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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Jan. 28, 2016**

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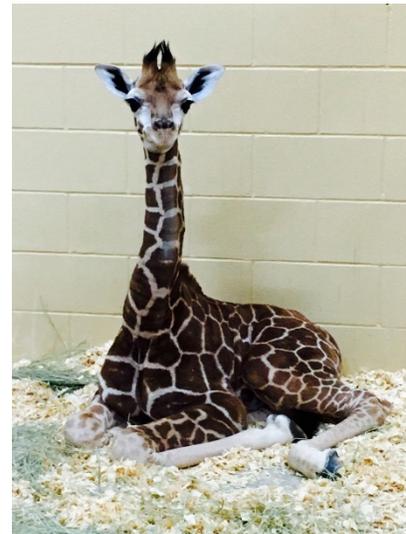
**Baby giraffe joins Abilene herd**

ABILENE, Texas – He wasn't born in Abilene, but he got here as fast as he could.

A month-old giraffe calf has arrived at the Abilene Zoo – just in time to join the animals in the soon-to-open Giraffe Safari exhibit.

A lucky turn of events brought him to town:

A few weeks ago, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center contacted Abilene Zoo staff regarding a reticulated giraffe born Dec. 27, 2015, at their facility. The infant was unable to get proper footing to nurse from his mother. Could the Abilene Zoo take over his bottle feeding and let the youngster join the giraffe in their holding yards and new barn?



It's a commitment the staff considered carefully – ultimately deciding that if the move to Abilene would be best for the animal, they could handle the work.

“We agreed because we knew this would be a good situation for the giraffe,” said Animal Care Supervisor Denise Ibarra. “It's also a great educational opportunity for our staff as we start our own breeding program.”

Already six feet tall and nearly 190 pounds, the calf arrived at the zoo Jan. 20.

He's consuming a steady high-fat, high-protein milk replacer and is slowly being introduced to the other three giraffe. The plan is to encourage one of the zoo's females to mother him. Zoo keepers do not anticipate any discord between the new male and the zoo's adult bull, a Rothschild giraffe named Mesi. The calf will be neutered before he reaches sexual maturity because his genes are already well represented among giraffes living in the United States.

“He won't be a threat to the bull, and we expect them to get along fine,” Ibarra said.

The plan is for zoo fans to see the baby when Giraffe Safari opens in April. The public will be invited to vote to give him a permanent name in a contest next month.

**About the Abilene Zoo:** The Abilene Zoo is home to more than 1000 animals of 250 different species. The zoo is open 7 days a week (closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day) from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Last admittance is 4 p.m. Tickets are \$7 for adults, \$4.50 for children ages 3-12, \$6 for seniors aged 60 and older. Members are admitted free. Memberships start at \$35. [www.abilenezoo.org](http://www.abilenezoo.org). 325-676-6085.

**Mission Statement:** The Abilene Zoo is a place of learning and adventure, where families make memories, share the joy of discovery and become inspired to preserve wildlife.