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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Kelly Thompson  
Marketing & Development Coordinator  
Office: 325-437-4692  
E-mail: Kelly.thompson@abilenetx.com

**Abilene Zoo acquires bull giraffe to start breeding program**

**ABILENE, TEXAS** –The Abilene Zoo has acquired a new bull giraffe. The animal will not be on exhibit during construction of the second phase of the Giraffe Safari exhibit during the next year, but guests may be able to catch a glimpse of the tall animal over the holding pen fence. Mesi (pronounced “may—see”) is a 9-year-old male. He weighs in at more than, 2,600-pounds, is 18 feet tall and is a Rothschild giraffe, one of seven giraffe sub-species. Mesi was born at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park. The Abilene Zoo purchased him from the Little Rock Zoo in Arkansas.

The animal was moved by a professional service and arrived Tuesday evening. The move went smoothly, and Mesi immediately took to his new surroundings – eating as soon as he arrived.

Mesi will spend the next year in the new giraffe barn and holding yards and will be introduced to the zoo’s two female reticulated giraffe in the upcoming months. The Abilene Zoo staff are excited to let Mesi get to know its two females, Asha and Punk. Asha is 17 years old, while Punk is almost 15. Both are capable of breeding; gestation takes 14 months.

“This is part of the long-term plan for the new Giraffe Safari,” said Abilene Zoo Executive Director Bill Gersonde. “Our two females are genetically valuable – as is Mesi -- and young from this pairing will contribute to the sustainability of the U.S. giraffe population.”

The current feeding bridge at the zoo will close very soon to allow for construction of the next phase of the Giraffe Safari exhibit, which includes new feeding decks. Giraffe Safari will double

the size of the giraffe's home and allow guests to hand feed the animals romaine lettuce at eye level.

"Everyone has always loved the experience of feeding giraffe from the bridge," Gersonde said. "This is going to be an even more enriching experience, especially when we have baby giraffe arrive."

**About the Abilene Zoo:** The Abilene Zoo is home to more than 900 animals from 250 species. The Zoo offers many educational programs and kid's activities, including camps, birthday parties and Behind the Scenes Tours.

The Abilene Zoo is open 7 days a week (closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, New Year's Day) from 9 am to 5 pm. Last admittance is 4:30 pm. Tickets are \$6 for adults, \$3.50 for children ages 3-12, \$5 for seniors aged 60+. Members are admitted free. Memberships start at \$30. [www.abilenezoo.org](http://www.abilenezoo.org). 325-676-6085.

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