



# CITY OF ATLANTA

## DEPARTMENT of PARKS

Office of General Manager

Atlanta, Georgia 30303

March 2, 1967

JACK C. DELIUS  
GENERAL MANAGER



Mr. Donald R. Dietlein  
National Zoological Park  
Washington, D. C. 20009

Dear Mr. Dietlein:

Along with a number of other people, I have received a Xerox copy of your report of February 8, 1967, dealing with the Zoo at Grant Park.

I appreciate your opinions and conclusions and feel certain that when I select a Zoo Director that your report will serve as valuable background information on some corrective action which may be needed.

The undersigned is relatively new in his job, having become General Manager in March of 1964; at a time when all of the major zoo buildings were completed or substantially underway. I immediately began to request a Zoo Director and, as you may know, I have only recently met with success when the position was created by the City effective January 1, 1967. We were disappointed at the pay range; however, we will make every effort to select the most qualified individual for this most vital position. I have written Dr. Reed, along with thirty or forty other Zoo Directors, asking and advising him to pass along to any of his interested staff the application for Zoo Director. It may be that one of you gentlemen may be interested in this position and I trust that I might hear further from you.

I am reluctant to make any change in the Zoo until I have an individual in charge since I am an administrator of eleven divisions of City government and certainly do not profess to be a specialist in horticulture, zoology, forestry, recreation, etc. A Zoo Director will be able to organize and operate the Zoo to serve recreation, preservation, conservation and education.

After considerable thought, and trusting that you will accept my remarks in the same context which I accepted your report, I would like to comment on your conclusions reached on Page 3, paragraph 3 in reference to the Reptile House. First of all, we are not remodeling the Reptile House. It would take several



pages to describe to you the difficulties involved in the cages of this building but basically the facts are these. The same Architect designed the Reptile House as did the Primate and Feline Buildings. About the time the Reptile House was nearing completion, we noticed a strong irritant in the air which caused one's eyes to water and a burning of the throat. It smelled like formaldehyde to me but we engaged a toxicologist at the Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta to verify this. The next problem was of course what was causing the formaldehyde. We employed a wood technician, a Dr. James Rice at the University of Georgia. Dr. Rice has spent most of his academic career working with particle and chip board. The cages were made of particle board and it was a natural thing for Dr. Rice to investigate the problems encountered with this material. About this time, the cages began to swell and bloat and materials which were one inch thick expanded to 1½ inches. The dimensional integrity of the cages simply collapsed. We refused to open the building to the general public in that, in the opinion of our legal counsel, to do so would be evidence of acceptance of the building. The Architect blamed the builder, the builder blamed the Architect, and the subcontractor blamed the supplier. We have had several dozen meetings over this problem and have called in experts in several fields. The end result is that we are replacing the cages with ones built of fiber glass to be enclosed in an exterior grade plastic impregnated plywood. I can assure you that so much money is involved and the legal entanglement is so complicated, that as Director of this department I would not be so foolish as to allow a "lay curator" "carte blanche" privileges to reorganize and remodel a \$380,000 building. I don't have that type of authority - thank goodness - and don't desire it. Cage replacement is being supervised by the City's Building Inspector, Law Department, and this department.

Now as to the statement that the Curator is a lay curator or amateur. This reflects on the Civil Service department of the City of Atlanta in that Mr. Dobbs scored the highest among the approximately 16 applicants for the job. The test was conducted by a doctor of veterinary medicine, a PhD with his doctorates in Zoology (Reptiles), and a clinical psychologist trained in testing. Of the 16 applicants, several had Masters Degrees but no practical experience. Mr. Dobbs is young and has only a high school diploma. However, he seems to hold his own with people in similar positions and has made quite an impressive record for the short time he has been in Atlanta. He is completely dedicated to his work, was reared in a zoological environment since his parents are in the business, and has in every way attempted to be professional as far as I am personally concerned. He plans to enter evening college in the near future. Of course, he too received a copy of your report and, to say the least, your remarks that he was a "lay Curator" were cruel, excessive, unnecessary, and completely inaccurate. The damage is done, the word is out and I can only say that it is a surprise to me that three gentlemen representing the National Zoological Park would make such a capricious remark without thoroughly investigating

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the background of the circumstances of the building and the qualifications of the Curator. You have, in all fairness, been given some erroneous information.

As to Page 4, paragraph 7, I am at a complete loss as to how you determined that there is a need to improve the cooperation between the Zoo and educational system that controls the science room in the Primate House. I believe you made your inspection on a Saturday and therefore would not have had an opportunity to meet the Teacher assigned to the science room. I have contacted the instructor and she is at a complete loss to know exactly what you are talking about. She also wonders as to where there is a lack of cooperation between the Zoo and the educational system. She suggested that possibly that it may be at a higher echelon since it certainly does not exist at her level. I have contacted the Superintendent of Schools and he too is at a loss. Needless to say, vast improvements can be made in the utilization of the Zoo as an educational tool and as soon as we have a qualified Director one of his duties will be to develop a complete educational program. I think it is worth noting that at the convention held at Houston, Texas two years ago, the AAZPA recommended our educational system as a guide and we were flooded with questionnaires from interested zoos who wanted to include a science room in their zoological complex. Again, in all fairness to you, I believe you have been given some erroneous information.

The individual who is distributing your report transmits it with a cover letter stating that the three of you are very brilliant men. I am sure this is the case or you wouldn't be associated with our national zoo if you were not top notch. I hope you are also men enough to apologize to our Curator of Reptiles, and retract your statement concerning the blank check approach to "remodeling" the Reptile Building.

Very truly yours,

Jack C. Delius  
General Manager of  
Parks and Recreation

JCD:bjw

cc: Mr. W. J. Armstrong  
Mr. W. A. Xanten  
Mrs. Margaret A. Dankworth, Executive Sec. AAZPA