Reflections from the Executive Director

As I sit in my air-conditioned office trying to stay cool, my thoughts can’t help but turn toward the fall. It’s been a long, hot summer, and our monsoons have been missing in action for much of the season. I’ve lived in Tucson long enough to remember when you could tell the time by our monsoons: you could count on some rain every afternoon at 3 p.m. Not so much anymore, sadly. We did have some good rain in the winter, though, which definitely boosted our production.

Despite the lackluster monsoon season, we’ve had quite an amazing year. Our spring plant sale was an outstanding success, and the new point-of-sale system worked pretty well. We had a couple of little technical glitches—which were to be expected. Thank you all for your patience! By the time the monsoon sale rolled around, we were quite efficient in the system. (Not so sure I’m efficient, but the staff is!)

In the spring, we were also invited to participate in Cultivate Tucson. Located in downtown, this market features local entrepreneurs in everything from bandana designs to handmade jewelry and brewing to baking. Each person I met was truly an artist in their trade, and it was such a pleasure to see and purchase their work. They, in turn, chose us to be their spring market “spotlight” nonprofit organization. After a wonderful day of sales and community networking, a portion of the market’s proceeds went to us. We felt so very honored to have been given this opportunity to get to know such an amazing group of people. I want to extend my sincerest thank you to Cultivate Tucson. I look forward to doing my Christmas shopping at the next market!

Desert Survivors continues to be a place where staff and clients (the individuals we serve who have intellectual disabilities) feel acknowledged, respected, and valued for who they are. And we continue to find new and better ways to continue our mission of providing clients with employment services in integrated environments so that they can eventually move into competitive jobs. We could not do any of this without your continued support. Head on over to Rich’s update (Finance Report) to learn more about how to best support Desert Survivors. We know there are so many worthy organizations you could choose from, so the fact that you choose Desert Survivors means the world to us. THANK YOU, and I’ll see you at the sale!

Karen Wilson
Executive Director

Fall Plant Sale

**Members Sale**
- Sept. 28 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- 20% off to members

**Public Sale**
- Oct. 1–5 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- 10% off to public
- 20% off to members
Finance Report

I’m grateful for the opportunity to continue advising Karen and serving Desert Survivors. I’ve served persons with disabilities and mental health issues for over 40 years and hope to continue to do so for many years to come.

Desert Survivors continues to remain fiscally sound. There have been many financial challenges over the last few years, of which the increase in minimum wage is the most salient. It has risen from $8.50/hour to $12.00/hr. That is about $7,000.00 per year per employee—not including the tax increase that accompanied it! Other expenses have risen, too, but we have met these challenges through constant vigilance.

Our members play a key role in helping us meet our financial goals. We cannot exist without our members’ participation, which totals $150K/year through memberships, plant purchases, and the Tax Credit Campaign. Here is my annual plug for the campaign. The state of Arizona gives a tax credit of $400 for those filing as single, head of household, or married but filing separately filers and $800 for those filing as joint filers. As I always say, the best part of the tax credit is being able to contribute to the Desert Survivors mission while getting your money back through reduced tax liability. All information to direct the credit to Desert Survivors is on the Arizona Department of Revenue (ADOR) website. Please remember that ADOR Form 321 requires the Qualified Charitable Organization code (QCO): 20414. Call me at 520-609-8333 for any assistance you may need.

This fall, Desert Survivors will be 38 years old. Celebrate our birthday with us by visiting the sale. God Bless!

Rich Bechtold
Chief Financial Officer

Nursery Report

It’s hard to believe I am in my tenth year at Desert Survivors! I came with an arts background, a touch of experience in the plant and special needs fields, and a curiosity about growing plants. What began as a temp position in plant production evolved into an assistant directorship in the nursery. I have to thank nursery director Jim Verrier for letting his staff gravitate toward their interests. Mine happens to be cactus and succulents, and because of Jim’s encouragement, they have become my specialty. With the help, knowledge, and expertise of Steve Steward and Jason Elam, I have been managing the cactus and succulent operation for the last 5 years. Despite having found my place at Desert Survivors, I know that there is no end to my learning curve—it’s the best thing about this organization. We learn as much about people here as we do about plants, and I feel tremendously lucky and honored to advocate for our mission.

Every season, we strive to grow high-quality plants for our members, long-time customers, and new transplants to the Sonoran Desert. Producing a large diversity of species is an art form, and it is a credit to our knowledgeable nursery staff, dedicated mentors, and hard-working clients that we are able to do so. To accomplish this, we must play the long game. This is especially true of our cactus and succulent propagation. These plants require a huge investment in time before they are sizable and stable enough to help ensure successful transplanting and establishment. We are always growing a number of plants not listed in our database and have begun offering plants in smaller pot sizes so they are accessible earlier for customers.

This fall, we are excited to offer a number of cacti that have taken a considerable time to grow. While we typically grow plants found within 500 miles of Tucson, our cactus selection extends to plants found throughout Texas and Mexico. This decision was made due to the incredible diversity and variety of forms, which are of increasing interest to gardeners, enthusiasts, and collectors. We can’t wait to show you these beauties at the fall sale!

Nate McDonald
Assistant Nursery Director
Muhlenbergia palmeri
weeping muhly, southwestern muhly (Asteraceae)

Originally described as *M. dubioides* from a collection in the Santa Rita Mountains (type: Box Canyon, 1936), this species has since been lumped into *M. palmeri*, which extends into South America. Weeping muhly reaches its northern limit in the Santa Catalina Mountains but is a state-listed rare plant in Arizona, where it is known in Salero Ranch and the Santa Catalina, Santa Rita, Pajarito, Huachuca, and Baboquivari Mountains. It occurs between elevations of 2,700 and 5,000 feet and is typically found in riparian settings or in grasslands. This clump grass is one of the showier species of muhly. Plants reach up to 2½ feet tall and wide and are reminiscent of the dwarf bullgrass *M. emersleyi*, making them a highly desirable landscape plant. Striking when in bloom, plants produce a profusion of long, elegant flower spikes that slightly droop away from the center of the plant. When in flower, the male anthers are maroon, and the female stigmas are purple. In cultivation, weeping muhly will benefit from additional water and afternoon shade, if possible.

Ferocactus hamatacanthus
Turk’s Head (Cactaceae)

This is one of Nate’s favorite barrel cactus. It grows slowly to just 2 feet tall by 1 foot wide and, over time, develops an intimidating shield of thin but long and hooked central spines with straighter radials between. The flower buds (*cabuchés*) are harvested and pickled for commercial scale. If left to flower, large, silky yellow petals—sometimes with red centers—sit atop the cactus between the spines in summer. When pollinated, they produce some of the most delicious cactus fruit that tastes like kiwi with a surprising depth of other flavors. These cacti are extremely tough and grow in New Mexico and Texas and throughout the northern Chihuahuan Desert. They do well here in Tucson if acclimated properly and given strong sun exposure.

Mammillaria pottsii
rat tail nipple cactus (Cactaceae)

A common name shouldn’t put you off from looking closely for the handsome qualities of this older plant—especially when the light is just right. About 8 years old, time has given this cactus upright narrow stems that branch at the base and/or along the stems; are covered with short, white radial spines; and are topped by a brown-black halo of central spines. Older plants can branch wider but will stay under 8 to 9 inches. Darker red flowers that open narrowly also have a brown cast and are followed by small red fruits. This Chihuahuan Desert gem is rarer in collections and grows in Texas and across the northern Mexico municipalities of Chihuahua, Durango, Coahuila, and Zaragoza.

Ariocarpus retusus
living rock cactus (Cactaceae)

This geophytic living rock cactus was germinated 7 to 8 years ago in San Antonio and in Tamaulipas in the Sierra Madre Oriental. It has elongated yellow-green tubercles that are covered with wool at the base and curve upward to terminate in a narrow point. Plants typically have yellow to cream-white flowers, and bulbous taproots grow just below the surface in a thorn scrub habitat. Plants will retreat partially underground where they are camouflaged by the surrounding rock and water storage is protected from the elements.

Jim Verrier & Nate McDonald
Plant Nursery
Program Services

It’s amazing how fast time goes by when you’re having fun and staying busy. That’s life here at Desert Survivors: we watch each other grow, and ultimately blossom, alongside the plants we nurture.

Summertime and a lack of monsoons challenged plants and people, but we’re happy to say that Desert Survivors pulled through with flying colors. The staff and clients have worked together to make sure every plant and person stayed hydrated so that we would be ready for this fall sale.

This year we’re excited to be working with Jim, as he’s teaching us how to start growing plants from seed. Our clients have their own small greenhouse where they’ll be able to nurture and watch their seeds grow into full plants. Speaking of clients, we added two new clients to the nursery retail team. Kirk and Jessie have made a huge difference in getting plants potted and ready for sales. We’re so very proud of them for all their hard work and camaraderie. But we feel this way about all our clients. We believe that each and every client we support has the ability and strength to help the nursery stay running throughout the year.

Our nursery remains a one-of-a-kind place where individuals with intellectual disabilities have a fully integrated work setting. We could not do what we do without the Downtown Partnership, Pima County, and the Stonewall Foundation. These groups continue to support our mission and provide our clients with opportunities to gain new job skills and work in a fully integrated work environment within the community.

Everyone at Desert Survivors is growing and learning from one another, and as long as we continue to use our strengths and work together, we will be able to raise and grow some amazing plants.

David Garcia
Program Services Director

Visit our website
desertsurvivors.org

Membership
• $50/yr
• newsletter semiannually
• 10% off plant purchases all year
• 20% off at sales

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About Us

DESERT SURVIVORS is a unique human service agency founded in 1981. As a nonprofit organization, it combines the appreciation and preservation of the Sonoran Desert with innovative and effective employment services to people with developmental disabilities. Come visit us and see how diverse groups can come together in mutual respect and understanding. See the quiet solution at work in this majestic environment.