

Washoe – Child of the CWU Community Dies

October 31, 2007

ELLENSBURG, Wash. — Washoe, the beloved chimpanzee of Central Washington University, whose name is synonymous with The Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute (CHCI) died last night (Tuesday, October 30) of natural causes at the age of 42. She was the first non-human to acquire a human language, American Sign Language.

“Washoe was a treasured member of our family,” says Roger and Deborah Fouts, co-founders of the institute.

Dr. Roger Fouts and his wife Deborah came to CWU in 1980 and created a sanctuary for Washoe and her family. Roger and Deborah are at the forefront of promoting and developing humane research methods. As Jane Goodall remarks in a book by Dr. Fouts’s, “Next of Kin,” “Roger, through his ongoing conversations with Washoe and her extended family, has opened a window into the cognitive workings of a chimpanzee’s mind that adds new dimension to our understanding.”

CHCI is a place where students learn that research and caregiving can be compassionate and to take their next of kin on their own terms. Visitors to the institute learn from Washoe and her family the connections shared between humans and our fellow beings and the importance of being responsible stewards for all life.

Dr. Mary Lee Jensvold, assistant director of the institute, commented this morning, “Washoe was an emissary, bringing us a message of respect for nature. She was a dear friend to so many; we will miss her.”

Born in Africa about 1965, Washoe was the only chimpanzee at CHCI born in Africa and was the matriarch of the chimpanzee family. She was named for Washoe County, Nev. where she lived with Drs. Allen and Beatrix Gardner until age 5.

Friends of Washoe, a non-profit organization cares for Washoe’s family, Tatu, Loulis and Dar, and works to protect other captive and free-living chimpanzees.

Washoe’s memorial will be held on November 12, 2007. Interested individuals may visit the Friends of Washoe Web site www.friendsofwashoe.org for more details. In 2002, Moja, another of Washoe’s family, passed away. The Foutses’ daughter Hillary traveled to Africa to spread Moja’s ashes.

Contact: Deborah H. Fouts, CWU Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute, 509-963-2363, foutsd@cwu.edu

Becky Watson, CWU Public Relations and Marketing, 509-963-1117, bwatson@cwu.edu

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Statement from CWU university president Jerilyn McIntyre

“Washoe’s significance to our lives as humans is profound: she was not only living evidence of the fact that members of other species are able to communicate with each other, but, through her and her chimpanzee family, humans have also able to communicate and converse with her species. Because of this, Washoe was a reminder of our responsibility to care for all creatures of this planet, however closely or distantly related they are to us. She modeled for us a care and concern for the beings with whom she lived that we would do well to emulate. She touched the lives of the thousands of people who have attended “Chimposiums” and she was a deeply appreciated member of the Central Washington University and Ellensburg communities. We were indeed fortunate to have her for so many years as our ‘next of kin.’ We will miss her.”

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Central Washington University is a master’s degree-granting institution with approximately 10,000 students and 1500 faculty and staff. More than 160 undergraduate and master’s degrees are offered. Founded in 1891, the Ellensburg campus is located in the heart of Washington State, nestled between the Cascade Mountains and the Columbia River. Since 1975, CWU has served the needs of placebound students at six university centers throughout the state.