

Main Supplier of Hollywood's Apes in Entertainment Gets Out of the Business

Eleven chimpanzees and six orangutans sent to sanctuary

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Sixteen chimpanzees and six orangutans owned by Los Angeles animal trainer, Bob Dunn, will be out of the entertainment business in March and headed to a life of permanent sanctuary retirement in Wauchula, Florida. Dunn, owner of Bob Dunn's Animal Services has for some 30 years been the main supplier of great apes for Hollywood and other entertainment, providing chimpanzees and orangutans to movies, television shows, and advertisements. Dunn is leaving the ape business and donating all his working and breeding apes to the Center for Great Apes, a private, non-profit sanctuary.

"My primates have worked many shows, but now its time for them to retire it's the right thing to do," said Dunn announcing that he is out of the ape business and will no longer own, breed, train, or work great apes in entertainment or provide them for commercial work.

Located on 100 acres of tropical forest and orange groves in central Florida, the Center for Great Apes was founded by Patti Ragan, who left a business career in order to provide long term care for orangutans and chimpanzees needing permanent care, the mission of the Center. With the assistance of the Arcus Foundation, the Center for Great Apes is building new habitats for Dunn's retired apes who will move to Florida as soon as the facilities are ready. At that time, the Center will remove from Dunn's property all cages, nighthouses, transfer crates, and other equipment used for these apes.

What was acceptable to the public 10 years ago is becoming unacceptable as people learn more about the use of apes in entertainment. Babies are taken away from their mothers as tiny infants, trained to do tricks and behaviors for the profit of the trainers, and worked only while they are infants and juveniles. Once they hit their adolescence (about 8 to 9 years old), they are too strong to be handled which results in a large number of unwanted apes. Given that chimpanzees and orangutans can live more than 50 years in captivity, the issue of where they go when they're cycled out of entertainment is a major concern. Many in the past have been "out-placed" by trainers to roadside attractions, biomedical research facilities, and inappropriate breeding farms where more babies are pulled from their mothers to supply both the entertainment and "exotic" pet industries. The public is starting to understand the toll entertainment takes on such large, strong, smart, socially sophisticated and emotionally complex animals as chimpanzees and orangutans.

The closing of this primary supply of great apes in the entertainment business is a major step toward ending the use of apes in entertainment. While the Center for Great Apes is predominantly a rescue sanctuary, other organizations exist whose missions are public education, program development, and affecting legislation governing the use and ownership of these apes.

Ragan anticipates that Dunn's retirement and placement of his apes into a sanctuary will be applauded by the public that has growing concerns about the use of great apes in entertainment.

Founded in 1993 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the Center for Great Apes has taken in 18 other great apes needing a permanent home. Ragan says, "The need is great for permanent, protective sanctuary care for great apes. While their lifelong care is a tall order, we make that lifelong commitment to each and everyone of them."

Sammy, a 15-year-old orangutan, is just one of the new residents who will be arriving at the sanctuary. This red-haired ape had the starring role in the movie "Dunston Checks In" when he was just 6 years old. Now, weighing over 200 pounds and having the strength of several grown men, Sammy cannot be safely worked around human actors anymore. Sanctuary director Ragan says her staff is looking forward to providing Sammy and all the other apes that will accompany him with huge new habitats and a long, elevated tunnel system running through the wooded property.

"Sammy can now do what an orangutan does best and wants to do most.... eat, roam through the forest, and hang around with other orangutans," commented Ragan. "We are very happy for him and all the others."

The sanctuary, which is supported by individual memberships and private donations, is not open to the public as an attraction. For more information visit www.CenterForGreatApes.org.