

## **Docent Shares Love for Gorillas and Zoo**

By Bobbi Legg

Eileen Hoskins has loved the Oklahoma City Zoo since she first visited the park with her grandmother in 1934. Back then, admission was free and guests were welcome to swim in Zoo Lake with Luna the elephant!

A lot has changed since then but Hoskins kept that love for the Zoo and now serves as a docent, or volunteer educator, through the Zoo's Education Department. She signed up for the program in 1979 after observing a Zoo education program at a conference of the Oklahoma City Kennel Club. The then Education Director Brian Rutledge invited Hoskins to join the program due to her ardent interest in the animals.

Shortly after becoming a docent, Hoskins began spending a lot of time in the gorilla building. She was fascinated with gorillas and learned all she could about them. One day she even met and spoke with Dian Fossey during one of Fossey's visits to the Zoo.

"Gorillas fascinate me because they are so closely related to us," Hoskins said. "We share 98 percent the same DNA and the gestation period for a female gorilla is 8 months - almost the same as a woman."

Tatu and Fern are her favorite gorillas at the Zoo. They seem to recognize Hoskins and will even come up and sit by her on the other side of the exhibit glass at Great EscApe. When the gorillas are not visible, Hoskins shows guests photos of the animals from her personal album.

Hoskins also spends time in other areas of the Zoo. "I love animals and enjoy talking to people about animals," Hoskins said.

Despite undergoing four hip surgeries and two shoulder surgeries, Hoskins continues to educate people about animals and help at Zoo special events. Many guests may know her as the "Queen of Hearts" at Haunt the Zoo for Halloween.

Even though Hoskins has seen many Zoos all over the country, she still believes our Zoo is the best. And as long as she is able, Hoskins will be at the Oklahoma City Zoo educating people about animals.