

Children feel the love through Valentine's Day activities

By Renee Newberry

Review correspondent

Valentine's Day is a day for hearts, a day for love, a day for ... animals?

No one at the Maryland Zoo would deny that last part.

Stephanie Drummond, events and community relations manager for the Maryland Zoo, said the zoo will host a Valentine Enrichment Day on Feb. 11.

What does that mean? Guests will be able to walk from exhibit to exhibit and see items such as papier-mâché hearts and ice treats dyed red, said Drummond, all for their own amusement and the animals' added care.

"Each enrichment item is specifically developed for each animal species," according to a press release. "You might see decorated paper bags filled with raisins for the chimps, and meat treats for lions and leopards. You might witness the giraffes delicately lick an ice treat, while the polar bears wrestle an ice block filled with fish."

The idea is to encourage the animals' natural behaviors.

At a previous Valentine Enrichment Day, Amari the leopard very literally got into her treat box, said zoo director of public relations Jane Ballentine. The huge box was covered in red-and-pink heart wrapping paper.

"This particular Valentine event is something we do every year," said Drummond, "to add to the guest experience in the colder winter months."

Other Valentine activities around Baltimore allow kids to craft their own animals. Several of the branches of the Enoch Pratt Free Library will hold afternoon events on or just before Valentine's Day for kids to make Valentine cards and crafts and listen to Valentine stories.

Govans branch manager Mary Triandafilou said in the past, kids at the event for ages three to 12 - this year held Feb. 9 at 3:30 p.m. - have crafted a mouse out of a heart, folding the heart in half and attaching a tail.

Melanie Townsend Diggs, children's librarian at the Forest Park branch, said its event for children ages 6 to 12 will be on Valentine's Day itself at 4 p.m.

Diggs recommended the website DLTK-kids.com for children's craft ideas.

"It really, really stretches the imagination when you have to turn a big, huge heart into an elephant or kangaroo," said Martha Spangler, art teacher at St. Stephen School in Bradshaw.

Spangler's third graders will spend their Valentine's Day in her class participating in just this type of activity. "They usually make a picture they can decorate their house with," the art teacher said.

The teacher said students start by picking the color of their animal - for instance, an elephant - drawing a big heart, cutting it out and gluing it on a pink or red sheet of paper. "You're looking at the elephant from the side,"

she said.

Students would then use “big, fat hearts for the ears and an elongated heart for the trunk,” she explained.

Spangler said “short, stumpy hearts” become the feet, and shorter “stubby hearts” make the elephant’s toe nails. “It’s all cut and paste, not too much drawing,” said the art teacher, who explained working with folded paper to create hearts also teaches the children about symmetry.

She said, as each child is choosing different colors to create their animals, the students will usually use other students’ leftover scraps to add color to their animals. A small heart might be used to adorn the end of an elephant’s tail, she said.

“Basically, it doesn’t have to be a perfect heart,” Spangler said about the students’ various cutouts. “It’s not about the finished product. It’s about the process. It’s about having fun with what they’re doing.”