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Giant panda Xiao Liwu celebrates second birthday



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO WU. Xiao Liwu, a male giant panda at the San Diego Zoo, has turned two years old. The young panda, whose name means little gift, received a birthday party complete with cake and presents. His four-foot-tall ice cake topped with a big number 2 was filled with apples, carrots, and yam slices — some of his favorite treats. (Photo/Ken Bohn, courtesy of the San Diego Zoo)

Xiao Liwu, a male giant panda at the San Diego Zoo, turned two years old last month. The young panda, whose name means little gift, received a birthday party complete with cake and presents. Xiao Liwu emerged from his den on his special day to find a four-foot-tall ice cake topped with a big number 2 and filled with apples, carrots, and yam slices — some of his favorite treats.

The birthday bear, called Mr. Wu by his keepers and panda fans, went directly to the two-tiered cake and began eating the slices of fruits and vegetables layering the

top tier of the icy treat. After consuming the slices, he patiently waited for the ice to melt so he could eat the fruit frozen within the tiers. He later climbed on top of the cake and chewed on the bamboo stalks frozen inside the decorative elements before venturing off to check out his gifts — boxes filled with hay, alfalfa, and pine shavings scented with cinnamon.

Xiao Liwu's cake, which weighed 100 pounds, was made by the zoo's nutritional services team and took weeks to create. It consisted of water frozen into layers colored with food coloring and supported

by tiers of bamboo stalks. It was decorated with sliced fruits and vegetables, bamboo, colored pieces of ice cut into star shapes, and pureed yam frosting.

The cake and gifts are a form of enrichment that are important to the panda to keep him stimulated and active and allow him to show his natural behaviors.

Keepers describe Mr. Wu as an extremely smart and precocious cub. He likes playing in a long, plastic tray filled with ice cubes, but once the cubes melt, he comes out. He also enjoys rolling in

Continued on page 7



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Page 2



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Page 4



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Page 8

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