



## TIMELESS LEARNING, PRICELESS RESULTS

by Fran Howard

Tish Laske, now a teacher at Brainerd High School, taught seventh grade at Forestview Middle School in Brainerd and for 17 years took her seventh graders to the Zoo for a self-guided educational tour. "It was a wrap-up to our animal kingdom lesson," says Laske. "They got to touch the sea stars and anemones. Some of them even got to touch sharks. How many kids from Minnesota get to see and touch something from the ocean?" Laske positioned the annual trip as a way to leapfrog from her animal kingdom lesson into her endangered species lesson. "We talked about biomes, especially coral reefs and rain forests, and that habitats are disappearing," she notes.

Biology teacher Rollie Greeno also helps run a self-guided educational program with fellow biology teachers from Apple Valley High School. "The Zoo is a world class facility that's only 15 minutes away. Before we go, I tell the students, 'You've been there as a tourist. Now you are going there as a student,'" says Greeno. "We've come up with a packet that focuses on evolutionary adaptations, hot spots, endangered species, and destruction of habitat."

Packet in hand, Greeno's students make their way through Discovery Bay, the Minnesota Trail, and the Tropics looking for evolutionary adaptations that enable an animal or plant to thrive in its habitat. Inside the packet, Greeno and his co-workers have placed a worksheet that their students are expected to complete. And while some of the answers may be found on Zoo signage, others require astute observation skills.

For example, Greeno's students might have to detail what it is about an angelfish that makes it well adapted to live in a coral reef habitat. The answer: a long, thin mouth and pancake-like body. The students learn quickly that interacting with Zoo volunteers is also a good way to explore the subject matter. "They are not afraid to ask for the answers," Greeno says. At the end of the trip, his students are both enthused and excited about biology.

Whether its biology, math, conservation, or another subject matter, the Zoo provides a fun and unique learning laboratory for students. The lessons they learn at the Zoo could help shape their future and the future health of the natural world.