

## **‘Amazing Animals’ host to give keynote talk**

By MICHAEL JAMISON

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SWAN VALLEY – Jack Hanna, the every man’s zoologist, is known to drop by now and again for a spot on “Good Morning America” or a visit with Larry King or maybe a segment on David Letterman’s late-night show.

He’s not necessarily known, however, for showing up at a tiny town’s fundraiser in places like Swan Valley.

But on July 14, Hanna – naturalist, adventurer and host of television’s “Amazing Animals” – will deliver the keynote address at a benefit for Swan’s Northwest Connections.

The nonprofit group, said Melanie Parker, is focused on community, conservation and education, teaching about both the wild habitats and the jobs that rely on those habitats.

Part of the work at Northwest Connections is to put undergraduate students square in the living rooms of rural communities, connecting them with loggers, ranchers and the like. That way, she said, they can begin to build bridges between the economics and environment of a place, squeezing their minds into the creative spaces where opportunity for both exists.

A similar program brings high school students into the field, where they help with scientific programs designed to better understand the Western world we live and work in. The mission, she said, is to explore the relationship between environmental issues and rural communities, by way of hands-on experiential learning.

But Parker’s high school program stumbled this year because of poor funding, she said, and the undergrad program needs cash for scholarships.

And so the “first-ever fundraiser” is scheduled for the evening of July 14 at the Swan Valley Community Hall, starting about 5 p.m.

There will be some wild game on the menu, she said, and some more modern fare as well, including a vegetarian plate. And there will be raffles and auctions, with items already arriving at the Northwest Connections office.

The list is long and growing still, Parker said – binoculars, raft trips, horse trips, snowplow services, wildlife art, outdoor gear – “everything you can imagine.”

And, of course, “Jungle Jack” Hanna will be there to inform and entertain, taking center stage at 7 p.m.

“You just know that will be fun,” Parker said.

Families are welcome, kids are encouraged, and the cost is \$5, \$3 for students, free for preschoolers. The community hall is located in Condon, at milepost 42.5 on U.S. 83.

For more information, call (406) 754-3185 or drop a line to [nwc@montana.com](mailto:nwc@montana.com).