When new chimpanzees arrive at Chimp Haven, they are assimilated into large social groups like they would be in the wild. But unlike the wild – where large group dynamics are resolved without outside interference – the sanctuary relies on a matchmaker, behaviorist Amy Fultz. With 111 new chimpanzees arriving this year, she has an immense job of matching compatible chimpanzees, based on their histories and her observations, and introducing them, with fingers crossed for success.

Fultz says she needs to consider multiple criteria in determining the best placement for each chimpanzee including age, gender, health and experience of the chimpanzee. While it is not easy to predict the outcome of an introduction, Fultz acknowledges that “introductions may proceed quickly or take a number of days, depending on the group, the number of chimpanzees involved and how socially-experienced the chimpanzees are. Although we plan and carefully choose groups to introduce, the chimpanzees can surprise us, making introductions somewhat stressful for the staff.”

Recently, Fultz introduced four new chimpanzees – Julius, Phyllis, Jessica Rabbit and Sandy – to Jerry, Harry, Karen, Ladybird and Penny, longtime residents of Chimp Haven. This group of chimpanzees is elderly; so, she expected the introduction to proceed more slowly and be more relaxed. She was wrong. “There were some aggressions and a few tantrums, but these moments were also punctuated by positive interactions including embraces and friendly vocalizations. Within 24 hours, all nine chimpanzees had settled in and were observed grooming each other and playing.”

Since 2005, Fultz and the staff have executed nearly 150 introductions. This year, she anticipates staging many more with the new arrivals. She offers, “Each experience is different, but no matter how the introductions proceed, we are encouraged that the groups will all grow into happy families.”

Follow Chimp Haven on Facebook and Twitter for updates on the new resident chimpanzees.
On April 20, 2013, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m., Chimp Haven is hosting its second annual Earth Day Festival in conjunction with our Chimpanzee Discovery Day. The purpose of this event is to educate the public about environmental initiatives in the Shreveport-Bossier City area. The festival will include exhibits, art, live music, food, demonstrations, lectures, and kids’ activities. Chimp Haven has invited Shreveport’s and Bossier City’s environmental businesses, organizations, restaurants, artists and farmers to participate. This will be a great opportunity to bring together local businesses and organizations who share a similar mission – to protect and restore our planet.

A truck carrying the first nine of 111 retired, federally owned, research chimpanzees from the New Iberia Research Center traveled a long gravel road to the their new home at Chimp Haven in rural Keithville, La. Simultaneously, 1,000 miles away, an esteemed group of scientists called the Council of Councils for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland recommended that NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins, retire almost all of the nearly 400 federally owned research chimpanzees to sanctuaries. That brief moment held promise that Chimp Haven’s long time vision of being filled to capacity with retired chimpanzees could soon become a reality. However, before this can happen, funding must be in place.

To this point, the significant leaps in the retirement of biomedical research chimpanzees have been the result of good faith, but to continue, additional actions must occur. Chimp Haven’s President and CEO, Cathy Willis Spraetz, asks supporters to urge members of Congress to lift a federal spending cap for The National Chimpanzee Sanctuary that will be met this summer.

“The addition of hundreds of chimpanzees will mean a significant budget increase for Chimp Haven since it is required to raise 25 percent of the cost of chimpanzee care,” Spraetz said. “To take on that level of financial responsibility, we ask that the government lift this cap so that federal dollars can support the future construction at Chimp Haven.”

Because of the uncertainties surrounding the lifting of the cap, Chimp Haven sprang into action in November by launching the Road to Chimp Haven, a $5 million fundraising campaign to pay not only its 25 percent share of the lifetime care of the 111 chimpanzees coming from New Iberia, but for 100 percent of the construction of their new quarters.

Presently, Chimp Haven is half way to its $5 million goal. Among those who have pledged major support are The New England Antivivisection Society, the Humane Society of the United States and the National Anti-Vivisection Society. Hundreds of individual donors have also donated to the retirement of the New Iberia chimpanzees.

Chimp Haven welcomed Cathy Willis Spraetz as its new President and Chief Executive Officer on Feb. 4, 2013. She assumed the role long held by Dr. Linda Brent, who retired at the end of 2012.

Spraetz, an Atlanta native comes to the sanctuary with more than 24 years of experience as a chief executive to nonprofit organizations in Georgia. Most recently, she served as president and chief executive officer at Partnership Against Domestic Violence, the oldest and largest domestic violence organization in Georgia. Her expertise lies in board development, fundraising, financial acumen, program innovation and staff talent development.

The search committee considered many candidates while seeking Chimp Haven’s new president, explains the committee’s chair, Mollie Bloomsmith. “Cathy’s passion for the Chimp Haven mission is evident, and we are confident that she will continue to carry forth former president Linda Brent’s vision to retire and care for chimpanzees no longer used in biomedical research and the pet and entertainment industries.”

Spraetz will be working closely with Chimp Haven staff to prepare the sanctuary for the remaining New Iberia chimpanzees in addition to developing fundraising and organizational advancement opportunities.

“I am thrilled to have joined the Chimp Haven team,” says Spraetz. “Animal welfare has always been one of my passions, and I am eager to help Chimp Haven fulfill its mission. It has been clear to me from my first day on the job that the board and staff are extremely dedicated. Working with and learning from them is a great privilege. I’m convinced that through strong partnerships, ambitious goals, and a commitment to providing a quality sanctuary, we can continue to positively affect the lives of the chimpanzees and bring awareness about them to the general public.”

In our time of transition, we encourage suggestions as to how we can better serve our chimpanzees, donors and supporters. Please send any comments to information@chimphaven.org.

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On Tuesday, May 1, 2013, restaurants around the country will unite to help Chimp Haven raise funds through Chow Down for Chimp Haven. When you eat at one of the participating restaurants, 10-20 percent of the proceeds from that day will be donated to Chimp Haven to support the incoming 111 New Iberia Research Center chimpanzees. If you have a restaurant in your area that you would like to participate, please contact Ketina Williams at kwilliams@chimphaven.org with restaurant information. Check https://donationpay.org/chimphaven/ for a list of participating restaurants.
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Clear, the wheels of progress are turning, but a funding gap of $5.4 million remains. Please consider making a generous donation to help close that gap so that all of the New Iberia chimpanzees will be guaranteed their rightful home at Chimp Haven. For more information about donating to the Road to Chimp Haven Campaign, visit https://donationpay.org/chimphaven/newiberria2013.php.
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