

Disney Animal Keeper Combines Art and Care to Help Endangered Rhino Species

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla., Oct. 5, 2012 – As a rhinoceros keeper at Disney's Animal Kingdom, Chad Harmon tends to some of the toughest, strongest animals on the planet. He recently channeled that passion into an arts auction that raised approximately \$6000 for the endangered animals.

For the Horns to Heroes project, Harmon used one of the rhinos he cares for as a model to make 40 horns by hand using a process known as rotational casting. The pieces are made of foam-filled resin and stand 16 inches tall and 7 inches wide.

He then recruited Central Florida painters, tattoo artists, sculptors, graffiti artists, illustrators, photographers and special-effects artists to create original and unique works of art. Each one was auctioned off with proceeds benefitting the International Rhino Foundation which funds research programs and helps protect threatened rhino populations in Africa and Asia.

“By supporting the International Rhino Foundation, The Horns and Heroes Project will help fund programs that support the courageous and dedicated rangers who risk their lives to stop poaching and give rhinos a chance at survival,” said Harmon. “We’re hoping that these works of art will help spark more conversation about how to protect these species.”

Though at one time there were 30 living species of rhino, only five species remain today, and those populations are facing the severe threat of extinction. Without immediate action, some rhinos could be extinct within the next 20 years, due to poaching, forest loss, habitat conversion and encroaching human settlements.

Disney's Animal Kingdom currently includes a herd of white rhinos. Since the park opened in 1998, nine rhinos have been born at Disney's Animal Kingdom as part of a white rhino breeding program coordinated by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The program focuses on sustaining the white rhino population in North America.