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Zoo begins work on
\$1 million exhibit for 2 giant anteaters

Naming rights go to big donor who antes up... perhaps UCI alumnus?
By DOUG IRVING

The Orange County Register

SANTA ANA – The coming attraction at the Santa Ana Zoo? A creature that shuffles along on its knuckles, slurps up termites with a sticky, 2-foot-long tongue and will most likely be named Peter.

The zoo has broken ground on a \$1 million home for a pair of giant anteaters. Zoo officials are offering naming rights to any big donor who steps forward with the money to actually buy the exhibit's two residents.

In theory, that means the Santa Ana Zoo could have anteaters named FedEx and Nokia. In reality, zoo managers are betting that UC Irvine alumni will come up with the cash and name one of the real-life anteaters after their beloved mascot – Peter the Anteater.

The exhibit, scheduled to open in early 2010, will take visitors into the South American grasslands known as the Pampas. There, they'll encounter huge flightless birds known as greater rheas and wild llama relatives known as guanacos.

And two giant anteaters, a breeding pair.

The real anteaters won't be quite as cute and cuddly as the UC Irvine mascot. Several Web sites describe the giant anteater as among the strangest-looking creatures on Earth. It's covered in coarse hair and walks on its knuckles – but its most outstanding feature is a 2-foot-long tongue covered in sticky, ant-trapping saliva.



Installation of the bronze anteater mascot at University of California, Irvine. Date unknown.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF IRVINE



A 9' bronze sculpture of Peter the Anteater watches over the UCI Student Center.

JEFFREY ANTENORE



UC Irvine's mascot: Peter the Anteater.

MIKE SCHWARTZ, IRVINE WORLD NEWS



This photo provided by the Smithsonian's National Zoo shows the zoo's six-week-old anteater, Aurora, riding on her mother's back, Wednesday, Sept. 5, 2007 at the zoo in Washington. (AP Photo/Mehgan Murphy, National Zoo)

MEHGAN MURPHY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

“They’re a little hard to describe,” Zoo Director Ron Glazier said. “They’re very unusual looking.”

The giant anteater is a “near-threatened” species, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. The Santa Ana Zoo hopes to breed the two it brings in and establish a new line of giant anteaters in the United States.

The Santa Ana Zoo has often been called the Monkey Zoo because of a requirement set down by its founder that it always house at least 50 monkeys. But zoo officials want to expand its focus – in particular to the animals of tropical South and Central America.

The zoo is covering the \$1 million cost to build the Tierra de las Pampas exhibit with state and county grants and private donations. But it still needs about \$53,500 to buy two anteaters and a year’s worth of nutritious anteater gruel to keep them happy.

Any big donor who steps up will get to name the anteater couple, city and zoo officials announced at a recent groundbreaking ceremony for the exhibit. The audience included the chancellor of UC Irvine and leaders of the school’s alumni association.

“If it’s someone that’s connected to UCI, I betcha the male will be Peter,” hinted Gerardo Mouet, the city’s parks director, whose wife is the board president of the UCI Alumni Association.

“We are just excited – just so, so excited about this project,” added Jon ‘Rip’ Ribble, the president of the zoo’s Board of Directors. “This is a dream come true for us.”

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