

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT



PHOTO BY MICHAEL DURHAM, COURTESY OF THE OREGON ZOO.

Tracy Modde and tour guide Dave Thomas get an up-close visit with Zuri, the black rhino, during a behind-the-scenes encounter at the Oregon Zoo.

Going Behind the Scenes

Zoo offers rhino and hippo encounters

Visitors can come face to face with giants, and find out what it takes to care for some of the largest animals on earth at the Oregon Zoo's new rhino and hippo encounter tours.

The tours — available Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 1:30 p.m. — begin in the zoo's animal commissary, where participants see the variety of animal diets and treats. Visitors then go behind the scenes at the hippo/rhino barn and learn from an experienced keeper about how the zoo cares for these animals.

"You don't fully grasp how large a rhinoceros is until you're standing next to one," said tour leader Dave Thomas. "And I don't think you walk away from an experience like that without caring a little more deeply about these animals and their place in the world."

The rhino and hippo encounters are the latest offerings in the zoo's growing behind-the-scenes program, which launched last year with giraffe and penguin tours. All of these encounters are led by

Thomas, a former animal keeper, who peppers his tours with anecdotes from his nearly 40 years at the zoo. To register or for more information, visit oregonzoo.org.



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