Greetings dear friends and supporters!

I hope you are all doing well and surviving this devastatingly hot summer. It has been so hard on humans, animals, plants, and the environment. Hopefully by the time you read this, our temperatures will be down to more normal levels! I am eight months into my position as Executive Director, and while my head is practically exploding with knowledge, I am still learning. The one thing I know beyond a doubt is that I could not do this job without the support of the amazing staff that works for Desert Survivors. I am dedicating my message in this newsletter to telling you who they are and how they have helped me take the reins of this organization.

I must start with a BIG thank you to Richard Bechtold, the previous CEO and now CFO of Desert Survivors. His advice and guidance have helped me more than he knows—even if I put my own little flair on it. I greatly appreciate his support and encouragement as well as friendship.

Next up is Jim Verrier, our nursery director. When Desert Survivors first moved to our site here at Starr Pass, the nursery grew one plant: aloe vera. Thanks to Jim, we now have over 700 species and counting! He is a wealth of knowledge on all things plants, and I so enjoy talking with and bouncing ideas off him. He is assisted by Nate (assistant nursery director) and a small team: Janine, Kelly, Bruce, and Jack. Their work shows that they truly care about Desert Survivors and our mission. Each brings unique talents and ideas to the table, and I am excited to utilize them more and more as we move forward with our mission.

David Garcia is our newly appointed program director, and he is simply amazing. He has worked his way up at Desert Survivors and more than earned this new position. He leads a very strong team that works with our nursery maintenance trainees. Ariel is our case manager who oversees client files; attends meetings; and fulfills other program duties, including float mentor. Mentor is how we refer to our direct care workers.

A mentor is a person who counsels others, acting as both a tutor and a friend, and we train them as such. Daniel and Brian are our two veteran mentors, and they have taken lead positions at the nursery as well as the Chuck Huckleberry Loop (aka the Loop) between Valencia and Ina Road. With guidance from Nate, mentors Jorge and Steve have taken the lead working the Downtown Tucson Partnership and Johnny Gibson’s Downtown Market. Finally, mentors, Foday, Bobby, Keith, and Fernando work with our more developmentally challenged members at the nursery. Each mentor does an amazing job every day, and we are so blessed to have them on the team.

And last, but certainly not least, is our operations manager, Mireya Valenzuela. This lady is everyone’s go-to for everything. Whether you’re looking for a key to a vehicle or last year’s financial statements, Mireya is the person to ask. We cannot thank her enough for all she does daily to keep our organization running smoothly. My worst days in the office are when I can’t find Mireya to answer my questions or provide me with the answers.

Reflections from the Executive Director

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**Featured Plants Spring 2018**

**Talinum paniculatum**

Hills offering unique, local milkweed species so it does not have to be grown in a garden setting.

**Erigeron arizonicus**

Arizona fleabane (Asteraceae)

Many of Arizona’s native plant species have been branded with disparaging common names that contain the words weeds, bones, and worts. Despite being one of these species, Arizona fleabane is an uncommon species with a very limited range in Arizona. It is found growing in forest openings, canyons, and ravines that occur at elevations of 6,000 to 8,000 feet. In the United States, it is known only in the Santa Catalina, Pinacate, Huachuca, Chiricahua, and White Mountains as well as in several localities in the Gila National Forest of New Mexico. Plants grow to about 2 feet tall and produce lush foliage and a profusion of large, showy, pinkish-white blooms. Admittedly, this is a somewhat decedent plant to grow in Tucson, as it is better suited for locations like Sierra Vista, Portal, and Oracle. Plants in cultivation require partial shade and medium water usage. Like most species of fleabane, it is attractive to pollinators and often everts specific moth caterpillar predators.

**Muhlenbergia arizonica**

Arizona muhly (Poaceae)

We are excited to finally offer this native species for the first time! This little grass has everything going for it: it is a Muhlenbergia species that is named after Arizona. It occurs between elevations of 3,500 and 5,500 feet and prefers sandy drainage and gravelly slopes. It reaches its northern range in the Santa Catalina Mountains at the edge of the Arizona Sky Island complex but also occurs as far south as tropical Central America. Talinum paniculum produces flowering spikes with small, pink blooms in August and September. Its foliage is predotted by moth caterpillars and sawfly larvae, although these species are not present in the low desert. While the plant’s fluffy leaves are edible, they are rich in oxalic acid and should not be eaten in small doses. Plants form a taproot and are easily established, and volunteers are abundant in garden settings.

**Finance Report**

I have been semiretired for six months, and it has been quite a change. In September 1959, my mother dropped me off at the first day of kindergarten at St. Matthew’s School in Brooklyn. Since then, I have gotten up every weekday ready to take on the world. Retirement has not changed my up-and-at-em mindset, but it has changed my routine. After treadmill and pool workouts, nutritional supplements, and very few medications, the rest of the day is all play. It turns out that retirement is much like being four years old. The only drag is that TV cartoons are not as good as they once were. Desert Survivors had a record year of contract revenue and plant sales. Our community-based funds were very good, and plant sales and service contracts were solid. Thanks to members and friends like the Stonewall Foundation, donations were also excellent. We do still need to maintain financial vigilance, as the State of Arizona is proposing many changes to our service system, and we do not know what these changes mean yet.

**Reflections**

On a sad note, we lost a dear friend and longtime team member earlier this summer. Linda Brewer, our newsletter editor and designer, passed away suddenly. Linda was a wonderful woman and will always be remembered fondly at Desert Survivors. Our thoughts, love, and heartfelt sympathy go out to those she left behind.

As always, thank you to our supporters, the wonderful Stonewall Foundation, and our amazing members and customers. See you at the fall sale!

Karen Wilson
Executive Director

To keep the mission alive, I need to do the annual plug for the Arizona State Tax Credit campaign, and our friends at Desert Survivors love that our friends can donate to our organization and receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit on their state taxes. The tax credit is still $400 for those filing as single, head of household, or married but filing separately filers and $800 for those filing as married joint filers. Donations can be given through December 31. Please call me directly at 520-609-8333 if you have any questions about this wonderful opportunity to support Desert Survivors.

Richard Bechtold
Chief Financial Officer

**Erigeron arizonicus**

Arizona fleabane (Asteraceae)

This species is a favorite of monarch butterflies and hosts many insect species, including queen butterflies, soldier butterflies, tussock tiger moths, milkweed bugs, and specialized milkweed aphids. It has a broad geographic range within the west-central United States and occurs throughout Arizona, except for in the dry southwestern portion of the state. This distribution allows it to serve as the primary larval host for monarch butterflies migrating through southeastern Arizona to overwintering sites along the California coast or in Michoacán. Large, lush patches of horsetail milkweed occur in the Santa David Cienega and Canelo Hills, which provides adult monarchs with a significant nectar source and allows for generous breeding opportunities. Plants readily produce rhizomes and can form a patch based upon water availability. This is not a xeric milkweed species, so it does just fine in boggy or poorly drained soils and would benefit from afternoon shade to mitigate its higher water needs in the low desert. We will be offering unique, local germplasm from both the Santa David Cienega and Canelo Hills at our sale.

Asclepias subverticillata

Horsetail milkweed (Apocynaceae)

This species is a favorite of monarch butterflies and hosts many insect species, including queen butterflies, soldier butterflies, tussock tiger moths, milkweed bugs, and specialized milkweed aphids. It has a broad geographic range within the west-central United States and occurs throughout Arizona, except for in the dry southwestern portion of the state. This distribution allows it to serve as the primary larval host for monarch butterflies migrating through southeastern Arizona to overwintering sites along the California coast or in Michoacán. Large, lush patches of horsetail milkweed occur in the Santa David Cienega and Canelo Hills, which provides adult monarchs with a significant nectar source and allows for generous breeding opportunities. Plants readily produce rhizomes and can form a patch based upon water availability. This is not a xeric milkweed species, so it does just fine in boggy or poorly drained soils and would benefit from afternoon shade to mitigate its higher water needs in the low desert. We will be offering unique, local germplasm from both the Santa David Cienega and Canelo Hills at our sale.

**Talinum paniculatum**

Jewels of Opa (Talinaceae)

Previously nested in the Purslane family (Portulacaceae), this plant now resides in its own family. Jewels of Opa is a medium-sized forb with large, succulent leaves that is only vegetatively active during the monsoon season and into the fall. It occurs between elevations of 3,500 and 5,500 feet and prefers sandy drainages and gravelly slopes. It reaches its northern range in the Santa Catalina Mountains at the edge of the Arizona Sky Island complex but also occurs as far south as tropical Central America. Talinum paniculum produces flowering spikes with small, pink blooms in August and September. Its foliage is predotted by moth caterpillars and sawfly larvae, although these species are not present in the low desert. While the plant’s fluffy leaves are edible, they are rich in oxalic acid and should not be eaten in small doses. Plants form a taproot and are easily established, and volunteers are abundant in garden settings.

Jim Verrier
Director of Plant Nursery

September 2018