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AK-SAR-BEN HONORS DR. LEE G. SIMMONS AS 113TH MONARCH

October 10, 2009 – Omaha, Nebr. A man who elevated the Henry Doorly Zoo to one of finest zoos in the United States was honored for his efforts at the Ak-Sar-Ben Coronation and Ball on October 10. Nearly 2,500 attendees witnessed the introduction of Dr. Lee G. Simmons as the 113th King of Ak-Sar-Ben. The event also included the formal introduction of the 2009 Court of Quivira which included honorees from more than 200 Nebraska and western Iowa families.

Dr. Simmons, currently serving as Chairman of the Omaha Zoo Foundation, retired in March of this year from his position as Director of the Henry Doorly Zoo. He served in this role for 39 years. The Zoo, during his tenure, has consistently been recognized as one of the top 5 or 10 best Zoos in North America.

Born February 20, 1938 in Tucson Arizona, Dr. Simmons moved to Choctaw, Oklahoma in 1951. His early interest in herpetology, both in Arizona and Oklahoma, led to a volunteer association with the reptile department at the Oklahoma City Zoo and ultimately to an interest in Zoo work as a career.

In 1963, Simmons graduated from the Oklahoma State School of Veterinary Medicine. He began his formal Zoo career as Curator of Mammals at the Columbus Ohio Zoo and held the positions of Veterinarian and Assistant Superintendent until December 1966 when he moved to Omaha to become Staff Veterinarian. Shortly thereafter he added the duties of Assistant Director and in 1970 he became Director. During his professional career Dr. Simmons has traveled and worked in 36 countries and Antarctica on projects ranging from field work to academics. He has authored or co-authored 35 publications and has served on 25 board and university appointments.

His professional affiliations include: American Association of Zoo Veterinarians; American Veterinary Medical Association; Captive Breeding Specialist Group of the IUCN International Inventory System; Nebraska Academy of Veterinary Medicine, Nebraska

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AK-SAR-BEN HONORS DR. LEE SIMMONS

Page 2

Veterinary Medical Association, World Aquarium & Zoo Association; and Rotary International.

For his service to the greater Omaha community, Dr. Simmons has received numerous accolades including honorary doctorates from Creighton University in 1993 , the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2002 and Midland Lutheran College in 2009. Other notable awards include: Nebraska Veterinarian of the Year in 1979; Omaha World-Herald – Midlander of the Year in 1991; Chamber of Commerce – Headliner Award in 1992; Omaha Press Club – Face on the Bar Room Floor in 1988; Nebraskaland Foundation – Wagonmaster Award in 1994, State of Nebraska – Prestigious Vision Award in 1995; and 2004 Inductee into the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce Business Hall of Fame.

Ak-Sar-Ben honored the Simmons family in 1981 when daughter Heidi was a Page and Crown Bearer to the Queen, in 1990 when daughter Heather was Queen, and in 2005 when Dr. Simmons was inducted into the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben Court of Honor.

Dr. Simmons is also known as an inventor of a number of medical equipment designs and immobilizing devices that he manufactures and sells to Zoos and professionals in the field.

The conceptualization, design and implementation of successful exhibits and programs for the benefit of animals, visitors and conservation is at the core of the lasting legacy Dr. Simmons has created in Omaha. Under his tenure the Zoo consistently raised private funding to design and build state-of-the art animal, visitor and medical research facilities. Significant additions include:

- North America's Largest Cat Breeding and Management complex
- Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom Pavilion
- A four-acre walk through aviary
- Lied Jungle – World's Largest Indoor Total Immersion Rainforest
- 1.3 Million Gallon Scott Kingdoms of the Seas Marine Aquarium
- Grewcock Center for Conservation and Research
- Lozier 3D IMAX Theater

Lee G. Simmons Conservation Park and Wildlife Safari (440 Acres)

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AK-SAR-BEN HONORS DR. LEE SIMMONS

Page 3

- *Desert Dome*
- *Mahoney Kingdoms of The Night*
- Hubbard Gorilla Valley – Three-acre site
- Hubbard Orangutan Forest – 9,000 square feet
- Hubbard Research wing
- Berniece Grewcock Butterfly and Insect Pavilion – 14,000 square feet total immersion
- Madagascar – currently under construction

In addition, the Zoo has become one of the leaders in conservation and the preservation of endangered species. Zoo staff is currently working in the field on in situ conservation projects in nine countries and in the United States. Notable accomplishments to date include the reintroduction of many species of endangered plants and animals back into native habitat ,artificially inseminated gaur calf, in vitro fertilized guar calf, artificially inseminated tiger cub, and in vitro fertilized tiger cub. The Omaha Zoo staff was part of the team that produced the world's first in vitro fertilized gorilla.

The Simmons' have celebrated 50 years of marriage. Marie Giem Simmons grew up in Guthrie, Oklahoma and graduated from high school in 1957. She attended Oklahoma State University and graduated with a B.S. in Vocational Home Economics in 1961. In the early years before the zoo had a hospital and nursery all orphaned babies came to the Simmon's house and Marie was surrogate mother to orangutan, gorilla, bear, hyena , leopard and other babies.

Marie has been an avid church and community volunteer in support of the Epply Cancer Center, Women's Board of the University Medical Center, the Zoo, The Salvation Army, Assistance League, Sunset Hills Garden Club, PEO Chapter BX, and Rockbrook Methodist Church.

The Simmon's have three children: Lee G. Simmons III of Port Charlotte Florida; Dr. Heather Ann Simmons of Madison, Wisconsin, and Heidi Marie Darty of St. Louis, Missouri. The couple has six grandchildren and five great grand children.

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AK-SAR-BEN HONORS DR. LEE SIMMONS

Page 4

The Ak-Sar-Ben Coronation Ball has a mission of promoting, recognizing and celebrating volunteerism, philanthropy and community pride. More than \$3 million in scholarship funding has been raised from Coronation Ball proceeds.

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