

# Film to show behind-the-scenes work of keepers at the Memphis Zoo

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Filmmakers Joann Self Selvidge and Sara Kaye Larson wanted to make a documentary about the Memphis Zoo, but were a little stumped.

After all, you could find dozens of ideas for a film at the zoo ... but what to focus on?

Then a realization dawned: Why not focus the documentary on the folks who know everything about a zoo, the keepers? Why not tell the stories of those who spend much of their lives making sure the animals are cared for?

"You have keepers who know more than anybody else about what it's like to care for animals in captivity," Selvidge said. "They have the most amazing stories about the animals, about the zoo, about their profession. So many of the keepers we've met are really fascinating, above and beyond the fact that they have this really cool job."

In September, the pair began filming keepers at the zoo, and plan to continue shooting through the next few months.

They hope to finish shooting, editing and production by the summer in time to get "The Keepers" showing at various film festivals.

So far, they've raised about \$10,000 toward their goal of \$30,000 to finance the film. More details, as well as preliminary footage, can be found online at [indiegogo.com/thekeepersmovie](http://indiegogo.com/thekeepersmovie).

Still, it wasn't easy to convince the zoo to allow them the kind of access they needed, Selvidge said. Fortunately, they had an ally in zoo president Chuck Brady, who was once a keeper himself.

"What we're positing to do flies in the face of their policies," Selvidge said. "Because Chuck was a keeper, he understood what we were trying to get at with this movie."

Now, zoo officials hope the film will help show another side of their facility, one the public likely knows very little about.

"I hope it will give the public a much more in-depth understanding of what zookeepers do," said Jimmy Jalenak, the zoo's chief administrative officer. "These zookeepers are really remarkable people. They want to take very good care of these animals entrusted (to them)."

Sandi Shoemaker is one of the keepers filmed so far. A 12-year veteran of the zoo, Shoemaker looks after primates, particularly the zoo's three orangutans, Chickie, Jahe and Tombak. She has high hopes for the film.

"I hope it's going to show the human side of zookeepers, how much we care about the animals, how much we try to help them," she said. "Some people think of zoos as just prisons for animals, that we don't really care about them, that it's just a paycheck."

In fact, if Shoemaker hadn't intervened with a curious orangutan, the film might have gone under before it ever really got started.

"As a matter of fact, Chickie tried to steal their camera," Shoemaker said, sounding as if she was talking about a mischievous toddler instead of a 33-year-old orangutan. "I turned around and she had one finger on the cord of his camera."