



# Desert Survivors

NURTURING PLANTS AND PEOPLE SINCE 1981

SEPTEMBER 2004

## Director's Report

Desert Survivors is doing well in its 24<sup>th</sup> year. It is sometimes hard to believe we have been around that long, providing quality services to children, families and adults. But through these many years, we have continually increased and improved our programs, and I believe our services to be of the highest quality anywhere. Our horticultural endeavors have expanded also. New highlights this year are the Pima County Native Plant Nursery, a landfill vegetation project with Rio Nuevo, the west branch of the Santa Cruz project, and continued development of our plant nursery at Starr Pass.

We have our "Too Tough To Die" Tucson-to-Tombstone Charity Motorcycle Run on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. This is always a fun fundraiser that provides much needed funds to operate Desert Survivors. Anyone interested in participating or helping out should call me at 245-4915.

Well, I hope to see everyone at the Plant Sale as I look forward to my 11<sup>th</sup> year as CEO of Desert Survivors. What a long, strange and wonderful trip it's been!

Rich Bechtold  
Executive Director



FALL 2004  
PLANT SALE  
OCTOBER 16 & 17  
Sat 8 - 5, Sun 10 - 4

Member's Presale:  
Saturday, October 9, 8 - 5  
and thru the next week

## Pima County Native Plant Nursery

I'm sure I mentioned in our spring newsletter that Desert Survivors had taken over management of the Pima County Native Plant Nursery located on land next to the Roger Road wastewater treatment plant. Our job was to complete an already started, but stalled, nursery and get it into operation.

I should say that this nursery was researched and carefully thought out by some wonderfully innovative people in the county. They wanted a native plant nursery irrigated with wastewater to supply county projects, while helping educate the public about the plants that grow all around

us. Our job really was to complete their vision. Pretty exciting. But we started on the land with a blank slate, and when people came to visit I would gesture grandly and assure them that "someday this will be full of plants."

Over the last six months, we have made slow, but steady progress, completing a green house, putting down gravel, installing 40 valves on a looped irrigation system for up to six thousand 5-gallon plants and more than two thousand 15-gallon trees. In July, despite the fact that we had a few more things to finish, we finally started production. I don't think I could have asked Nora Bechtold and her crew to scoop another shovel full of gravel or put in another irrigation box.

It was time to plant and grow some cool plants. So it has started. *We are in production.* We're planting several dozen different species of natives. And by the time you read this, we will have met with various county departments in need of native plant material to help us look ahead—not just to this year or next, but for the years ahead. We will keep native plants coming for roadsides, parks, and restoration projects—each with different and specific plant needs. Native plant needs.

This fall I hope to give tours to all those in the county who created the vision that lead to this wonderful nursery and I will gesture grandly to rows of velvet mesquite, screwbean mesquite, ironwood, to jojoba, whitethorn and much more. Think of Pima County's public parks, natural areas, and roadways landscaped to look and act like southern Arizona—with those plants that evolved to flourish here! Pretty exciting.

Peter Gierlach, Nursery Director

## Change Is Good

They say change is good, and if that's so then we must be doing pretty good. Last June Renee Kukla resigned as nursery director to go off and do something different. We wish her the best. Our executive director, Rich Bechtold, asked me to step back in and run our Starr Pass Nursery as well as the Pima County nursery. All of which sounds impossible, but **Jim Verrier** and **Amy Schwemm** are my co-assistants at Starr Pass. They run the place when I'm not there and, yes, when I'm there too. They are so enthusiastic and positive and true native plant geeks. It is a joy to work with them.

Although we have different backgrounds and plant experiences, we share a love for Arizona and its plants. Amy has been with Desert Survivors for over two years and Jim approaching a year. Jim has experience with greenhouse growing, organic gardening, and has studied plant nutrition. He is currently studying Restoration Ecology at Prescott College. Amy studied biology in college and has extensive experience growing vegetables.

**Linette Denise** has stayed with us, thank goodness, splitting her time between Desert Survivors and her mom's place in Mexico. She is our "Queen of Propagation." She very casually cranks out hundreds of seeds or cuts a day while chatting away about Mexico.

**Chuck Rahing** is back at our Starr Pass nursery. He worked for us at the county nursery for a couple months, moving gravel and digging ditches, but was delighted to be sent back to work with Linette in propagation. He's in heaven, and so are we.

**Tonette Derocher** is back with Desert Survivors after a break, helping us out with public relations work from her home in Bisbee. We are thrilled to welcome her back.

Finally, I want to just mention a fellow, who over the last few months has answered my crazed calls about irrigation and solves problems, big and small, at both our nursery sites. Thank you, **John Burns**. You're a blessing. (Bet you thought no one would ever say that about you.)

So change is good, but things are so good right now, couldn't we just keep it this way for a while?

Peter Gierlach  
Nursery Director



## Plant Nursery Update

As co-managers for day to day operations at the Starr Pass nursery, we are excited about the incredible things that are happening here. This year, Desert Survivors will be focusing more on natives and local biodiversity, which we both strongly support. Although plants from Australia are interesting, we will no longer be carrying them at Desert Survivors, as they are readily available at most nurseries. This also allows us to do what we do best—grow native plants!

We are pleased to be working with our friends and associates in the West Branch of the Santa Cruz River project, propagating plants from this unique area. Another fun project has been assisting Jesus Garcia (of the Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum) with research and re-establishment of mission-era heirloom fruit trees (fig, white pomegranite, quince, etc).

At our Starr Pass nursery, we are experimenting with organic alternatives in an effort to limit the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. This will benefit our staff, customers, and the environment—every little bit helps!

We look forward to talking to you soon, and really appreciate all of your patronage!

Jim Verrier and Amy Schwemm  
Managers, Plant Nursery



*mesquite along the west branch of the Santa Cruz*



## One of My Favorite Plants

One of my favorite homes was northwest of Tucson on a corner where two dirt roads intersected. It was a falling-apart frame and stucco house surrounded by an adobe wall and tucked back into the desert on 40 acres. I was in my early twenties. I had a garden, some chickens and goats, even grew a little pot that was quite a hit in the bars where I played music six nights a week in town. Life was good.

I had already dropped out of college, but couldn't bring myself to get rid of some of the books I had purchased for classes—*Arizona Flora*, *The Cacti of Arizona*, *The Vertebrates of Arizona*, and, yes, I still have them. So I spent my days poking around the glorious desert surrounding my funky hacienda. It was a desert full of ironwood trees, palo verdes, mesquites, saguaros, prickly pears, barrels and hedge-hogs. It seemed I learned new plants and animals daily.

It was there I got to know one of my favorite plants. A shrub called desert hackberry growing in washes with canyon ragweed or sometimes out in the open. I liked how it was so thick and evergreen and spiny. I noticed Gambel's quail hanging out under those dense, shady branches; and sparrows, wrens, and thrashers jumped around in them. Sometimes I'd find a twiggy verdin nest in the upper branches. Nothing could get to birds in that impenetrable shrub. In the fall it would fill up with small orange fruits, and I'd watch many of the same birds eating that fruit. I had found a plant in an arid land that gave birds everything but a drink of water.

*Celtis pallida* is the scientific name of desert hackberry. *Celtis* is from the Greek for some other plant with sweet fruit. (Pronounced SELL-tiss or if you took Latin in school KEL-tiss, I don't care. Just spell it right.) The specific epithet *pallida* means pale and I don't know what's pale, but what a wonderful plant. I think everyone should have a desert hackberry or two or three in their yard making a great thick barrier or hedge, while adding desert wildness to your habitat.

Sometimes I pull off the road at the corner of Thornydale and Cortaro Farms roads in Tucson and stare across the parking lots and through the stores and remember that I learned so much about the desert right there, and life was good.

Peter Gierlach, Nursery Manager

## West Branch

This summer Desert Survivors Nursery was awarded a grant from Arizona Game and Fish, administered by Tucson Audubon Society, to grow out plants found in and along the west branch of the Santa Cruz River, where native plants typically found in slightly higher elevations or riparian habitats of southern Arizona have been documented. Through this grant these plants will be made available to west branch projects and residents.

Ann Phillips of the Tucson Audubon Society made this grant possible, and we can't thank her enough. We are latecomers to a very neat project and vision for this unusual, isolated branch of the Santa Cruz, and we are honored to be a part of it. I can't possibly do it justice with just a few words here, but please ask us about it when you come in to visit or shop. I promise to write more in our Spring Newsletter.

## Hack Facts

Desert hackberry are found in southern and western Texas, southern New Mexico, south central Arizona and Sinaloa, San Luis Potosi and the Baja peninsula in Mexico. Typically, they are found along arroyos, but can be found out in the open and on gravelly hillsides ranging from 1500' to 4000' in elevation.

## planting & watering

- in a yard landscape, it tolerates all types of soils
- once established requires little or no maintenance
- slow-growing shrub that can be pushed with some good irrigation through the summer.

## habit

- has the potential to reach 8' by 10', but typically a 6' by 6' shrub.
- evergreen except in very cold areas; will lose leaves in drought as well, but recovers from both situations quickly.

## wildlife resources

- has dense spiny branches and berries that appear late summer and fall, so *excellent* cover and food for birds
- host plant for the Empress Leilia butterfly and the American Snout butterfly.
- Betcha didn't know that.



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## Adult Vocational Services

I continue to be amazed and inspired by the motivation and quality of work that our 30+ disabled adults produce on a daily basis.

The Adult Program is what it is all about. Imagine, if you will, having several of your teeth pulled, having pneumonia or stomach flu, and still managing to get up and put in a full day's work! This is how dedicated some of these guys are. It is amazing! Don't get me wrong; we encourage proper care and send people home if they are sick, but they would rather not go home.

Regardless of what's going on in their lives, these hard-working, caring, dedicated adults come to produce and care for our desert plants. With that kind of dedication, we are sure to produce super shrubs, trees, and flowering plants for our customers! See you at the plant sale!

Sonia Alvarez  
Director of Adult Services



*Seniors from Oasis come to read.*

## Children's Services

Fall is a time of renewal at Children's services. We say goodbye to families and children as they move on to public school or out of services, and we welcome families and children who are just starting out.

The Desert Survivors' children's center is still enrolling children for the fall, so please refer family and friends who are looking for quality child care and preschool services to us.

Don't forget we are a fully accredited day care and learning center for preschool age children, including informed care for children with developmental delays. Our early intervention program—which serves children and families in their homes—has expanded over the last year. Unfortunately, the expansion was due to a fellow provider going out of business. It is sad to see that happen, but with the difficult financial situation our state is in, it's not unusual anymore. Your support is so *very* important to us during these times.

I want to thank a very special supporter of our Children's Services, Dr. Carol Wolfe. We really appreciate your friendship and support. See you at our fall plant sale. I'm the one that knows nothing about plants, but does a fair job at cashiering!!

Karen Wilson  
Director of Children's Services

VISIT OUR WEBSITE:  
[desertsurvivors.org](http://desertsurvivors.org)

### **MEMBERSHIP:** \$50/yr

- newsletter
- 10% off plant purchases
- members' sale entry
- class discount at Tucson Botanical Gardens

## **DIRECTORY**

### **Richard Bechtold**

Executive Director  
884-8806 ext. 21

### **Peter Gierlach**

Outreach/Nursery  
Coordinator

### **Jim Verrier Amy Schwemm**

Co-managers, Desert  
Survivors Plant Nursery  
791-9309

### **Karen Wilson**

Director of Children's  
Services  
623-4377 ext. 3

### **Sonia Alvarez**

Director of Adult  
Services  
884-8806 ext. 18

### **Tonette Derocher**

Public Relations

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