Apex Zoological Sanctuary Operations Team of the Year Nomination

What makes your operations team special and deserving of this award?

When the chiller unit serving our Polar Frontier exhibit failed on a July Saturday, we found out the hard way what a closed exhibit costs. Guests who had driven hours to see polar bears turned around at a sign. Front-line staff spent the day fielding complaints they couldn't answer. We brought in an emergency HVAC contractor at weekend rates, and the exhibit was back online by Tuesday — but the damage, financial and reputational, was already done.

It wasn't an isolated event. Across our 580-acre campus — eight world regions, an aquarium, a water park, and a golf course — we were running a reactive maintenance operation on infrastructure that ranged from decades-old animal habitats to high-demand public facilities serving more than two million visitors a year. Our facilities team was skilled and dedicated, but they were operating without a real system. Work requests came in through email, phone calls, and hallway conversations. There was no asset history, no PM schedule, no way to know what was about to fail until it did.

The cost was showing up everywhere. Emergency contractor invoices. Repeat repairs on equipment that never got properly serviced. Staff hours spent chasing down who was working on what. And every time a critical system failed in a guest-facing space, we felt it in visitor satisfaction scores — and in revenue.

We needed a platform that could handle the complexity of an operation like ours: diverse facility types, dozens of critical systems with animal welfare implications, and a guest experience that lives and dies on whether every exhibit is open and running.

We chose FMX.

The first thing we did was build a true asset registry — every HVAC unit, every chiller, every pump system, every critical piece of infrastructure across the entire campus — tagged with age, service history, and maintenance schedule. For a campus this size, that work alone was revelatory. We found equipment that had never had a formal PM schedule. We found assets that had been repaired repeatedly but never flagged for replacement consideration.

Once the asset data was in place, FMX's preventive maintenance engine went to work. Critical systems — especially those tied to animal habitats and temperature-controlled exhibits —

were put on automatic PM cycles. Work orders generated themselves. Technicians had clear schedules. Supervisors could see exactly where every open item stood.

The requestor portal changed how our frontline staff communicated with the facilities team. Zoo staff across every region could submit issues from their phones. Requests routed to the right technician automatically. No more lost emails. No more "I thought someone else called it in."

The results came quickly.

In our first full year on FMX, emergency repair costs dropped by 31%. PM compliance — which we'd never formally tracked — reached 79% within two quarters. We reduced unplanned contractor spend by over $190,000. And perhaps most importantly: we went the entire summer season without a single critical exhibit closure due to a mechanical failure.

That last number is the one our leadership talks about most. An exhibit closure on a peak weekend isn't just a bad guest experience — it's lost revenue, lost trust, and a reminder that we let something get ahead of us. FMX gives us the visibility to stay ahead of it.

Our facilities director put it simply: "We used to find out about problems when animals were uncomfortable or guests were turned away. Now we find out during a scheduled inspection, three months before it becomes a crisis."

Two million visitors come through our gates every year. Every one of them expects every exhibit to be open. For the first time, we have the system to deliver on that — consistently.

What measurable outcomes have you achieved since using FMX?

Cost savings

How much have you cut in costs?

$190,000 annually