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A Zoobilee of a Career at the Brookfield Zoo

Even the Dolphins Get a Union-Chauffeured Drive to O'Hare Airport

Flipper never knew how good his fellow dolphins could have it.

Peering out of their crates on a crane truck, several dolphins went for a drive down the very bumpy Mannheim Road. Well, they weren't exactly driving.



Carrie Widlock, Brookfield Zoo groundskeeper and Teamsters Local 726 Steward, operates a variety of heavy equipment such as this crane truck.

*Photo courtesy: Brookfield Zoo
Photographer: Jim Schulz*

graduation from the University of Florida, she traded in the balmy tropics of Florida for the Windy City.

Widlock got her start in 1992 at Brookfield, working as a seasonal employee. For five years she worked as a seasonal employee caring for a variety of hoofed-stock, including zebras, giraffes, bison, and camels.

In 1997, Widlock was transferred to the zoo's Living Coast exhibit, where she worked as a full-time zookeeper. She cared for jellyfish, eels, a variety of fish, penguins, birds and countless other animals.

"I was so thrilled to be working at Brookfield Zoo," said Widlock. "I found my niche when I got that job in The Living Coast. It was a great variety of work and lot of fun."

The dolphins were actually chauffeured by Teamsters groundskeepers via a crane truck several hours before Chicago's morning rush hour. The Brookfield Zoo Police escorted the dolphins' crane truck to make sure they arrived at their O'Hare Airport destination safely. There the dolphins boarded the plane and headed to their new home of Minnesota.

This was just one day in the life of a groundskeeper at Brookfield Zoo.

Carrie Widlock was one of the Teamster groundskeepers who hauled the truck of dolphins to the airport, and she enjoyed every minute. She has always wanted to work at the Brookfield Zoo—so much that, upon



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Widlock expanded her horizons at the Brookfield Zoo four years later when she joined the grounds department as a groundskeeper/heavy equipment operator. She and four other equipment operators are responsible for several things besides the grounds department. They operate tractors, drive a garbage truck and snow plows and are responsibly for Brookfield's local train station.



Brookfield Zoo groundskeepers (from left to right): Vito Blazys, Carrie Widlock, Greg Wall (back), Tony Marra and Dave Micheletti.

Photo courtesy: Brookfield Zoo

Photographer: Jim Schulz

The workers often haul large animals using a tractor, similar to the trip they made with the dolphins to the airport. The zookeepers place large animals in crates, and groundskeepers haul the rhinos, buffalo, zebras and other big-sized animals to different locations in the zoo.

In addition to her grounds duties, Widlock is a member of Teamsters Local 726 and a union steward. Brookfield Zoo was without a steward for approximately two years, so she decided to try it out when she joined the grounds department.

As a union steward, Widlock has been a part of many successful contract negotiations. She recalls that the last contract they ratified was a memorable one, where one zoo director was moving out and another was moving in. The six-member negotiating team worked hard with management to get a decent contract. She also credits Local 726's business agents and lawyers for their successful negotiating skills.

“The negotiating team was unbelievable,” recalls Widlock. “We devoted a lot of time—sometimes outside of work—to get a good contract.”

And the hard work continues to pay off. The animals receive stellar care. The grounds are well kept. And the dolphins get to cash in their frequent flier miles.