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Riverbanks Honors Not Only Dads But Also Kids of Deployed Military Personnel on Father's Day

[Columbia, SC] Riverbanks has once again teamed up with Operation Military Kids to offer free admission to all children of deployed military personnel on Sunday, June 15. The Zoo also will provide free admission to children who have a parent that has returned within the last year from a deployment.

"The Zoo hopes to provide a day of fun for kids who can't celebrate Father's Day with their dads and a day of celebration for those families who have re-united after a parent has returned from deployment within past year," said Lindsay Burke, communications specialist for Riverbanks Zoo and Garden.

Military families with a parent deployed overseas must bring a copy of the parent's deployment orders to receive free admission. Those who have had a parent return from deployment within the past year must provide a copy of those orders as well. The Zoo also will admit kids with moms deployed overseas or children with moms who have returned from deployment in the past year for free on this day as well.

South Carolina's Operation Military Kids (SCOMK) program supports families and youth of military personnel, emphasizing outreach to families of deployed National Guardsmen and Reservists. SCOMK provides positive youth development programs and helps mobilize communities to support families of deployed members of the US Armed Forces. Staff from Operation Military Kids will have a booth set up inside the Zoo entrance with information about the organization and support programs for families.

More than 2,000 South Carolina National Guardsmen have recently returned from deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan – marking the single largest deployment of South Carolina National Guard Soldiers since World War II. Coupled with ongoing deployments of other units from the South Carolina National Guard and the Reserves, many families will be celebrating Father's Day without their father or as a newly reunited group.

Kids of deployed military personnel aren't the only ones receiving free admission that day; Riverbanks will also offer free admission to all fathers. The Zoo will be open from 9am to 6pm on Father's Day.

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Riverbanks Zoo and Garden is located at I-126 and Greystone Boulevard near downtown Columbia. The Botanical Garden entrance is located in West Columbia off Hwy. 378 at Botanical Parkway. Hours are 9am – 5pm and the Zoo is open daily except for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Admission is \$9.75 for adults, \$7.25 for children ages 3-12 and free for children under three. Group rates and other discounts may apply. For more information, call Riverbanks at 803.779.8717 or visit www.riverbanks.org.