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## Seneca Park Zoo and Rochester General Hospital partner for national ape research project

*Cardiac health data from male orangutan assessed for Great Ape Heart Project*

**February 22, 2018** — February is Heart Health month, providing the perfect context for an interesting partnership between Seneca Park Zoo and Rochester General Hospital.

Earlier this month, experts from both organizations teamed up to give the Zoo's adult male Bornean orangutan, Denda, an echocardiogram as part of a complete physical exam. While Denda's physical validated that he's very healthy, information from his exam will be provided to the Great Ape Heart Project, a national research initiative focused on cardiac care of all ape species (including Bornean orangutans).

"Just as with humans, cardiac disease is a significant health risk for orangutans," said **Dr. Louis DiVincenti**, Director of Animal Health and Conservation at Seneca Park Zoo. "Collecting data from animals like Denda, who are raised in conservation care, can help animals in zoos and in their natural range in Borneo."

"Assisting Dr. DiVincenti and the Seneca Park Zoo in this endeavor was an honor and a unique opportunity," said **Dr. Gerald Gacioch**, cardiologist at Rochester Regional Health's Sands-Constellation Heart Institute. "Orangutan and human hearts are strikingly similar, so research will not only extend our knowledge of the orangutan's heart, but also help cardiologists better understand human evolution."

Based at Zoo Atlanta, the Great Ape Heart Project (GAHP) addresses a critical need within the zoo community to investigate and understand cardiovascular disease in great apes. The project now involves more than 70 institutions and includes veterinarians, cardiologists, geneticists, epidemiologists, nutritionists, animal managers, ape specialists and research pathologists.

“We have a wealth of great health care professionals in this community,” said **Larry Sorel**, Zoo Director. “Partnering with Cardiologists at RGH to ensure heart health of the animals in our care is a win-win for everyone.”

The exam was done under anesthesia at the animal hospital at the Zoo, in anticipation of Denda’s departure from the Zoo this spring. Denda, and other animals from the Main Zoo Building will be leaving the Zoo this year in preparation for the September 2018 demolition of the antiquated Main Zoo Building. This demolition is part of the Master Plan improvements and will pave the way for a new tropics complex and other enhancements to the front of the Zoo in the future.

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Internationally, and in our own backyard, Seneca Park Zoo plays a key role in species survival. Chartered as an educational institution in 1957 by New York State, the Seneca Park Zoo Society plays an integral role in supporting Monroe County, the owners and operators of the Zoo. Together, we are working to bring animals back from the brink of extinction.