

**Approximate boundaries:**  
**N**-W. Bluemound Rd; **S**-I-94;  
**E**-Hwy 45; **W**-Mayfair Rd

# WEST SIDE Zoo

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

The Zoo neighborhood lies on 190 acres. Major areas include the Animal Health Center, Aquatic & Reptile Center (ARC), Dairy Complex, Dohmen Family Foundation Hippo Home, Family Farm and Marketing & Communications Office, Florence Mila Borchert Big Cat Country, Herb & Nada Mahler Family Aviary, Holz Family Impala Country, Idabel Wilmot Borchert Flamingo Exhibit, Karen Peck Katz Conservation Education Center, Thrivent Mutual Funds Playground, Northwestern Mutual Family Farm, Otto Borchert Family Special Exhibits Building, Peck Welcome Center, Primates of the World, Small Mammals Building, Stackner Animal Encounter, Stearns Family Apes of Africa, Taylor Family Humboldt Penguins, U.S. Bank Gathering Place, Whooping Cranes, Zoo Administration Office, Zoological Society Office, and Auxiliary West Entrance & Parking.

There are also areas for zoo rides, live shows, gift shops, and zoo food. See photos below.

## HISTORY

The Zoo neighborhood did not always include a zoo.

### Early populations

A hamlet called Honey Creek grew up along the creek of that name in today's West Allis in the early 1800s, just blocks southeast of today's Zoo grounds. The small settlement, founded by pioneers from New York, housed a blacksmith shop, post office, schoolhouse, and homesteads, and was served by three stages each week. In 1855, a steam sawmill was built along the creek by Bigalow Case and Edwin Youmans. The sawmill closed a few decades later when the company had depleted the area of timber. Other early settlers in the Honey Creek hamlet included the Cornwall, Douville, Smith, Sheldon, Strong, Marsh, and Marlott families. The settlers were mainly people of British ancestry who were practicing Episcopalians and Baptists.

As settlers, mainly Germans, began to migrate south and west from the Washington Park neighborhood, the terrain to the north of the West Allis hamlet began a long process of filling up. The City of Milwaukee annexed the area that would become the Zoo neighborhood.

### *Post-World War II and the arrival of very different residents*

Development of the neighborhood nearly ceased during the Depression years and through World War II. The great postwar housing boom had a major effect on most Milwaukee neighborhoods. Many of the streets that make up today's neighborhood had not been built or had not been extended into the Zoo area. This would all change when a second wave of over 1,000 migrants of the Washington Park neighborhood began to relocate west in the late 1950s. These residents were quite different from the German and British migrants of the past. They included reptiles, birds of every variety, amphibians, monkeys, bears, cats, pachyderms, giraffes, small mammals, reptiles, and more. This population had outgrown the limited acreage allotted in Washington Park.



Today's neighborhood-  
Alpacas in the open

Soon development proceeded on the 190 acres that would become the Milwaukee County Zoo. By the close of the 1960s, new construction shot up, including the primate building, aquarium/reptile structure, Australian buildings, and Winter Quarters. New habitats were created for monkeys, bears, cats, giraffes, birds, small mammals, and elephants. In the 1970s, new additions included the Children's Zoo, Dall Sheep Exhibit, Train Shed, Zoo Hospital, and the Zoo Pride and Gift Shop. The 1980s witnessed expansions such as Wolf Woods, exhibits for the polar bear and sea lion, Dairy Complex, and Peck Welcome Center. By the close of the century, a \$10.7 million dollar Apes of Africa primate facility opened, and the Aquatic and Reptile Center got a \$3.3 million dollar renovation.

All the while, the Zoo neighborhood nurtured some favored residents. One of these is profiled below.

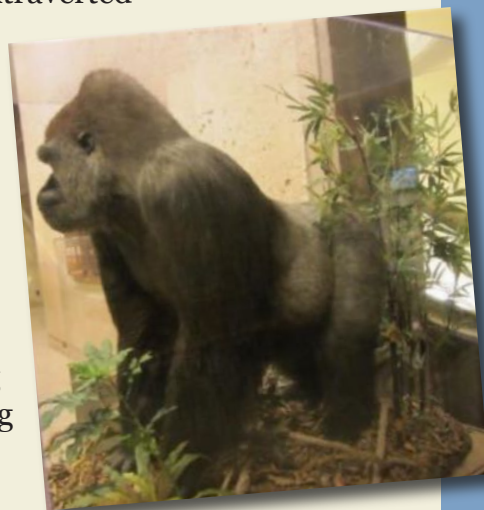
## Zoo neighborhood featured resident (1950s)

### Samson

Born in Africa, Samson immigrated to the United States with an older brother named Sambo in 1950. The siblings first settled in a small abode in Milwaukee's Washington Park neighborhood. In 1959 they moved to a much larger estate—fully staffed with servants-- in the Zoo neighborhood. While Sambo died young, Samson's extraverted personality soon made him one of the most popular residents on the city's West Side.

However, as beloved as he was with residents, he did not prove particularly appealing to prospective female counterparts. In 1975, he was introduced to the lovely Terra, and his friends negotiated an arranged marriage. While Terra found him gregarious and fun to be around, the marriage was never consummated. Terra may have been a bit turned off by his weight. Samson topped 600 pounds and even after extensive dieting, he never succeeded in reaching an average weight goal (*see photo*<sup>1</sup>). After four years of living together, Terra made a trip to Chicago where she met Frank in the primate section of the Lincoln Park Zoo. The attraction was instant and she stayed behind with him and bore him a daughter named Mandara.

Samson remained in Milwaukee, never remarrying or having offspring. He died in 1981. Because of his huge popularity with residents, the Milwaukee Public Museum featured an exhibit on "Remembering Samson" in 2007 and 2008.



<sup>1</sup> Photo attribution: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9e/Samson\\_the\\_gorilla\\_\(23547597554\).jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9e/Samson_the_gorilla_(23547597554).jpg)

## Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, the Zoo neighborhood has just over 3,100 residents. Of these, the largest number belongs to the avian group. Other populations include invertebrates, fish, primates, reptiles, amphibians, and small and large mammals. Most residents are on the county payroll, although some have commercial sponsors.

The neighborhood has seen much recent development, including the renovation of the Outdoor Gorilla Exhibit, redesign of parts of the Elephant Exhibit, installation of Lactation Suites, and improvements to the auxiliary west entrance and adjacent parking lots.

## RECURRING NEARBY OUTINGS (Health conditions permitting)

In the following section the website addresses have been eliminated due to technical problems with the various ways different web browsers display PDF files. Website information on these events is available through the book *Milwaukee Area Outings on the Cheap*. See below.

FAMILY FREE DAY AT THE ZOO			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Oct., Nov., Dec., Jan., Mar., select Sat.'s 9:30am-4:30pm	Milwaukee County Zoo, 10001 W. Bluemound Rd., Wauwatosa	If you want to stay warm, we have many indoor animal exhibits for your enjoyment. If you're more of the outdoorsy type, you'll also find many outdoor animal exhibits.	Free

NATIONAL NIGHT OUT—ZOO			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
First week Aug., weekday 4- 8pm	Milwaukee County Zoo, 10001 W Bluemound Rd., Wauwatosa	Fun evening of free food, games, rides, animals, chance to dialogue with local police and community organizations,	Free, pre-registration required

Most of these outings are provided courtesy of MECAH Publishing. To access the book that provides nearly 600 outings—all priced under \$10—for the entire Greater Milwaukee area, go to <http://mecahmilwaukee.com/NonFiction.html>

## PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood—  
Looking north toward welcome center



Today's neighborhood-  
Camels weathering the cold



Today's neighborhood-  
Zoo entrance



Today's neighborhood-Looking west toward gathering place building



Today's neighborhood-Cheetahs behind glass

For more information on Milwaukee neighborhoods, refer to John Gurda's *Milwaukee, City of Neighborhoods* and Jill Florence Lackey's and Rick Petrie's *Germans in Milwaukee: A neighborhood history*.

Do you have great photos of this neighborhood? Are you a resident with an interesting quote about this neighborhood? Do you have recurring outings, additions, corrections, or general comments about this neighborhood? Please email your input to:

[JFLanthropologist@currently.com](mailto:JFLanthropologist@currently.com)