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**SAINT PAUL’S COMO PARK CONSERVATORY
GETS AN EARLY PRESENT**

**MAYOR RANDY KELLY OFFICIALLY ACCEPTS A \$7 MILLION
DONATION FROM AREA FAMILY THAT WILL HELP
SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY LANDMARK**

Saint Paul’s Como Park Conservatory today celebrated the spirit of the holiday season a bit early when it received the largest private gift in the City’s history. Saint Paul Mayor Randy Kelly officially accepted a pledge of \$7 million to the Como Zoo and Conservatory Society from the Donald McNeely family. To recognize the large show of support for the conservatory, the facility will now be known as the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory at Como Park. The City Council is expected to formally accept the gift, the name change and approve the terms of the agreement at its December 11th meeting.

Money will be given to the conservatory over the next 20 years with the Como Zoo and Conservatory Society serving as fiscal agent. The new funds will help meet some immediate needs at the conservatory and also create an endowment that will benefit the facility.

“For more than a century, the Como Park Conservatory has brought people together in Saint Paul to share an amazing experience,” said Saint Paul Mayor Randy Kelly. “Thanks to the

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unprecedented generosity of the McNeely family, future generations will continue to

enjoy this great landmark. As Mayor, I am truly grateful for this support and honored to be able to accept this amazing gift on behalf of the people of Saint Paul.”

“The conservatory is a treasure for the entire state of Minnesota,” said Greg McNeely, Marjorie McNeely’s son. “The Donald McNeely family is delighted to participate in the growth and extension of the important work the staff and volunteers do to support and preserve the conservatory and what it represents. Our goal is to provide a degree of financial support to help them accomplish what otherwise would have been difficult with the current funding. Broadening the scope and appeal of the conservatory will be a contribution to the community and the region.”

Marjorie McNeely, who passed away in 1998, was the president of the Saint Paul Garden Club, a founding Trustee of the Warner Nature Center and an original Trustee of the Tyrone Guthrie Theater. She had a great love of flowers, plants and instilled this appreciation in her five children and the entire family.

The McNeely family’s Manitou Fund is making the gift to the Como Zoo and Conservatory Society, the nonprofit support organization that provides annual grants to the zoo and conservatory. Gregory McNeely, Como Park Conservatory Director Roberta Sladky, and Jackie Sticha, the Executive Director of the Como Zoo and Conservatory, negotiated the details for the Manitou Fund gift over the past year. McNeely will join the conservatory’s board of directors and views this as the beginning of an exciting new partnership that will be a lasting tribute to his mother’s love of flowers.

“Our family is extremely pleased to be part of this new association and we look forward to a great future working together,” Greg McNeely said. “My mother truly appreciated the beauty of flowers and how important it is for everyone to be aware all that nature gives us. Together we can continue to make the conservatory an outstanding resource for all those interested in flora and fauna.”

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“This gift is the largest the society has ever received,” said Leonard Wilkening, President of the society. “Our mission is to help build support for this amazing place and the programs that bring thousands of people here each year. We have long known the connection people have with the conservatory, and this generous gift is truly an example of this. We are pleased to partner with the McNeely Family and the Saint Paul Division of Parks and Recreation to benefit the conservatory for many years to come.”

Working with the society, the Saint Paul Division of Parks and Recreation will use a portion of the gift to invest in improved operations and maintenance systems, including horticultural needs for the plants and collections, exterior cleaning, and other minor maintenance items. Money will also be used to create a new visitor guide and revise existing printed materials to reflect the new name. The remainder of the gift will be invested in an endowment that will help provide additional long-term financial support.

The park, zoo and conservatory have enjoyed a long history of community involvement and support from a variety of public and private organizations. This gift will help maintain the buildings and support the many programs from flower shows to education classes for area schools. Using most of the gift for an endowment gives the Conservatory the chance to create some significant long-term benefits.

“This gift will help us solve some immediate needs that aren’t in the current budget,” said Bob Bierscheid, Director of Saint Paul’s Division of Parks and Recreation. “The conservatory will continue to rely on local, state and private sources for operating and capital funds, but we now have the opportunity to make this gift grow as an endowment over the next 20 years.”

A special event will be held in 2003 to unveil the new name and celebrate and honor the generosity of the McNeely family.

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About the Saint Paul Division of Parks and Recreation

The Saint Paul Division of Parks and Recreation offers athletic, recreational, educational, environmental and social activities among its many programs for all ages. Employment, volunteer service, and agency partnership opportunities are also available. Saint Paul's public park system includes more than 160 parks and open spaces, 41 recreation centers, three 18-hole golf courses, 24 bicycle and pedestrian paths, one indoor pool and two outdoor pools, and a public beach.

About the Como Zoo and Conservatory Society

The Como Zoo and Conservatory Society is a nonprofit organization that promotes supports, preserves and enhances Como Zoo and Conservatory with fund-raising and marketing support. The Como Zoo and Conservatory Society raises money for programmatic and capital needs at both the zoo and conservatory. The Society was created in 1999 and raises resources through annual giving programs, special events, gift shops, memberships, and grants.

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