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Friday, September 1, 2006

[Zoo officials unveil plans for glass cage to hold Little Joe](#)

By John R. Ellement, Globe Staff, and Andrew Ryan, Globe Correspondent

Little Joe, the 250-pound gorilla who mauled a 2-year-old girl at the [Franklin Park Zoo](#) in 2003, may appear again in public early next year.

Zoo officials today unveiled plans for a completely enclosed glass cage for Little Joe and six other gorillas which will bring visitors "face-to-face" with the apes. The \$2.3 million renovation in the Tropical Forest exhibit includes a stainless steel net capping the 1 1/2-inch thick glass walls. The enclosure will keep the gorillas contained, officials said, and allow them for the first time the freedom to climb inside their exhibit space.

On Sept. 28, 2003, Little Joe escaped for the second time in a month. The gorilla, now 6-foot-tall and 400-pounds, scaled a moat, broke through a series of electrified cables and leapt to freedom.

Little Joe bit an off-duty zoo employee and attacked Nia Simone Scott of Dorchester, who suffered injuries on her face. Police had to chase the gorilla for two hours until he was shot with at least four tranquilizer darts. Little Joe had previously escaped in August 2003 and was returned to his enclosure before anyone was hurt.

Since the attacks, Little Joe had been kept in a holding pen out of public view with Okpara, another gorilla his age. Adolescent male gorillas can become restless and aggressive in captivity. The pair have been kept busy with a swing, ropes, toys and access to an outdoor cage, zoo officials said.

"With these changes, we will feel very confident putting these two guys back on exhibit," said Zoo

New England President John Linehan.

The new enclosure is expected to be completed by early 2007. It is being funded by the zoo, private donations and leftover money from the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

"It's all about getting Joe back out into the exhibit," said Thomas W. Gaul, the superintendent of Commodore Building, which is renovating the exhibit space. The glass walls will consist of three 1/2 inch thick panes of tempered glass that have been bonded together, Gaul said.

Five of the zoo's other gorillas have remained on display, including 34-year-old Gigi, and Kiki, 25, and her two daughters, Kira, 7, and Kimani, 2. The other male gorilla, Kitombe, 20, has also been seen by visitors to the zoo.

The Tropical Forest exhibit will remain open during the construction.

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