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Weather: Our weather pattern is finally working itself back to normal again as we can expect warmer temperatures. Today will be partly sunny with a high of 83 (28C). 20 percent chance of thunderstorms tonight with a low of 62 (17C). Partly sunny and warm for the weekend with highs in the upper 80s (30C).
Barb Branda/The Nebraskan

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It's a zoo!

By Bill Allen

Arts and Entertainment Editor

Sitting on a park bench in Zooville Square yesterday Folsom Children's Zoo and Botanical Garden director Alan Bietz summed up the success of Lincoln's "community zoo."

"To see what makes it successful here you just need to sit out on this bench and watch," he said. "Today (Kiwanis Day) we mix three generations. There are grandchildren, parents and grandparents here. We're entertaining, educating and making tons of people happy. Today over 3,000 people will enjoy the zoo."

Since 1965 the zoo, started by a donation from Arnott and Jane Folsom, has brightened the eyes of Lincoln children, of all ages. Bietz, a former biology teacher, who has been director since 1973 said the zoo is financially healthier today than it has ever been.

The zoo has achieved fame not only through the eyes of children but also in the true "zoo sense" of the word. The Lincoln zoo is nationally known for its success in breeding and sharing small monkeys, most notably the near extinct golden lion, cotton top tamarin and black howler monkeys.

Last summer the zoo sent monkeys raised here to four other countries: South Africa, England, Australia and Sweden.

Bietz said the zoo's breeding success started with the fact that the Smithsonian National Zoo had enough faith in the Lincoln zoo to let it try breeding. Since then, Bietz attributes the breeding success to the small size of the zoo. He said each animal is given more individual care, and credits curator Laurie Trechsel with much of the work in this area.

Bietz said another part of the zoo's success lies in the fact that it is respected and trusted by other zoos. For instance, Reuben, a two-year-old chimpanzee is on loan from the St. Louis zoo.

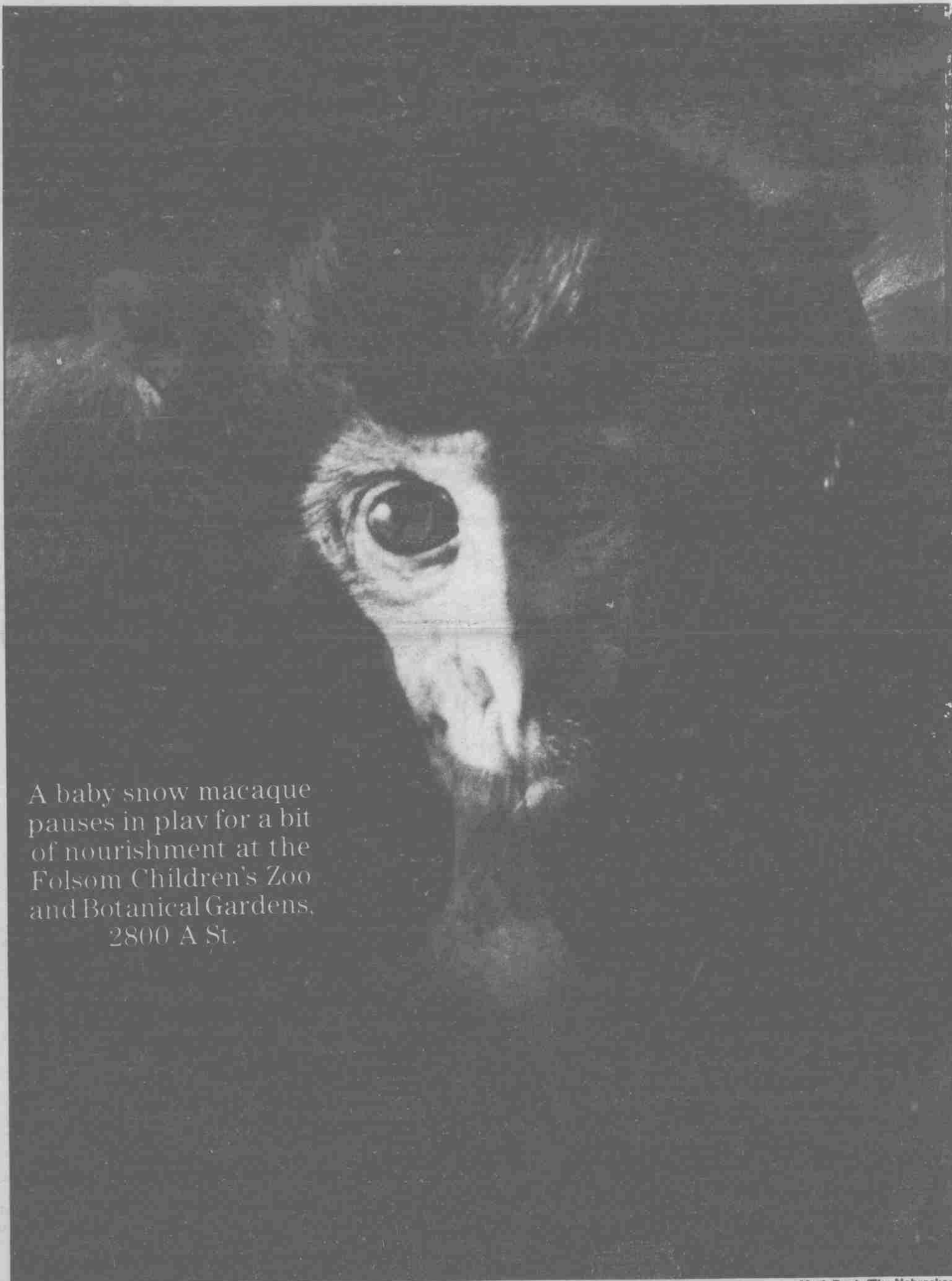
Bietz said the Lincoln zoo has developed good rapport, especially in the last seven years or so, with other zoos across the United States which encourages them to share animals like Reuben.

Reuben is a popular attraction. The glass front of the cage allows the visitors to come face to face with the frolicking youngster who enjoys swinging from a heavy rope for his audience.

And then there's Anna, a baby elephant and the zoo's newest attraction. Visitors can talk with and touch Anna for the rest of the summer. The first day the new elephant was at the zoo, Bietz said she attracted 2,000 visitors.

Perhaps the zoo's most popular attraction is Ben, the 1,600 pound kodiak bear, and former star of TV's "Grizzly Adams." Ben, who came to the zoo in 1979 at age 4½ stands 9½ feet tall. Bietz said it took about eight months of heavy negotiation with Ben's trainer to convince him that Lincoln was the best place for Ben to "retire."

The zoo is also listed in the American Gardens Handbook, published by the Brooklyn Botanical Society. This listing is reserved for outstanding horticulture environments in the United States. Over 85 species of trees and shrubs are cultivated on the 8-acre zoo, and



A baby snow macaque pauses in play for a bit of nourishment at the Folsom Children's Zoo and Botanical Gardens, 2800 A St.

Mark Davis/The Nebraskan

they also serve a useful purpose. Plants and trees often hide the exhibit around the turn so visitors always have something to look forward to.

Being a successful zoo, however, is not the sole purpose of the Folsom Children's Zoo, according to Bietz.

"It's a philosophy of wanting to share the best things in life with children, and the child that still lives in adults if they let it," he said. "We're always looking for something new, fresh, and exciting, on a year to year basis."

Bietz said even the employees aren't trained to see themselves as workers. The zoo has about seven full time year

around people he said, with about 50 part time seasonal workers hired every summer. They view their job, he said, as "ambassadors for the place."

Bietz said the zoo has about a 50-50 mix of wild, exotic animals and domestic animals, such as cows and horses... "like that little fellow," he said, pointing to a lamb walking among the visitors. "He's so tame he thinks he's human," he said.

The zoo also features an Affection Section, which allows children of all ages to pet and play with animals. There are also pony and train rides.

The buildings in Zooville Square, in

keeping with the children's theme are all five-eighths size, and include among other things, a livery barn, a theater which presents live shows and a blacksmith shop.

Lincoln's zoo is community supported, Bietz said. It receives no tax dollars, but depends on admissions, donations and concession sales to keep running.

One popular program, Bietz said, is the "adoption" of certain animals. Commercial businesses and individuals pick out exhibits that appeal to them and "adopt" them, that is, pay for their food for a year or more.

Bietz said one problem right now

might be the fact that the zoo is a bit squeezed in size.

"I think the next 10 to 20 years are going to be exciting for the zoo in that respect. There is some land opening up to the west of here," he said. "Of course, with a zoo like ours you have to keep in mind that you can't expand more than the community can support, but I feel we can grow some now."

A family membership to the zoo is \$30, and also includes free admission to more than 50 other zoos throughout the United States, including Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha. Single admission is \$2.75 for adults and \$1 for children.