

Ikigai: Aligning Your Passion, Profession, Vocation, and Mission

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

There is a guiding principle that resonates with me—Ikigai. It is a Japanese concept that serves as a compass for aligning your passion, profession, vocation, and mission. If you're good at it, if the world needs it, you get paid for it, that's not just a livelihood, that's your purpose, that's your mission.

That is who we are as the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. We are a collective force driven by our love for wildlife, our expertise in animal care, our responsibility to our communities and our planet, and the mission that unites us all. But we can't do that without our teams, and none of it matters without inspiring action in our guests.



In this issue of *Connect*, we are exploring how involvement with and partnerships in our communities and with our guests can enrich our business operations. As we open our gates every day, we strive to not only be welcoming, but a place where our guests feel they belong. As we build trust in our communities, other opportunities for combined impact arise. This is evident in the stories of exhibit development at Fresno Chaffee Zoo and seafood connections at the South Carolina Aquarium.

Community engagement and enhancing guest experience is also strengthened through our on-site partners. In this issue, you'll see how two organizations of our Commercial Member Engagement Council (SSA and Satisfi Labs) are contributing in meaningful ways that do both.

These stories demonstrate this blend of purpose, passion, and contribution, where in my mind, we find Ikigai alive. We as AZA can create a world where animals flourish, visitors are inspired, and teams are supported. Together, we embody Ikigai, a purposeful journey where our love for wildlife ignites change, one partnership and conversation at a time.



LISA NEW
AZA Board Chair
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Zoo Knoxville

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Tim Lewthwaite

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Angela Parrotta, Angela Parrotta Design LLC

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