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Issues affecting Des Moines' business

# Kanzi gets a vote on sanctuary design

Bonobo chimpanzees expected to move to Des Moines by at least spring 2004



Photo submitted by Language Research Center, Georgia State University

Kanzi, a bonobo chimpanzee, has been called the Albert Einstein of the primate world by some researchers. Kanzi and at least seven other bonobos will be moving to Des Moines to their new home at the Iowa Primate Learning Center, which will be located on an undeveloped site in the southeastern part of the city near the Des Moines River. Once developed, the IPLS will be a world-class research center created to study comparative cultures and the cognitive and communication abilities of primates. The focus will be on research, education, communication and preservation.

BY BETH DALBEY

Though the design of the Iowa Primate Learning Sanctuary has yet to be sketched on paper, it will have to pass muster with Kanzi, the celebrated bonobo chimpanzee that responds to voice commands and taught himself to manufacture stone tools.

If allowing Kanzi and seven other bonobos the last word on design of the structure that will be their home by at least spring 2004 seems a bit of a stretch, internationally known researcher Sue Savage-Rumbaugh assures that it is not. Communication with bonobos, humans' closest living relative with 99 percent similarity in DNA, is limited only by questions asked, she said as she and others associated with the project gathered last week at the proposed 200-acre IPLS site in southeastern Des Moines.

Savage-Rumbaugh, Des Moines businessman Ted Townsend, project director Kirk Brocker and Omaha, Neb., architect Peter Hind videotaped the site last week and will show the film to the bonobos to help them adjust to their move to Des Moines from their current home at the Georgia State University Language Research Center near Atlanta.

The city of Des Moines has agreed to transfer 137 acres of heavily wooded land near the Des Moines River on what is known as the Hubbell Tract to the non-profit IPLS organization. Townsend is in negotiations with Mid-American Energy Co. to obtain another 65 acres adjacent to the Hubbell Tract.

Architect Hind of Leo A Daly has designed primate houses before, but the opportunity to work on the IPLS facilities is unique, he said. "I haven't done the research," he said, "but I am certain Leo Daly has never been asked to interview a primate," he deadpanned.

Once a concept is completed, Kanzi and the other bonobos will use a computer joystick to select colors for sleeping quarters and to determine how the kitchen will be arranged. Hind said the name of the facility would be "something that pleases Kanzi," who has been called the Albert Einstein of the primate world by some researchers.

"Other architects have never thought about asking," Savage-Rumbaugh said. "Peter's thinking first about what it will be like for them. If we're going to be learning from them and interacting with them, we have to consider them."

The bonobos will be free to roam the site, which will be fenced to keep intruders out. Before their move to Des Moines, microchips will be implanted to track their movement. But there's little likelihood they'll stray from the site,

Townsend said.

"The apes have a daily choice of whether to be outdoors or indoors," he said. "There's no danger they will run off and terrorize Indianola."

Townsend, the primary driving force behind the IPLS, said the initial phase of the project will cost \$10 million, money that will be raised through donations, earned income and endowments. He has pledged that no taxpayer money will be used to support the project.

Projecting the economic impact of the project is difficult, he said, but Townsend expects it to draw researchers to Des Moines in much the same way scientists vie for time on the Hubbell Space Telescope. Faculty members at Des Moines University, an osteopathic medical school, are interested in forming a partnership with IPLS to learn more about how people age.

Townsend became familiar with the research of Savage-Rumbaugh and her former husband, Iowa native Duane Rumbaugh, while working on the Iowa Child Project, which involves building an indoor rainforest at Coralville. Organizers of the Iowa Child rainforest project had hoped to replicate an African rain forest, but since getting plant and animal species from Central Africa can be life threatening, they decided instead to focus on a South American rainforest. Because bonobos are not indigenous to South America, Townsend began working on a project to bring the chimpanzees to Des Moines. □



Photo by Rusty Riley

From left, businessman Ted Townsend, researcher Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and architect Peter Hind videotaped the Iowa Primate Learning Sanctuary site in southeastern Des Moines last week. The tape will be viewed by Kanzi and seven other bonobo chimpanzees to familiarize them with their new home.