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Contact: Lucas Meers ▪ 904.757.4463, ext. 211 ▪ cell: 636-328-2036 ▪ meersl@jacksonvillezoo.org
Lyndsay Plemmons ▪ 904.757.4463, ext. 208 ▪ cell: 904-728-0618 ▪ plemmons@jacksonvillezoo.org

JACKSONVILLE ZOO AND GARDENS ENDS OCTOBER WITH RECORD ATTENDANCE FOR 28th ANNUAL SPOOKTACULAR

Sponsored by Pepsi and Chase

November 6, 2015 - Jacksonville, FL – The numbers are in for Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' (JZG) Spooktacular event hosted in October each year.

The Zoo welcomed 49,907 guests over ten nights, surpassing the previous record of 45,580 in 2010, a 9.5% increase in attendance. This year, Spooktacular was also voted Best Haunted House by the Florida Times-Union's *Bold City Best*.

"Bigger and better has been the motto as the staff plans for Spooktacular each year," said Tony Vecchio, Executive Director of JZG. "This year they outdid themselves by making Spooktacular the best ever. We are very proud to be able to offer our community a safe, fun alternative to trick-or-treating, and very gratified to see how the community responded by visiting in record numbers."

Since 1987, Spooktacular has offered a family-friendly place for children to trick-or-treat, jump in bounce houses, fill their bellies with cotton candy and delight in fright by entering some of the Zoo's scarier areas. The event is a one-way path with themed-areas modeled after favorite children's movies including *It's the Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Shrek* and *Peter Pan*. Kids wore their favorite costumes while getting their faces painted by members of the American Association of ZooKeepers (AAZK) and riding the Zoo's carousel and 4-D theater.

JZG begins planning and set up for the event months in advance to add new themed areas, additions, and organize the 200+ volunteers that are coordinated each night. JZG recruits community members to help scoop and carve the 800+ pumpkins each week for three weeks (because pumpkins don't last long in Florida), and also to play the many characters in each of the themed areas. Zoo employees also join in on the fun by volunteering their time to supervise the volunteers and to make sure the event runs smoothly.

Though the high attendance is wonderful, JZG recognizes that because of the record number of guests, the amount of people also created traffic jams on I-95 and Zoo Parkway and generated bottlenecks during the event. To ensure the guest experience is not interrupted with massive crowds, JZG is addressing those concerns for Spooktacular 2016 among other events in the future.

Photo Credits: Rob Bixby

High Resolution photos are available by request.

About Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens

For over 100 years, the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens has aimed to inspire the discovery and appreciation of wildlife through innovative experiences in a caring environment. Starting in 1914 with an animal collection of one red deer fawn, the Zoo now has more than 2,000 rare and exotic animals and 1,000 species of plants, boasting the largest botanical garden in Northeast Florida. The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens is a nonprofit organization and an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. For more information, visit jacksonvillezoo.org.