Program Services Update

This year has gone by so quickly, it doesn’t seem but five minutes since I wrote our spring update. It has been a busy few months in program services but also very productive. Here are some updates for you:

Adult Services:
We are currently serving a total of forty-five adults with various skills, abilities, and disabilities. Ten of these individuals go out with two mentors Monday through Thursday to assist in maintaining the Pima County river parks and walkways. Pima County has been a great support, and we are so grateful to them for offering us this opportunity to work with them to maintain our beautiful river parks. In the future, we will be able to work with them to maintain the desert parks and will go toward special events like barbecues or Thanksgiving and Christmas parties. Please stop by and see what we have been making.

Children’s Services: This program is going along really well. We continue to have two staff working in two regions providing early intervention services to over 70 families. The two main regions we cover are the south-

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Executive Director’s Report

Fall 2014

Another Sonoran Desert summer comes to a close as fall approaches and, not far beyond, a new year. The close of this year will be a milestone for me at Desert Survivors. On January 1, 2015, I will have served as Executive Director for a full 20 years—a wonderful but challenging two decades! I have spent half of my 40-year career working in human services at Desert Survivors. There is no place I would rather be.

We had a good year for both our program services and nursery products. Adult vocational services have expanded, children’s services have decreased in scope, and the native plant nursery remains a constant. All three departments are top quality, providing superior services and products.

Financially we are still sound, although last fiscal year we had to refurbish ramps and three departments are in the last two years. Quite simply, it is an opportunity to direct Desert Survivors portion of the State taxes that you already owe. Individuals may donate up to $200 and couples may donate up to $400. Since it is a tax credit, it will decrease what you owe to the State by the amount you donate. All you need to do is go to azdor.gov to see the section on tax credits allowed by law. Our tax credit is listed under “The Working Poor.” Last year this program raised $12,000 for us. Contributions are actually zero dollars out-of-pocket for donors. And if you donate, at least you will know where some of your tax money went. Donations must be received by December 31, 2014. Please call me anytime at 520-609-8333 for more details.

We hope you will all come to the fall plant sale and fall plant sale week. Members have their day on Saturday, September 27th, and also Tuesday through Saturday of the next week to get the members’ 20% discount (and no sales tax!). There is no easier way to support Desert Survivors than to adorn your house with beautiful desert flora purchased at our spectacular plant nursery. See you at the sale!

Richard M. Bechtold
Executive Director
Emory's barrel cactus
*Ferocactus emoryi*

This large barrel cactus is native in Pima, Pinal, and Maricopa counties, found between 1,500 and 4,500 feet elevation. It has attractive red-and-white spines and large showy flowers, either yellow or red, during the monsoon season. Emory's barrel cactus can get as big as 6 or even 8 feet tall, but that takes several decades.

It is somewhat funny and unfortunate that another common name for barrel cactuses is "Travelers Friend." This comes from the myth that barrel cactuses are filled with delicious, potable water just waiting to be tapped by a thirsty desert traveler. However, the pulp is high in oxalic acid and is not good to ingest in quantity. Potable water actually can be obtained from a barrel cactus, but it entails separating the water vapor from the pulp, typically done in the field by making an underground still—not a very travel-friendly process. Ferocactus species are mostly pollinated by specialized cactus bees, like the abundant and familiar *Diadasia rinconis* (Apidae).

Maximillian sunflower
*Helianthus maximiliani*

We are pleased to introduce a new showy plant in the sunflower family (Asteraceae). A relatively fast-growing shrub, Maximillian sunflower grows up to 4 feet tall and bears large 2-to-3-inch yellow flowers. The plants bloom heavily during the monsoon season and into the fall, and are extremely attractive in a landscape setting. Native to New Mexico, it prefers full sun, moderate water at first, with lower water later in life (e.g., Alzheimer’s, dementia), and cancer and tumor growth as well as other metabolic problems.

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Sugarcane
*Saccharum officinarum*

I have to admit that it seems pretty crazy for Desert Survivors to be selling sugarcane, but the provenance on these plants is from historic Jesuit missions in Comondu, Baja Sur. This makes it part of the Mission Fruit Tree Project. A member of the grass family (Poaceae), sugarcane is easily cultivated in Tucson. It can be grown in full sun or half-day sun, but plants in full sun will require additional irrigation. Once established, they are rather tough and easy to maintain.

Sugarcane is a clumping bunchgrass that can reach heights of up to 12 feet or more, and it uses moderate water. The good news is that after the first couple of years you can cut down the canes sometime in February to harvest the sweet culms; the plants then grow back vigorously for annual harvesting. A nice, easy way to use the raw canes, other than just chowing them, is to quarter them and use them as skewers for meat or vegetables on the grill or in the oven (Vietnamese style). It is interesting, and disturbing to me, to note that all non-organic sugarcane grown in the United States is “openly” with glyphosate (the active chemical in the herbicide Roundup). On another note, I feel somewhat obligated to mention that moderation is good with consumption of this plant, as high sugar consumption has been associated with a number of diseases, including diabetes, increased risk of cognitive problems later in life (e.g., Alzheimer’s, dementia), and cancer and tumor growth as well as other metabolic problems.

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Jim Verrier
Director of Plant Nursery

Photos by Jim Verrier unless otherwise noted