

## Panda cam up, running at zoo

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Lights, camera, action: Panda-monium is back.

Zoo Atlanta's panda cam went live again Friday morning, streaming the painfully cute antics of Xi Lan and big sister Mei Lan, thanks to a gift from a panda fan and a partnership with EarthCam.

When cost-cutters disconnected the cam Jan. 1, the sun dimmed for panda lovers around the world.

"It was almost like they took my oxygen away," said Frances Nguyen, a Web designer in Gaithersburg, Md.

Then Mara Strock, a city administrator in the suburban Washington town of Burke, Va., wrote Zoo Atlanta a check for \$10,000 to pay for a new server.

That piece of hardware, and a partnership with Web-streaming content provider [EarthCam](#), helped put Zoo Atlanta's panda babies (as well as parents Lun Lun and Yang Yang) back on the international stage.

Even before the Web-stream returned, gratitude poured in.

"You rock, Mara!" wrote "scrunchybear" at the Pandas Unlimited group on the Flickr Web site.

"Oh, I missed seeing little Xi Lan's life," said Nicole Vanderzon, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service and a resident of Odenton, Md. "I'm really impressed that one of our fellow panda fans has been so generous to bring it back up."

Strock, 55, who has visited Zoo Atlanta four or five times in the past six months, said she made the gift because, "I think so highly of Zoo Atlanta, and I love pandas." She's also given money to the National Zoo in Washington, the San Diego Zoo and the Memphis Zoo, all of which feature pandas.

She says she isn't a big spender ("I drive a [Hyundai] Sonata") but has a nest egg that she's willing to tap. "I have some investments."

She's heard from panda-philes as far away as Belgium, but she has especially delighted a core of fans around D.C., who got into panda babies when the birth of Tai Shan at the National Zoo in 2005 triggered a wave of panda-mania. Atlanta's panda cam generated 30,000 hits a day when it was inaugurated in 2006, peaking with 84,000 hits when Xi Lan was born last August.

Because of health problems, Strock uses a mobility scooter, but she says her problems disappear when she gets in front of the panda habitat. "When I get to Zoo Atlanta, it's like I'm in a totally different world."

Many others get the same relief from watching panda babies on-screen, said Nguyen. "This is better than modern medicine. It's good for your soul."