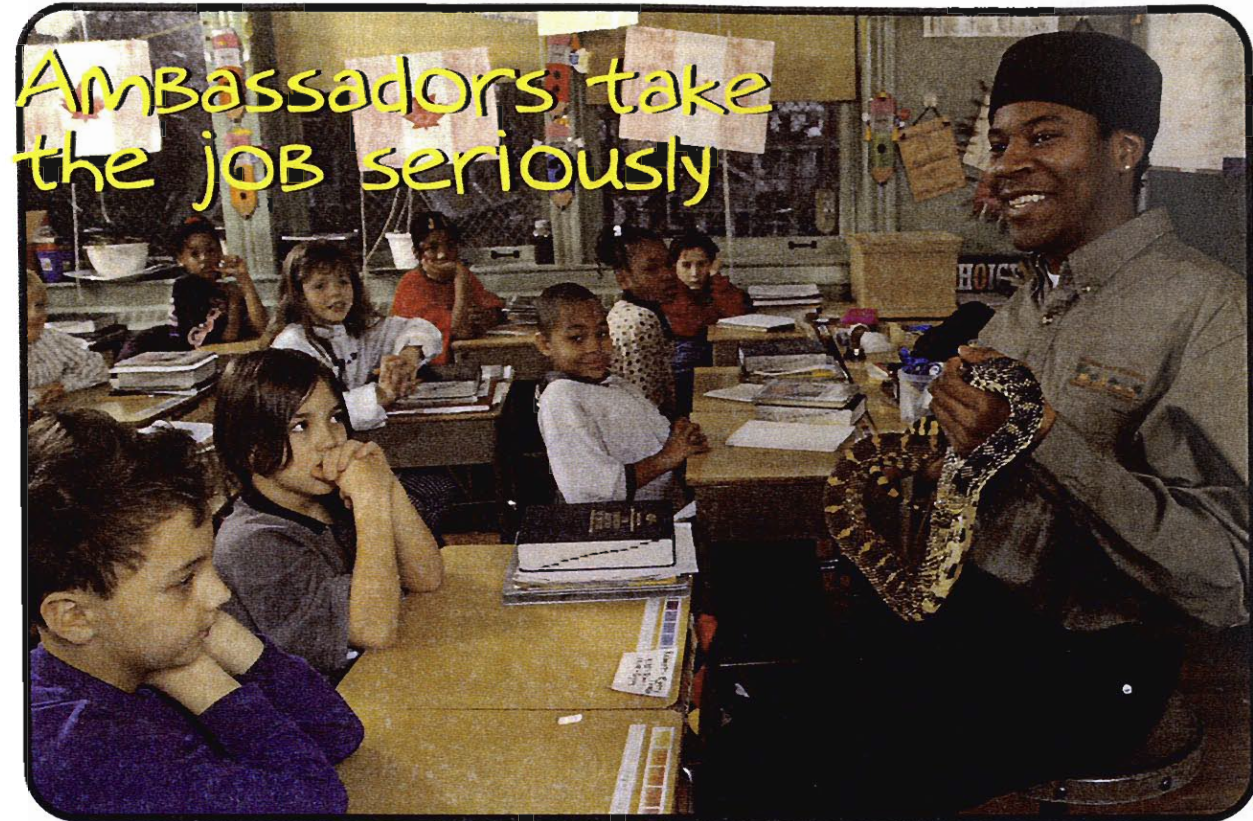


Role models:



Ambassadors take the job seriously

Zoological Society educator James Edwards gives children from Milwaukee's Trowbridge Street School a hands-on introduction to a Fox snake while teaching about animal preservation and adaptation, ecology, geography and careers in science.

"This is real, everyone!" says the awestruck fourth grader as she holds the crocodile skull high above her head for all her classmates to see. The look of wonder in her eyes is unmistakable as she touches the artifact and passes it around. The other students gathered here in the Zoo's Aquatic & Reptile Center respond in kind and, for a moment, the room is silent, all eyes focused on nature.

Now more than ever, the students comprehend the importance of their jobs as Animal Ambassadors.

These students from Milwaukee's 27th Street School are part of the Zoological Society's Animal Ambassador Program, a perennial favorite among the 24 participating schools and the sponsors that have donated \$64,000 this year alone.

Now in its 10th year, the Animal Ambassador Program allows children from low-income schools to explore conservation and possible careers in the sciences through two classroom visits and three field trips to the Zoo. Program sponsors also subsidize summertime visits to the Zoo for the children and their families.

This is no free ride, however. In exchange for the trips and the lessons, students are charged with an important duty: To act as ambassadors on behalf of the animals that need their help. It's a serious job; in fact, James Edwards, the Zoological Society educator who meets with the students at the first visit, wears a tuxedo to illustrate just how influential ambassadors are.

"An ambassador makes big decisions for whomever it is he or she is representing," says Edwards. "This is how we communicate this importance to them."

With the Animal Ambassador Program celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, Karen Peck Katz, who has been part of the program since its inception, sees it as highly successful. It certainly has gotten across the message of conservation. She is a member of the Zoological Society's Board of Directors and also represents the Milton and Lillian Peck Foundation, which sponsors two schools.

"At White Rock School in Waukesha, the program is always growing in popularity," Peck Katz says enthusiastically. "Children

hear all about it through older brothers and sisters who have also participated. Kids make the best ambassadors."

Back at the Zoo, Edwards is only midway through his first year on the job, yet already he recognizes the program's impact. "A lot of these children have not visited the Zoo before and they're amazed that there are animals like ours in the city," Edwards says. "It's like a dream come true for them."

As an African-American educator and scientist, he knows that the messages of wildlife conservation and career opportunities will hold particular resonance for the students. "For kids who are at risk, it's best for them to see other minorities in the field who are successful."

After the busy morning of lessons and tours, the 27th Street fourth-graders take a break for lunch. Michelle Conley, the official class reporter, holds up five pages of notes she has taken.

"We learned that fish are coldblooded stuff like that," she says matter-of-factly. "I also know what it means to be an Animal Ambassador—to take care of the animals and represent them."

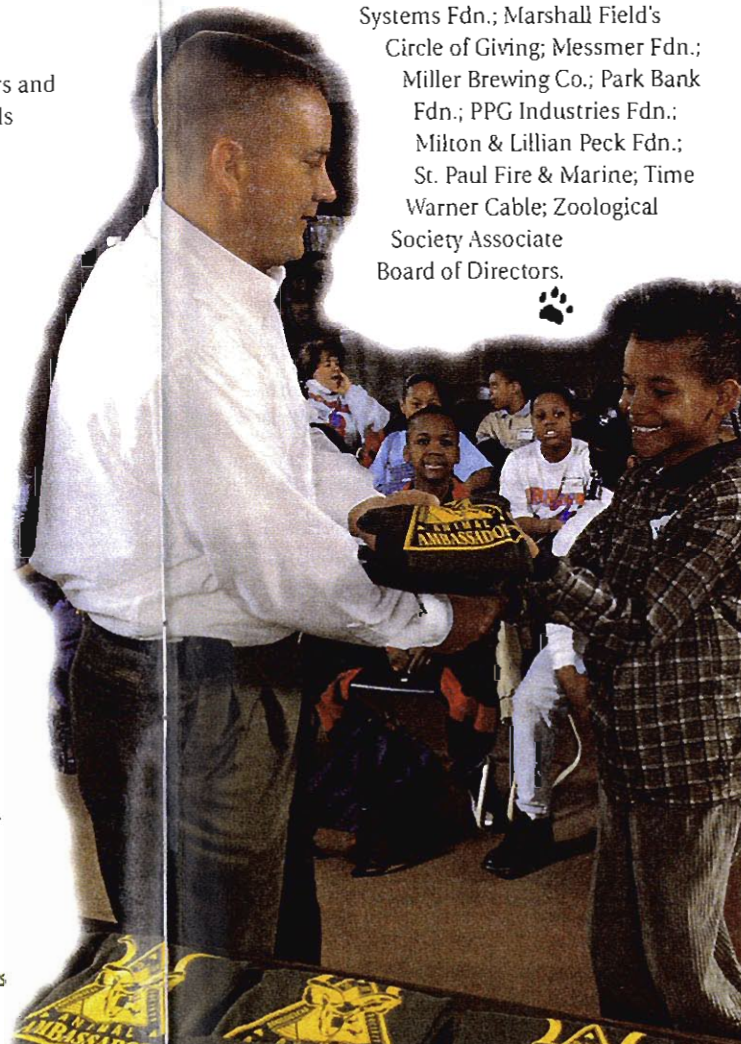
Adds her teacher, Clotilde Melo: "There's nothing like giving children the chance to see, touch and hear—experiences they can't get in the classroom."

And if Michelle is any measure of the program's success, this new Animal Ambassador can't wait to learn more.

"I told my teacher I'll be happy to come here on our next field trip," says Michelle.

The Animal Ambassador program's sponsors are American Express Financial Advisors, Inc.; Beatrice Cheese, Inc.; H.H. Camp Fdn.; Canadian Pacific Railway; The Chapman Fdn.; John C. & Harriett Cleaver Fund; Cooper Power Systems; Excelsior Lodge #175 F and AM; Fortis Insurance Fdn.; Harnischfeger Industries Fdn.; Jerome & Dorothy Holz Family Fdn.; The Home Depot; Charles D. Jacobus Family Fdn.; Manulife

Financial; Marquette Medical Systems Fdn.; Marshall Field's Circle of Giving; Messmer Fdn.; Miller Brewing Co.; Park Bank Fdn.; PPG Industries Fdn.; Milton & Lillian Peck Fdn.; St. Paul Fire & Marine; Time Warner Cable; Zoological Society Associate Board of Directors.



John Stoffer of sponsor Canadian Pacific Railway distributes Animal Ambassador T-shirts to Granville School students during their first visit to the Zoo as part of the program.

ON THE JOB James Edwards, Zoological Society Educator



James Edwards knew he wanted to work with young people, helping them discover the important role they play in society. But he never imagined he'd be using animals such as snakes and groundhogs to convey the message.

That's just what he's doing as coordinator of the Zoological Society's Animal Ambassador program. He joined the Society's Education Department last August. With a B.S. degree in community health education, Edwards previously had worked for the Milwaukee Health Department and for the Public Allies Apprenticeship Program. His work involved reaching out to at-risk youth in schools and community groups on violence and suicide prevention. He also taught health education at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

But the unconventional pairing of children and animals appealed to him: "Animals are an excellent intervention tool," he says. "They give children a chance to think about things other than their daily lives."

In the Animal Ambassador Program, Edwards reaches third- through sixth-grade students in 24 low-income schools. He teaches them about conservation and wildlife, but he also serves as a role model, getting their attention on his first visit to their school by donning a tuxedo. He talks about careers and what it takes to get a good job in the sciences.

On his second visit to their school, Edwards brings along one of four animals: a groundhog, snake, ferret or box turtle. "Students always ask me beforehand if I could bring a tiger or giraffe to their school," he says. "But my car just isn't big enough."

As they get to know the animals, both through Edwards' visit and through visits to the Milwaukee County Zoo, the children gain more understanding of how the future of humans is linked to the world's animals.

"The neatest thing about the program is that in summer the 'graduates' return with their families, proudly wearing their Animal Ambassador T-shirts," he says. (Their Zoo admission and parking is paid for by program sponsors.) "And they teach the moms, dads, brothers and sisters what it means to be an ambassador for animals."

