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Desert Survivors

NURTURING PLANTS AND PEOPLE SINCE 1981

FALL 2017

Executive Director's Report

A summer with above average rainfall! Desert Survivors' plants sure benefitted from this year's magnificent monsoon. And as I begin my 24th year at the helm, I am pleased to report that our agency is flourishing like our verdant flora.

Over the last year, we were able to purchase all the buildings that we had previously leased. We fenced in an additional three-quarters of an acre on the north end of our property. We are leasing the new acreage from the City of Tucson, and appreciate the City's facilitating this expansion. With this and other innovations, we continue to grow and develop our agency.

Plant sales in our Native Plant Nursery for fiscal year 2016-2017 rose over the previous year, enabling us to cover the latest increase in minimum wage for our special workers. We know that good plant sales come from quality plant stock, and we are grateful that Jim Verrier and his crew do an excellent job guiding the

selection and propagation of quality of low-water-use Sonoran plants, shrubs, and trees. We are also aware that little would get done around here without the indefatigable work of mentors and crews caring for our plant stock. Our River Park crews continue to maintain the Santa Cruz side of the County's Loop Park from Silverlake Road to Ina Road. All in all, it is a pleasure to be part of the great work being done at Desert Survivors.

While Karen Wilson and Jim Verrier get to tell Desert Survivors' great stories about the opportunities for clients and the fabulous selection of plants for sale, I get to tell the financial story, which is equally as exciting. Overall, the fiscal year ended with adequate profit. Showing a modest profit means we are managing our finances well, yet putting the lion's share of our funds into agency operations. We have a great administrative/finance team, which includes Mireya, in the office, and Cindy, in California. Our auditors agree, and that's always a good sign!

As always, our members have been a significant factor in the success of our agency. The support we receive at the three plant sales, and all year round for that matter, is critical to our existence. Please stay tuned for our winter season fundraiser, the great State Tax Credit Drive. This annual drive raises funds that make an enormous difference in what we are able to do during the year. If you are already one of our "super members" who participates every year, please help us again this year. If you have not participated in years past, get on board this year. Your donation is a tax credit, so you can get your money back. Please watch for details when we send you our holiday-season card in early December. Call me directly at 520-609-8333 for any assistance or information you may need.

We have a great selection of plants at the Fall Sale. The monsoon really pumped the stock up and the flora looks great. You'll be in awe! See you at the sale.

Richard M. Bechtold
Executive Director



Mentor Heather, left, with Joe and Wendy, preparing soil for potting plants.

Karen Wilson

VISIT OUR WEBSITE desertsurvivors.org

MEMBERSHIP: \$50/yr
-newsletter semiannually
-10% off plant purchases all year
-members' day sale entry

DIRECTORY:

Richard Bechtold
Executive Director
609-8333

Jim Verrier
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791-9309

Karen Wilson
Director of Programs
884-8806

DESERT SURVIVORS is a unique human service agency founded in 1981 in and for the Tucson community. Desert Survivors is a nonprofit organization combining the appreciation and preservation of the Sonoran Desert with innovative and effective services to enhance the lives of people with disabilities.

design: LMBrewer/Bailiwick, Ink

Program Services Update

Each year really seems to fly by a little faster than the last. Here we are, approaching the end of summer and another fall plant sale is just around the corner. It has been another busy year for program services.

Our program manager, David, has been working closely with Nate, our nursery manager, to complete various tasks in the nursery (such as those noted below and much more) by pairing our mentors and their crews of workers with disabilities with someone from the nursery staff who can offer guidance with the actual task. Having the expertise of the nursery staff available during the performance of the task prevents unnecessary mistakes.

David has also been overseeing work for a water-harvesting project in a limited section of the plant nursery. By digging a large hole at one

end of a row of plants and using a plastic liner on the ground around the pots, we have been able to harvest the unabsorbed water as it drains from the pots, which has enabled us to re-use it for up to three days of watering. Our mentors and their crews have been responsible for setting everything up and monitoring the re-used water to insure that salt levels are not too high. It is still a work in progress, but shows signs for great success.

We are also going back to Desert Survivors' beginnings as our crews gather seeds from shrubs and trees within our nursery and actually plant those seeds, so they can watch the plants grow. It is essential for our crew workers to be a part of the entire growing process. Our workers with disabilities do so much maintenance in the nursery, and for it to really mean something to them, they need to feel some ownership. There is nothing better

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FALL Plant Sale

MEMBERS
Saturday, Sept. 23
20% off everything

8:00 am to 5:00 pm

GENERAL PUBLIC
Tuesday, Sept. 26 thru
Saturday, Sept. 30
10% off to general public

Left to right: Ceraunus Blue butterfly. Anil falso, budding; its blossoms host the larve of the Ceranus Blue. Jacquemontia pringlei, Pringle's clustervine. Its flowers are represented here slightly larger than life-size. These native Sonoran species are available at Desert Survivors.

Program Services: *cont. from back*

than planting a seed and getting to watch it grow while you nurture and care for it.

Last October we opened “La Vuelta Pit Stop” to provide support to our community using the River Park bike loop. With help from our friends at Pima County and the City of Tucson, we laid a path from The Loop to a gate at the northwest corner of Desert Survivors. Inside that gate is an area for cyclists to rest, get air for their tires, do minor repairs to the bike and buy some snacks and refreshments. It is not just for cyclists but also hikers and any passers by that use The Loop. Though still in its fledging stages, La Vuelta Pit Stop has already become a popular respite for many in our community. Two of our workers with disabilities man the pit stop Monday through Friday from 8:00 to 11:30 am.

As Rich reports, this summer Desert Survivors leased more land at the back of our nursery, increasing the area we have to over four acres. So far, we have focused on putting up a new fence and incorporating it into the nursery. We have also been clearing the land and rescuing cactus. We are still discussing how we might best use the space. Ideas vary from growing edibles, making a demonstration area, using a portion in our La Vuelta Pit Stop, and doing a European-style coffee/tea/gift shop. Honestly, it is great to have options, and we welcome



your ideas and suggestions. Please send me an email with your ideas to karen.n@cox.net.

We are also branching out with mobile services in the community. We have been fortunate to secure a contract with Johnny Gibson's Downtown Market. Steve Gibson has been such a gentleman to work with and very supportive of our crews. If you visit or shop at the market please

Letter from the Nursery Director

Cultivating a high diversity of native plants is challenging for any nursery, particularly on a small site of about four acres. Lately, subtle and not-so-subtle changes in seasonal climate dynamics have made this more difficult. Increasingly warmer winters have ended at the start of February for the past three years, resulting in an increase of insect pests. At Desert Survivors we have also observed a trend of alternating temperature increases and decreases throughout April and May over the past several years, which has had a negative affect on seed germination. While we greatly appreciate your patience and understanding when we are “in between crops” and temporarily out of certain species, our goal is to remedy these challenges. So, over the past year Desert

Survivors has invested in three additional greenhouses that will allow us to produce more of our own material. By using high-quality soil and by not pushing plant growth with excessive fertilizer application, we cultivate plants that we believe are much healthier than those we can purchase from wholesale growers. This will help us reduce seasonal inventory shortages and better serve our members and customers. Thank you for your patience as we continue to evolve. On another front, almost two years ago Desert Survivors experienced the devastating impacts of an insect pest that was unintentionally imported into our state—Euphorbia pitscale

be sure to check out the courtyard area in the back, where we have re-designed the planters and added native plants. We will continue to care for them and do clean up twice a week. This has also led to some negotiations with the Downtown Partnership, and we will see what we can provide to support their work in downtown Tucson.

As always, we want to send out a big thank you to the **Stonewall Foundation** for their continued support. There are three gentlemen here at Desert Survivors receiving services they need because of the Stonewall Foundation support. Thank you from all of us.

Watching the news every day has become painful. I am so grateful for our little corner here in Tucson. At Desert Survivors, everyone is equally respected and cared about, whether it's our CEO or the newest employee with a disability. Diversity is our middle name and Respect is always number one. This world of ours could learn a thing or two from Desert Survivors. Thank you all for your continued support. See you at the sale.

Karen Wilson
Director of Program Services



(*Planchonia stentae*). Wholesale nurseries and big box stores were early vectors for this insect invasion here. After much loss and effort, we were forced to abandon some of our organic growing techniques in order to counter this insect. Based on the relentless spread of this new pest in the States, I feared it might have a nasty effect in backyard gardens and our community. Luckily, we have been able to contain the situation, but we have not been successful in completely eradicating the insect. The good news is that while it endures in moister nursery settings, it does not do well in our arid climate and does not seem to persist in backyards. We apologize for ceasing some of our organic practices and thank you for your understanding.

Featured Plants Fall 2017



Jim Verrier

Lonicera interrupta chapparal honeysuckle

This pale-yellow-flowered honeysuckle only occurs in a small portion of south-central Arizona. Native to the Santa Catalina Mountains, it is a sprawling, woody vine that grows as an understory plant. It is usually found between elevations of 3,800 and 6,200 feet and flowers in the early summer (May and June). Clusters of complex flowers bloom in the evening and persist into the early afternoon. They are presumably moth pollinated. The flowers are lightly fragrant, and once established the plants are easy to maintain. They require moderate water use and a partial shade or understory habit. Chapparal honeysuckle produces red berries that are eaten by birds and wildlife.



mock vervain

Photos. Left top: back patio at Johnny Gibson's Market, by Karen Wilson. Left: one of three new greenhouses at Desert Survivors. Above: *Glandularia gooddingii*, Southwestern mock vervain, by LMBrewer. Bottom right: *Justicia longii* (previously *Siphonoglossa longiflora*) or longflower tube tongue, which grew plentifully in the Tucson Mountains this summer.



Jim Verrier

Calliandra humilis var. *humilis* anil falso, false mesquite

Anil falso is a “dwarf fairyduster” that grows at middle to higher elevations (4,000 to 9,000 feet). It is differentiated from the variety *reticulata* by its more numerous, smaller leaflets. Both varieties of this species grow sympatrically in many sky islands in our region. An herbaceous low-growing perennial, this one might be considered a ground cover; it seldom grows above a height of 14 inches. Valued nectar sources for pollinators, their small white to pinkish flowers with yellowish centers form during the monsoon and into the fall. Like many other legumes, the flowers also serve as a larval host for an assortment of Lycaenid butterflies (blues). Anil falso is rhizomatous and will form a small clump once established, but rarely more than several feet wide. In the low desert, these plants will benefit from afternoon shade or partial sun conditions.



Jim Verrier

Baccharis thesioides Arizona baccharis

One of several grassland species of *Baccharis* in our region, this shrub is commonly found on the edge of oak woodland and into the pines, between 4,000 and 8,000 feet elevation. Arizona baccharis is an impressive nectar source for an assortment of pollinators and is favored by Monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*), the species renowned for long migrations that has been threatened by increasing loss of native resources. *Baccharis thesioides* is also a larval host for specialized moth caterpillars. Clusters of small white flowers form during the late monsoon season and continue to bloom into early fall. Individual plants typically grow to three or four feet in height and width, and do well at the periphery of other medium-to-large plants. This *Baccharis* is easily differentiated from the other local grassland species by its distinctive serrated green foliage. It is highly recommended for our customers who live at middle elevations, but it will also thrive in the low desert given afternoon shade.

Jim Verrier
Director of Plant Nursery

Did You Know?

While tapwater is adequate to quench the thirst of most plants, rainwater nourishes plants in ways that tapwater can't. Rainwater enhances their growth and development due to its typically lower pH (which facilitates the uptake of nutrients), its lack of “hard” minerals, salts, water conditioners, or additives such as chlorine or fluoride used in some urban systems. Rainwater usually contains nitrogen in forms that plants can absorb, and nitrogen is an important nutrient for them. They love the showers! You could see it this summer in the washes and canyons around Tucson, which abounded with seldom-seen native flowers (or not seen so prolifically) and every-shade-of-green growth in trees, cacti, and shrubs. This fall, your yard can share the glow of Desert Survivors' rain-happy plants.



Daivide Bergamaschi