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## **Baby gorilla arrives safely at new home, Louisville Zoo** ***Baby will be socialized with foster mom and gorilla family***

SEATTLE— A week ago, Woodland Park Zoo announced its critical decision to move its 1½-month-old male gorilla to another zoo to ensure he is raised by gorillas and grows as a gorilla. The baby gorilla has safely arrived at his new home, Louisville Zoo in Kentucky, where he will be socialized with a foster gorilla mom and multigenerational family of gorillas.

Woodland Park Zoo’s gorilla care team has lovingly named the baby gorilla, Abeo (ah-beh-OH), which means “bringer of happiness” in Yoruba, after a language spoken in West Africa.

Every precautionary measure was taken for the baby gorilla’s travel to reduce his health exposure and ensure his safe arrival. A Woodland Park Zoo gorilla caretaker and veterinarian accompanied him during transit straight through to Louisville and will stay as long as necessary to help ease his transition to his new home.

The baby gorilla was born June 28 to Akenji, a first-time mom, and dad Kwame. He has been under round-the-clock care by Woodland Park Zoo staff since shortly after he was born because his mom hadn’t shown interest in caring for her baby. The zoo pivoted to training three of its experienced gorillas to become surrogates, but progress did not advance fast enough for the well-being of the baby.

Gorillas are intelligent animals that live in complex, social groups. Constantly being with a mom is natural for an infant gorilla. This gives the infant confidence and a sense of security. These are critical characteristics for a gorilla to live a healthy, social life with multigenerational gorillas, which is a natural grouping for this great ape. This is why raising a baby gorilla needs to be gorilla-centric from the start.

“As the baby was growing and reaching important developmental milestones, we were racing against the clock. For his long-term benefits and well-being, we couldn’t further delay the critical need for him to be cared for directly by gorillas or take the risk of him becoming imprinted on humans,” said Martin Ramirez, Interim Senior Director of Animal Care at Woodland Park Zoo.

Woodland Park Zoo worked with the Gorilla Species Survival Plan to locate a new home and suitable family situation. A cooperative breeding program across accredited zoos to help ensure healthy, self-sustaining populations of gorillas, the program maintains a list of potential surrogates across the country for situations just like this and experts recommended Louisville Zoo where the baby gorilla can be socialized with a foster mom and a multigenerational family of gorillas.

“While we hoped for a different outcome, this is the best decision for the baby gorilla’s long-term benefits and well-being,” added Ramirez. Kweli (kway-lee), a 40-year-old experienced mother and foster, has been chosen to be the baby’s foster mom. She lives in Louisville Zoo’s award-winning Gorilla Forest with family



members: 42-year-old silverback (adult male gorilla) Casey; and females, 35-year-old Paki, 11-year-old Patty and 8-year-old Kindi. The family group is on exhibit rotation with a bachelor group at the zoo.

“Kweli is a super experienced, proven mother and foster, and our silverback, Casey, is a big, accepting softie who is a perfect foster dad. Our other adult females, Paki and Patty, have tons of experience around kids, and our youngster, Kindi, who was fostered as an infant, will benefit greatly experiencing a fostering situation as she nears adulthood. It’s a feather bed of a foster group,” said Ron Evans, General Curator, Louisville Zoo.

Like Woodland Park Zoo, Louisville Zoo is accredited by the [Association of Zoos & Aquariums](#) and a respected peer institution. “We are confident in Louisville Zoo’s seasoned gorilla and veterinary staff, passion and professionalism and are so grateful they have opened their arms to take in our baby. This baby gorilla will continue to be in excellent hands and grow to be a gorilla. We look forward to watching his journey from a distance,” said Ramirez.

[Species Survival Plans](#) are cooperative breeding programs across accredited zoos and aquariums to help ensure healthy, self-sustaining populations of threatened and endangered species. The plans convene experts in animal care, welfare, and conservation who work toward maintaining genetically diverse, self-sustaining populations of more than 500 species of animals.

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