

## **Greg Dye**

Greg: I am the executive director of the Lemur Center, and it is my honor to welcome you here this evening. Actually, it's my absolute pleasure to welcome you to the Karsh Center as we celebrate the extraordinary career of Charlie Welch.

I want to thank all of you for being here, especially those who traveled great distances to join us. Your presence speaks volumes about the impact Charlie has had on so many lives.

I don't need to tell anyone in this room what a remarkable journey Charlie's career has been over nearly 40 years. His legacy speaks through a staggering list of accomplishments: hundreds of thousands of trees planted, countless communities supported, students mentored, and an international conservation infrastructure that will carry his work well into the future.

Just walking through the room this evening and afternoon and hearing Charlie's stories, one thing is clear: His ability to connect with people and lead with compassion is what truly sets him apart. If you haven't read Robin Smith's wonderful profile of Charlie in the current Lemur Center magazine, I encourage you to do so. It's a beautifully told account about how all of this began.

Now, Charlie's story started with the Jackson Zoo, where he worked as a teenager; but he would first cross paths with the Duke Lemur Center in the early 1980s while transporting lemurs for a breeding program. And it's where he also met Andrea. And after what I imagine was a thoroughly southern, uh, courtship, the two married.

In 1987, they traveled to Madagascar for the first time to help train staff at Parc Ivoloana, where confiscated lemurs were being placed by the Ministry of the Environment. At that time, they had to present the trip to the university leadership as a research mission because there simply wasn't institutional interest in conservation yet.

What was expected to take a few visits turned into a 15-year commitment. The more time Charlie and Andrea spent in Madagascar, the more potential they saw, not just for protecting lemurs and forests, but for reshaping how conservation itself was practiced. They helped lead the shift away from fortress-style conservation, which relied on fences and guards, towards community-based models that centered on the needs and health of the people living near the forest. They launched programs in agriculture, education, women's health, reforestation, and community development. They worked hand in hand with local governments and universities, and they co-founded the Madagascar Flora and Fauna Group, an international coalition of zoos, botanical gardens, conservationists, and educators, all united by a shared passion for Madagascar.

In 2011, a new chapter began. Charlie was asked to lead a new project for the Lemur Center in the SAVA region of northeastern Madagascar. One of the first people he recruited was a young paleontologist from

Madagascar and also a research assistant named Lanto Andrianandrasana. Lanto told me that he was struck by how Charlie spoke slowly and clearly, carefully explaining his vision [of] the project. That conversation, Lanto said, changed his life. He moved his family to the SAVA and has worked alongside Charlie ever since.

When I asked Lanto what he would remember most after 13 years, he didn't hesitate. Charlie's unwavering belief in education, especially for children in primary schools, as the foundation of long-term conservation, is what came out.

What impressed him most though, was that Charlie's primary focus was not just on the forest, but it was on the people.

That too is what I'll remember most. If you spent time with Charlie, you know he's not one to seek the spotlight. He works quietly, often behind the scenes. Sometimes the only way I know where Charlie has been is when a new tree is planted that just pops up outta nowhere, or we get a fresh patch of sumac saplings coming up out of the ground.

But wherever he's been, his respect and compassion for people are unmistakable. You see it in the joy on his Malagasy colleagues' faces when he visits. You see it when he mentors students who are searching for ways to turn their passion into something that serves others. And you see it in the simple kindness of stopping to ask a colleague how they're doing.

Now, you might describe Charlie—\*I\* might describe Charlie—as a man of few words, but that's not entirely true. Those of us who have been around for his daughter Alena's milestones, her high school graduation, Barnard College acceptance, first job as a social worker, graduate studies at UNC, Alena meeting Joe, Alena and Joe getting engaged, Alena and Joe getting married and now her teaching career in Durham—are all stories from a very proud father.

Alena, I suspect your dad told you that driving your things to New York City for college in the back of his truck was because it was the cheapest option. But I think we all know it's because he wouldn't trust anyone else to get you there safely.

Charlie's love for his family has been a joy to witness and a reminder that the heart he poured into his work comes from a deeply rooted place.

To honor all that Charlie and Andrea have done for the Lemur Center and for Madagascar, we are proud to announce the creation of the Charlie Welch and Andrea Katz Fund. This is a fund that will carry forward their legacy of conservation rooted in compassion, education, and partnership.

Charlie, your legacy isn't just in the forest you protected or the lemurs you saved. It's in the lives you've touched and the minds you've inspired. You've shown us that real change happens not only through vision and hard work, but through humility, patience, and heart. Congratulations on a remarkable journey, and thank you.

**Karen Freeman**

**Greg:** It's my pleasure to introduce you now to the Director of the Madagascar Flora and Fauna Group, Karen Freeman.

**Karen:** Hi, thank you so much for having me. This is a real privilege to be here on this really special occasion, and I'm very proud to represent Madagascar Fauna and Flora Group.

And I'm not gonna look at Andrea or else I'm gonna start crying.

So this is about Charlie and his years with Madagascar Fauna and Flora Group. It's impossible to talk about Charlie and MFG without talking about Andrea and Alena. Andrea and Charlie are just an amazing team, and they were fantastic at splitting the responsibilities and pretty much everything they've done, they've done together. And so, although this is for you today, Charlie, obviously this is for Andrea, you as well.

So in the beginning, there was a huge cyclone which destroyed what was left of Park Ivoloina. And as the government knew about Duke Lemur Center, they looked to Duke for some help and advice. And thankfully for all of us, [Duke] decided to send Andrea and Charlie.

And so they went across in 1986. And then in 1987 through their efforts, there was the St. Catherine's Accord, which was a collaboration between the Malagasy government and various international organizations, including Duke Lemur Center, all about the conservation of lemurs.

In 1988, the Madagascar Fauna and Flora Group, then Madagascar Fauna Group, was created to address the needs that had come out from the government.

So this is a real whistle stop tour, you know, 17 years later. The things that Andrea and Charlie have managed to do together are really quite incredible. So this is a proper whistle stop tour.

So setting up Ivoloina, rebuilding it because it was pretty much totally destroyed, and reopening it.

Creating MFG. So MFG was an entity on paper, but they grew the teams, nurtured MFG right from the beginning. And obviously it just wouldn't be there without the amazing efforts of Andrea and Charlie.

Setting up the Rendrirendry Research Station just outside the Betampona Strict Nature Reserve—this is honestly my favorite place in the world to be. And Charlie I think had a lot to do with that.

The releases of the black and white ruffed lemurs I think is one of the most momentous things that has ever been done by MFG and guided completely by Andrea and Charlie.

So the release of captive bread lemurs into Betampona Reserve, and to my knowledge, that's still the only successful reintroduction that's ever been done with lemurs. And we just had some genetic testing, and it's shown that our population, even though it's very isolated, is very genetically diverse. And that really can only be thanks to these releases.

And those releases, then, obviously it started with lots of following of the lemurs, but that then grew and expanded into a big research program looking at all the vertebrates and the rare plants, of which there are very many in Betampona.

Setting up a flagship environmental center, which has actually been much copied. People have come and done exchanges. I've just been talking to Lanto about how the team from SAVA came down and setting up the Saturday classes. I have to say, you, you'll see this photo quite often because I think it's the best photo that's ever been taken by Charlie of the Saturday classes. So everybody uses it and continues to use it.

And then another passion of Charlie's: growing things. So the restoration programs at both Parc Ivoloïna and at Rendrirendry at the edge of Betampona. And a lot of the partners that Charlie and Andrea set up, like the Rotary Club and the port authorities, are still partnering with us today, 35 years later.

And again, Charlie working with the the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew and a particular project with some of the rarest palms in eastern Madagascar. So now, according to Missouri Botanical Garden, we've probably got the best collection of Malagasy palms anywhere in the world, many of them critically endangered. And we are now trying to get registered as a botanical garden, and this is where it all started.

Another passion [is] sustainable agriculture. Obviously one of the biggest drivers of lemur loss is habitat loss, and a lot of that is due to slash and burn agriculture. So really tackling the issues head on.

This is a special shout out for Andrea, who's really led the way in not only doing responsible imports and exports of some of these critically endangered lemurs between Europe, America, and Madagascar. So really doing that in a very responsible, wonderful way.

And a labor of love with the lemur [care] manual, which is now finally starting to be used—is really starting to be used. So a huge shout out.

And Charlie in recent years has helped us secure funds for green energy. We've got a hydroelectric—somebody was asking me about the water wheel, we did finally get the water wheel! And that's really down to Charlie helping us secure the funding for that. It's not just green energy, it's just energy. Full stop. We're not on the grid at Ivoloia, so having any electricity for the zoo is a huge, huge deal.

So I think when I think about Charlie, I just think [of] the number of people I've met, and I've had the opportunity to talk with lots of you today. Charlie just has a way of inspiring people.

In Madagascar, too, you've inspired so many of the team and I think that's really your gift and it's an amazing legacy.

I just want to finish with this. So we all know Charlie loves to grow things and trees, and this is your restoration patch at Rendriendry. So this is 20 years on. Charlie has literally grown a forest, and when you walk through there, it's so diverse and it's wonderful. I can't think of a better legacy than that.

I'm so grateful that Andrea and Charlie are still advisors to the MFG and we'll, we'll keep pestering you [laughs]. We'll make sure that you keep in touch.

And I just want to take the opportunity to thank Duke Lemur Center as well for the many years of wonderful support.

So enjoy your retirement, but we're not gonna let you get away completely [laughs].

### **James Herrera**

**Greg:** Thank you, Karen. I'm going to turn the podium over now to James Herrera, who's not only been with Charlie for the last several years, but who will be stepping into some very large shoes very shortly. He's going to be taking over as our new Conservation Coordinator, and we couldn't be more pleased [clapping].

**James:** Thank you very much. Thank you to everybody for being here.

There is a saying attributable to the Greeks, though I'll adapt it a little bit: "A society grows great when our elders plant trees. They know they will never sit in their shade." Charlie really embodies that philosophy—and I mean that literally, he has personally planted thousands of trees all over Madagascar. But more than the seeds that he's planted, the lives that he's touched have grown trees into forests.

And, you know, everyone in this room can attest to the impact you've had on our lives. And there are so many more in Madagascar that you've inspired not only with your personal efforts, but also by creating the institutions that have made—can make—those efforts scale.

I want to personally thank you, Charlie, for your mentorship, for your leadership, your guidance, and for setting an example of always respecting Malagasy culture. I'm so grateful that you gave me the opportunity to be a part of this institution and that you put your trust in me. I'm grateful for your patience with me and that you are allowing me to continue in your legacy.

I speak for myself and on behalf of my team, including Lanto Andrianandrasana who's here with us tonight [waves], when I say that we share your values and your vision and we will continue your legacy.

Of course, I also have to acknowledge Andrea Katz. She and Charlie were the dream team, the power couple who lived in Madagascar and inspired people to conserve wildlife. I'm so grateful that I've had even a short time to get to know you both, and I just wish I had had a chance to see you two at Ivoloia together, because seeing these pictures today and hearing the stories—I just wish I could have been a part of that.

It's so powerful to me to see how many of you have come today in honor and celebration of Charlie's accomplishments. We all thank you so much for your support and your dedication to Charlie and to the Lemur Center, and it's because of you that we are able to achieve the mission that Charlie has made his life's work and why we'll be able to continue it in the future.

Charlie, we will forever seek your guidance. It's probably no surprise to anybody in this room that Charlie will continue to engage with the Lemur Center and Madagascar for many more years to come. It's like the Malagasy saying, "*Tsy veloma fa mandra-pihaona*." "It's not goodbye. But see you again soon."

Thank you.

### **Alena Welch**

**Greg:** You know, Charlie and Andrea didn't just live in Madagascar for over 15 years. They made it their home. It's where they raised their daughter, Alena, until she was 11, and where they poured their hearts out into making a difference in the community. This evening, I hope you'll have the opportunity to get to speak with Alena. She is a remarkable young woman, and it's clear she's inherited her parents' drive to help others and to give back. These days, she's doing just that as a teacher right here in Durham. Please, it's my pleasure to invite her to the podium. Please welcome Elena Welch.

**Alena:** [To herself] No tears. [To audience] By a show of hands, how many of you have ever sneezed around my dad? [Laughs]

Those of you who have know his response: "May the great tree embrace you."

Now imagine being raised by someone who has been saying that for your entire life. I hear my dad's voice in the back of my head all the time. When someone sneezes, when a piece of trash is left on a trail

(imitating dad, "Why would someone do that?"), when I'm anxious (imitating dad, "Don't be!"), when I'm full after a meal (imitating dad, "*Voki be*"), when I plant or pick something (imitating dad, "Be gentle"). I could go on forever.

How lucky am I to have Charlie Welch narrating my everyday actions?

You would think I would be more laid back, but I was also raised by Andrea, so.... [laughs].

This weekend we're celebrating my mom and dad's professional accomplishments, which as all of you know, are deeply personal to them just as they are to you. I was raised in a household without any notion of work-life balance. Their jobs shaped every facet of our lives, our home, the languages we spoke, our health, our vacations, and most importantly, the chosen family we cultivated while thousands of miles separated us from blood relatives.

As a young child, I remember not knowing how to respond when someone would ask what my parents did for work. Honestly, this is still true today [laughs] because it's never been about what they do, but rather who they are.

Their unwavering sense of purpose and passion for conservation and environmental education across Madagascar inspires me as much today as it did when, on a very rainy Independence Day in Tamatave, they were knighted as Chevalier de l'Or National by the Malagasy government.

For my entire life, their identities have been shaped by this important, challenging, and interminable work. Their willingness to throw themselves without an ounce of self-importance into the protection of Madagascar's flora and fauna has been the single greatest gift they've ever given me.

Mom and Dad, growing up in Madagascar was the best thing that could have ever happened to me.

It also ensures that I have the coolest, fun fact to share at icebreakers [laughs].

Thank you for teaching me the value of service and of striving, even when it feels hopeless, to make the world a better place. It was a privilege to be raised by my heroes.

[Sniffles] [To herself] Keeping it together.

Thank you to Mary, Susan, Greg, and everyone else who somehow convinced my dad to be the center of attention for an entire weekend. And thank you to those of you here for celebrating my favorite person in the world in the way that he deserves.

Dad, congratulations on a lifetime's worth of impact. Through intentional collaboration with communities, you've done more for Madagascar's precious wildlife than can be quantified.

I love you more than beach walks in front of Paco Diaz, stargazing at Betampona, ice cold Coca-Colas from [?], Bull City summers, and Mississippi sunsets.

May the great tree embrace us all.

**Greg Dye**

**Greg:** You know, Andrea recently said that the best possible gift for Charlie's retirement is to know that his work will continue. And I'm here to assure you that it will.

James, Lanto, and I will work to build upon the progress and collaborations that Charlie has built and to continue to protect the flora and fauna of Madagascar while making a real difference in the lives of the Malagasy people we work with. We are fully committed to this.

As I mentioned earlier, uh, we are honored and thrilled to have the Charlie Welch and Andrea Katz Fund that will be supporting the Lemur Center's work in Madagascar in perpetuity. As of today, the fund has raised over \$100,000, which was needed to get it activated—and we're confident that we can reach the \$300,000 mark so that it will become restricted to conservation in Madagascar.

I'd like to thank the following individuals for establishing that fund: Drs. Marilyn Grolitzer and Bill DuPont, Dr. and Mrs. Clinton Kelly, Sally Kleberg, Walter and Elizabeth Sinnott-Armstrong, and one couple who wishes to remain anonymous. To everyone who has contributed to this fund, thank you for your generosity and for your support of Charlie and Andrea's life's work.

We're getting close to the end, Charlie, I promise. All right. Hang in there, buddy, all right?

Before we do a toast, uh, we'd like to present Charlie with one last gift and—let me grab it. So you may have picked up a little bit—it's been subtle, but Charlie likes to garden. And so Mary and Sherry and Susan really were the impetus behind this. So we've created a sign that's going to hang at the entrance of the food forest that Charlie has created.

It's called "Charlie's Food Forest: May the Great Tree Embrace You."

So this is for you.

And finally, I'd like everyone just to grab a glass. We're going to raise a special toast to Charlie.

Charlie, may the years ahead be as wonderful as you have been to the Lemur Center and to the many lives that you have touched. We wish you and Andrea all the happiness as you begin to write this next chapter of your lives. Thank you, Charlie.



## **Charlie Welch**

**Charlie:** Holy moly, I'm a little, no, I'm a lot overwhelmed.

I don't quite know what to say, but I'll start off by saying thank you, all of you, for being here. I really appreciate your wonderful support. Many thanks to the organizers, Mary and Susan and Sherry, and anybody else that I'm missing. I know a lot of work went into this, so thank you very much.

I'd also like to thank my life partner without whom none of this would've been possible. You've heard a lot about Andrea, and she is just as much a part of this and just as much a reason that this has worked—that conservation in Madagascar has worked—as I am.

She's also my conservation partner, I might add. Without her, none of this happens at all.

But I'd also like to thank the Duke Lemur Center directors through the years who supported conservation. It's not obligatory for a primate research center to support conservation and this one has for years, starting with Dr. Elwyn Simons and then on through Ken Glander and Anne Yoder, who started—let us start—the SAVA program. And then through Greg, who continues to expand what we're doing in Madagascar and supports it in a huge way.

I'd also like to thank the DLC staff because conservation—I'm getting a lot of credit myself today, but it's not just me who's responsible for this conservation in Madagascar happening. In addition to the directors, the staff of people like Melissa Dean who keeps us all organized and running on all cylinders, [and] Mary and Susan who are sure that we have enough money to keep running our conservation programs. So many people to thank at the Lemur Center that do things both small and large to keep us going in terms of conservation.

I'd like to thank Duke Travels and Beth Ray Schroeder and Nathan McInnis and before him Tyler, who have helped us to engage people in Madagascar. People that may have just started off as being curious about Madagascar, but traveled with us to Madagascar and really became captured by that amazing country.

A special heartfelt thank you to all of you that are donors that are here today, and our donors that aren't here today, because you help us make it all happen. Without you, we couldn't make anything happen in Madagascar.

Lastly, but not least, I'd like to thank our teams in Madagascar: our conservation team, SAVA conservation team, and the Malagasy people in the SAVA region who have welcomed us with open arms into the SAVA region and work with us and our collaborators there as well.

Forgive me, I'm going to read this because I want to get it all right. The DLC is a unique and special institution, but you all know that; and that we engage in Madagascar conservation as part of our overarching mission, really sets us apart from other research-focused primate facilities.

In part, our Madagascar involvement is due to simple serendipity of politics and timely power shifts in Madagascar, but it is also a result of years of commitment and persistence on behalf of our DLC directors and staff through the years. Madagascar is a place like no other on our beautiful green and blue orb of a planet with remarkable and unique biodiversity. It is a microcosm of our precious Mother Earth.

I am proud to know that Duke and the Duke Lemur Center will continue to play a role...

[Sniffles quietly] I wasn't gonna get emotional.

...Will continue to play a role in protecting the threatened forest and biota of Madagascar, and particularly pleased to know that going forward, that effort will be spearheaded by Dr. James Herrera and Lanto Andrianandrasana.

Could y'all please stand up both of you?

I wish them both *bon courage*, as the Frenchies would say. It is a challenging and formidable task, but with all of you behind them, I have all confidence that they will succeed and carry the project forward in the years to come,

So all jobs include a certain amount of tedious bureaucracy, writing grants or submitting reports and taking care of administrative duties. But I felt so lucky when I worked for the Duke Lemur Center and the MFG. When I would go up to Betampona, the reserve that was an MFG project where we reintroduced the black and white ruffed lemurs, I would try to go up to the reserve for a week out of each month and stay up there and work with the team and the conservation agents on the ground and spend a lot of delicious forest time with the critters there.

But when it would come time to leave on Friday, I'd often stand up at the top of the ridge before I went down and think. [I'd] look across the valley where there are rice patties down in the bottom part of the valley and houses with smoke curling up from morning cook fires. And you could usually see a slice of the Indian ocean sparkling in the sun along the eastern horizon.

And I'd think, *Damn, you are one lucky guy.*

And I still feel like a pretty lucky guy, and I'm just very honored and privileged to work with the people I work with and to work with the people of Madagascar to protect their amazing biodiversity.

Thank you very much.