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THE BLACK & WHITE GALA A SUCCESS FOR SOON TO BE V.I.Ps (VERY IMPORTANT PANDAS!)

March 1, 2013 Toronto, Ontario: On Thursday, February 28, 2013, the Toronto Zoo held its inaugural Black and White Gala, in support of the Toronto Zoo's new Giant Panda Exhibit which opens May 2013. This premier event, presented by Manulife Financial and hosted by Toronto's newest five-star hotel, the Shangri-La Toronto, included a V.I.P pre-dinner reception, sponsored by TELUS. The night was hosted by Master of Ceremonies Pauline Chan, CTV News Health Reporter and Anchor, and was attended by Mrs. Laureen Harper, Honourable Chair of the Black and White Gala as well as the Honourable Michael Chan, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Ambassador, The People's Republic of China to Canada Zhang Junsai, and Fang Li, Consul General, The People's Republic of China in Toronto.

The Black & White Gala would not have been possible without the support of the following generous sponsors. Manulife Financial was the gala's presenting sponsor, Shangri-La Hotel, Toronto, TELUS, National Post, Government of Ontario, BMW Toronto and Hainan Airlines.

The exclusive sold out event consisted of 250 guests who were treated to a memorable dinner experience designed by celebrity Chef Du Fei, Sichuanese cuisine Executive Chef from Shangri-La Hotel, Chengdu and prepared by Chef Damon Campbell, Executive Chef for Shangri-La Hotel. Highlights of the evening included an exclusive auction featuring five priceless items including: A Toronto Zoo Giant Panda VIP Behind-The-Scenes Experience, A Four Night Stay at the Shangri-La Chengdu, China including airfare by Hainan Airlines, Robert Bateman Giant Panda Print, Porsche Boxster Weekend Driving Package and "Panda Reflections" a work on canvas by Gina Godfrey.

"All of us at Manulife are proud to be the Presenting Sponsor of the Black & White Gala in support of the upcoming visit of the two giant pandas from China," said Donald Guloien, President and Chief Executive Officer. "The arrival of Er Shun and Da Mao from China is a testament to the deepening relationship between Canada and China."

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"I am delighted that our inaugural Black and White Gala was such a wonderful success and I want to thank all of our sponsors and supporters who helped us raise funds to support the important conservation work that the Toronto Zoo will undertake during the next five years with the Giant Pandas." John Tracogna, CEO Toronto Zoo "The funds raised from the event will go towards supporting the Giant Panda Exhibit as well as the important nutrition and reproduction program initiatives at the Toronto Zoo, which will help rebuild giant panda populations for generations to come."

After an absence of 28 years, the Toronto Zoo is excited, and proud, to welcome Er Shun (five year old female) and Da Mao (four year old male) our breeding giant panda pair from China. The giant pandas will spend five years in Toronto and this exciting project re-confirms our long term conservation partnership between China and Canada. In addition to the Giant Panda Exhibit, which opens May 2013, there will be a new Giant Panda Interpretive Centre that will engage visitors and educate them about the giant panda as well as the importance of the world wide effort in the conservation of this important species.

About Toronto Zoo

The Toronto Zoo is Canada's premier zoo and a leader in animal preservation and environmental protection. More than a tourist attraction, the Toronto Zoo boasts a number of leading programs for helping wildlife and their natural habitats – from species reintroduction to reproductive research. A world-class educational centre for people of all ages, the Toronto Zoo is open every day except December 25 and attracts approximately 1.3 million visitors each year.