Reflections from the Executive Director

Happy New Year! I’m entering my second year as Executive Director, and I’m still growing in my role. Speaking of growing, much has been in the works here since we last talked.

When you come to the spring sale, you’ll notice some changes with our point of sale. We have a new computerized system that’s bringing us into the 21st century. (Now we just have to bring me into the 21st century!). The system will provide us with better tracking for our sales, inventory, and current member list. Please be patient on sale days as we’re still learning the technology.

Another huge project scheduled to begin in the next few weeks is water harvesting. Water is not easy to come by in the desert, and Arizona has been in a drought for some time. Desert Survivors currently uses city water, but we want to maximize our use so that we use as little as possible. Our plan is to collect and filter rain and city water that has drained off plants. We’re at the beginning stages of buying equipment and planning where everything will go so that we can be as efficient as possible.

One of our nursery staff has also been researching how to incorporate biochar into this process. Biochar is basically charcoal that is made by burning wood at a specific heat. It absorbs carbons, so it’s safe for the environment. We hope to make our own biochar on site to filter the harvested city water and minimize salt and other mineral contents. The best people to explain this new endeavor, are Jim (nursery director), David (program director), and Jack (nursery staff). This will be in addition to our ongoing experiment area studying the effects of reused water on specific plant species. If you have any tanks, guttering, hoses, or PVC piping you no longer need, please consider donating to Desert Survivors. We’ll be happy to give you a tax deduction letter for your kind donation.

While these two projects have received a lot of our attention in the last few months, know that we’re continuing to grow and improve in every area of our work and mission. Every little change makes a difference to the people we serve, and in turn those changes affect our community at large in a very positive way. None of these changes would be possible without the support of our members and friends.

I want to add a special thanks to Rick and Susan Small with the Stonewall Foundation. Five years ago, they approached Desert Survivors about adding us to their list of annual grant beneficiaries. Because of their generosity, we’ve been able to support three individuals who lost their funding from the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and another six individuals who were waiting for the DDD to determine eligibility. These individuals would be stuck at home with no services were it not for funding from the Stonewall Foundation. Thank you, Rick and Susan, from the bottom of our hearts.

I’m so honored to be the executive director of this wonderful organization, and I’ll always do the very best I can to continue moving us forward in a direction that is respectful to our employees and beneficial to our customers and community at large. I look forward to seeing you at the sale!

Karen Wilson
Executive Director

Spring Plant Sale

**Members Sale**
Mar. 9 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
20% off to members

**Public Sale**
Mar. 12-15 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
10% off to public
20% off to members

Mammillaria grahamii
Featured Plants Spring 2019

**Stenocereus thurberi**  
Organpipe cactus, aaki (Cactaceae)  
This iconic columnar cactus is native to Sinaloa, Baja California, and Arizona. The highest concentration of plants in Arizona occurs in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in the southwestern portion of the state, while scattered individual plants are found much farther north in Pima and Pinal Counties. Lone plants occur in the Sonoran Desert National Monument as well as the Silverbell, Tucson, and Roskruge Mountains and even a few miles south of Superior. Organpipe is a large cactus that produces an abundance of main stems in a candelabra-like shape. Plants can reach widths of around 12 feet at maturity, with heights of often 15 feet. Farther south, organpipes grow much taller, reaching heights well over 20 feet. During the monsoon season, plants form white or pink flowers that open at night and close around dawn. The flowers are primarily pollinated by nectar-feeding bats such as the lesser long-nosed bat (*Leptonycteris yerbabuena*) and the Mexican long-tongued bat (*Choeronycteris mexicana*). After the flowers are successfully pollinated, large fruits form and typically ripen in July and early August. Mature organpipe plants produce juicy, red pulp that is superior in flavor and size to saguaro fruit. The fruit is relished by birds and nectar-feeding bats, who disperse the seeds long distances. The organpipe is a sacred plant to the Yaqui people. Plants are somewhat frost sensitive but do well in cultivation. Young plants benefit from protection, while mature specimens are somewhat cold hardy.

**Asclepias albicans**  
whitestem milkweed (Asclepiadaceae)  
Native to southwestern Arizona, southeastern California, and Baja California, this impressive milkweed species inhabits the Sonoran and Mojave Desert communities at lower elevations below 1,500 feet. Plants form thick, whitish stems that are similar to *Asclepias subulata* (desert milkweed and rush stem milkweed) but are much more robust and taller. Individual specimens can grow to heights between 6 and 12 feet. This is a truly impressive plant in habitat or cultivation, and it is uncommonly found in garden settings. Although the whitestem milkweed is somewhat frost sensitive, mature plants are more cold hardy. It is wise to plant it in warm microclimates where it can benefit from ambient and radiant heat in the evening or winter (south- or west-facing exposures, near walls, etc.). During the monsoon season, large, yellowish-white flower clusters are produced at the tips of the stems and provide quality nectar to pollinators. This species, like all milkweeds, is a larval host for an assortment of specialized insects, like queen butterflies, milkweed aphids, and milkweed bugs.

**Sporobolus wrightii**  
giant sacaton (Poaceae)  
One of the largest native grass species, giant sacaton is widespread in Arizona and New Mexico and grows between elevations of 2,000 and 6,000 feet. Plants typically form 5- to 8-foot clumps, depending on water/rain availability. Sacaton is often seen growing in ditches on the side of the road, in floodplains, or in natural water catchments. In Silver City, New Mexico, plants are used as visible barriers and may sometimes be planted in rows along property lines. Once established, sacaton does not require high amounts of water, instead benefitting from water-harvesting strategies. Like other grass species, *S. wrightii* provides habitat and shelter for lizards. Recent research by botanist Richard Felger highlights that this grass is one of the best native species for edible grain production. Nutritional analysis of the seed shows that it is more nutritious than cultivated wheat and rye. Experimental large-scale sacaton farming in the Gila Region of southwestern New Mexico has been highly successful, and this species shows much promise for food production. Plants produce abundant grains (seeds) on their many flower spikes, and the chaff (glumes) are easily winnowed. Sacaton is extremely cold hardy, flowers during the monsoon season, and can be planted in sun or partial shade.

**Atriplex polycarpa**  
(desert saltbush, allscale, desert spinach)  
All species of saltbush are nested within the Amaranth family (*Amaranthaceae*), which now also includes all former species from the Goosefoot family (*Chenopodiaceae*). Like many other native saltbush, this extremely tough and xeric species employs an advanced evolutionary process known as C4 photosynthesis. The C4 adaptation allows plants to obtain carbon dioxide more effectively, which results in greater water efficiency and increased heat and drought resiliency. The desert saltbush is native to the Southwest, particularly the Pima, Pinal, Maricopa, Yuma, Graham, and Mohave counties. In habit, desert saltbush occurs below elevations of 3,500 feet and on both saline and nonsaline soils. This species is often found in association with creosote, which highlights how hardy it is. Plants have distinctly small foliage and form round shrubs often to 3 to 3 feet but can grow larger in ideal conditions. *Atriplex polycarpa* thrives in full-sun conditions and is tolerant of cold temperatures. Like other species of saltbush, this plant is an important forage plant for wildlife and is a larval source for select species of butterflies. Although individual specimens are often male or female, both flowers can occur on the same plant.

Jim Verrier  
Director of Plant Nursery  
Desert Survivors
**Finance Report**

The New Year finds Desert Survivors in good financial shape. The Arizona Tax Credit Campaign was a huge success again this winter. Members and other supporters of our agency donated just under $55,000.00! This cash infusion is timely because we do not sell as many plants in the winter as in other times of the year. If you’d like to donate next year, simply download Form 321 from the “Credit for Contributions to Qualifying Charitable Organizations” page on the Arizona Department of Revenue website. Please do not forget to include the agency code for Desert Survivors. Contact me directly at 520-609-8333 if you need any assistance.

The financial structure of Desert Survivors is well balanced to fulfill our mission. Our funds are divided up as follows: 60% are state service; 30% are business revenue from nursery sales, county contract, and downtown contract; and fully 10% is from community donations. Business revenue is used exclusively to provide paid work to our nursery and landscaping crews, and member purchases account for approximately one-third of all nursery sales. The bottom line is that the members of Desert Survivors sustain our mission—big time. We cannot thank you enough.

Karen has completed her first year as our CEO, and the improvements she has implemented have helped maintain our process of excellence in services and products. This, coupled with our excellent financial standing, has allowed Desert Survivors to continue flourishing in its mission of service to our community. I’m looking forward to seeing what fruits we plant in the year 2019.

Rich Bechtold  
Chief Financial Officer

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**Case Manager’s Log**

Greetings everyone! My name is Ariel, and I’m the case manager at Desert Survivors. What does the case manager of a nursery do? Well, here at Desert Survivors, I oversee client files, attend meetings, and tend to program duties like scheduling events and creating plans to help members succeed at their jobs.

I kicked off the new year by celebrating my first anniversary at Desert Survivors. Before starting my journey with this organization, I was a pretty recent transplant to Tucson. As an avid cyclist, I was first introduced to Desert Survivors via the Pit Stop. This little station is located along the Santa Cruz River trail and serves as another entrance to Desert Survivors. Open Monday through Friday, it’s a place to grab refreshments or get a quick bike repair. The Pit Stop is run by Desert Survivors members and staff, and they’re always ready to offer a warm welcome, some water, and plant and bike expertise.

It’s been only one year, but I already can’t imagine what my life would be like without Desert Survivors and the unique, kind, and patient people that make this place what it is. My absolute favorite part of the job is getting to know our wonderful clients and members. I plan to keep my seeds planted at this special place so that I can grow alongside everyone else.

Ariel Rosen  
Case Manager
Program Services

I can’t believe that it’s 2019 already! Even more, I can’t believe that I am one year into my journey as the Programs Director at Desert Survivors. I have worked in this organization for 8 years, slowly finding my way with Karen’s support and guidance along the way.

Here at the nursery, winter has come and gone, and the flowers are finally blooming. Last year was one of Desert Survivors’ best years. We completed many projects off-site and implemented some great strategies on-site.

Off-site saw us continuing to work with Pima County to maintain the Chuck Huckelberry Loop (aka the Loop) from Valencia to Ina Road. A big thanks to both of our community partners for their collaboration and support of our mission. We also extended employment services with the Downtown Partnership, so you’ll see our crews watering plants, providing plant maintenance, and adding native plants to the planters in the core of downtown Tucson.

We also made quite a few changes on-site. Have you had a chance to check out the La Vuelta Pit Stop? This hydration and refueling station is located next to a cactus garden right along the Loop at the northwest corner of Desert Survivors. The Pit Stop opens up Desert Survivors to the public, which gives people an idea of what they nursery and our programs are all about. In fact, our very own Ariel came to us after grabbing some water at the Pit Stop. As you explore this new area, please note that only plants in our retail area are for sale. All other plants are still growing, so please take care not to disturb them while you’re looking around. We also implemented several great strategies to increase plant production and create more space so we could add to our inventory.

All of this is thanks to a great team made up of nursery staff and mentors. We learn and grow together so we can best maintain the nursery and support our client members. I’m excited for the ideas and goals we’re bringing into 2019 and hope that they will make it an even greater year than 2018. Please feel free to come in and see our what we’re up to. You’re a big part of who we are, and I’m so thankful for that.

David Garcia
Program Services Director