

# CITYSIDE

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## SCULPTURE PARK



ROD A. LAMKEY JR. — Staff

Parker Hamren, 5, scales the new "Holding Tomorrow's Heart" sculpture at the African Savanna exhibit while his 2-year-old sister, Emily, plays on the stone base.

# Statue of fatherly devotion moves into zoo's Savanna

## Artist's grandkids posed for child-with-father sculpture

By Glenn Chapman  
STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND

**T**WO-YEAR-OLD David Severensen scampered past tree monkeys and meerkats to deliver a long kiss on the cheek of a stone boy luxuriating in the embrace of a statuesque male guardian.

The toddler beamed proudly at his mother at the other end of a rainbow-colored leash strapped to her son's waist.

David then divided his attention between artist Amana Johnson and the statue she carved from a 4,600-pound chunk of springstone, dug from the ground in Zimbabwe.

Johnson shared her house studio in the Oakland hills with the massive stone for nearly as long as David has been alive. Johnson used hand

and power tools to coax from the boulder the image of a man embracing and guiding a child into the future.

The chiseled result of Johnson's vision was unveiled at its new home in the African Savanna portion of the Oakland Zoo in Knowland Park on Thursday.

"Some nights it would wake me up . . . in the mornings, I'd go down and sit with it," Johnson said as David turned his attention back to the zoo animals, and a cluster of other children laid siege to the statue. "Usually I just work with a mallet, but for this one I pulled out my entire arsenal of power tools."

The springstone was encased in mud when Johnson began working on it in her studio in September 1997. Johnson had designed the courtyard, colorful restroom tiling and grass huts of the savanna area in keeping with the traditional villages of the Kikuyo people native to East Africa.

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# Statue: Human-nature harmony

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The sculpture was the final component of zoo's savanna, a project overseen by Johnson. She wanted to finish the scene by putting people in the village in order to symbolize that humans must live side by side with animals to be in harmony with the world.

Johnson originally envisioned a Kikuyo medicine man emerging from the stone. As she chipped away at the rock, Johnson felt the character of

the rock guided her hands in a slightly different direction.

"As I got into the stone, it became clear that there was a child in there," Johnson said.

Johnson's four grandchildren took turns posing for various parts of the statue. Now, Johnson said with a laugh, each of her grandchildren is convinced the figure in the statue is them.

The statue child is wrapped in the arms of a man who represents any caring male — a fa-

ther, uncle or brother. The statue child leans trustingly into the man and, Johnson proudly pointed out, is so happy that one toe rises in kiddie ecstasy.

The man's left hand rests over the boy's chest, an observation that inspired the piece's name — Holding Tomorrow's Heart.

"It's also a reminder that men shouldn't be ashamed of their gentle, nurturing side," Johnson said. "There is nothing wrong with shedding that macho, unemotional image."

Springstone is a hard-enough stone to take just about everything children, zoo workers and the elements can throw at it for millennia, Johnson said. The \$2.3 million Savanna project was funded by the city's Public Art Program.

The sculpture will be feted Sunday during a day of music, food and dance that begins with a dedication ceremony at 11 a.m. The Oakland Zoo is in Knowland Park near the Golf Links Road exit of Interstate 580 in the Oakland hills.