Reflections from the Executive Director

The journey of our lives is a fascinating conundrum, especially when we look back at all the events along the way that brought us to this particular moment in time. I remember my disappointment at not being accepted into postgraduate school to specialize in psychiatric nursing. I was determined to somehow get my foot in the door, and an opportunity arose to work with handicapped children in a residential unit within the grounds of St. Clements Psychiatric Hospital in my hometown of Ipswich, Suffolk, England. I was sick with the flu the day of my interview and quite sure they would never hire me. The job was offered to me the next day! I fell in love with those amazing children and decided this was the area I wanted to specialize in. For the next three years, that is what I did.

During that time I met my future husband, an American airman stationed at a nearby base. I had never really given any thought to leaving England, where all my family lived and where I assumed I would always be. Once again, the powers of the universe put a different path in front of me. We got married in England in 1980, two years into my postgraduate training. I finished my specialty three months before delivering our first child, Freddie. He was literally our first anniversary gift. My husband and I were both over the moon at Freddie’s arrival.

In November 1982 we moved everything we owned to the USA. Having left a cold rainy England, I arrived at the Tucson International Airport with a mixture of excitement for this unknown life I was coming to and a very heavy heart at leaving my family behind. My first thought on arriving in Tucson was “who turned the heating up?” Then, after meeting my husband’s family at the airport, we drove through Tucson to their home on the east side. On passing through town, my second thought was, “where are all the people?” It was a major culture shock, to say the least.

We spent the first nine months of 1983 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, where my husband was stationed. During that time, Freddie had frequent ear infections, and I was dreadfully homesick. My husband, bless him, was doing the best he could to help us through it all. Freddie’s development came to a halt after a particularly bad ear infection. He stopped trying to talk, showed no interest in anything, and started rocking back and forth in the middle of the room. By the time we got back to Tucson I was seven months pregnant, and we both knew our little boy was not progressing the way he should.

My husband left the Air Force in October that year and our daughter, Samantha, was born in November. Two weeks later we moved to Phoenix, and a doctor then referred us to Gompers Rehabilitation Center, where Freddie was seen for speech therapy and occupational therapy. Two of the therapists mentioned autism to me for the first time. It was painful to hear that word in reference to my little boy. I was so angry with the universe, I couldn’t talk to my husband about it. I had to come to my own terms with it first. When I did finally talk to him, his reaction could not have made me feel better. It was mind-blowing. After three months of worrying what that diagnosis could mean, my husband looked straight in the eye and said, “Well, he’s still our Freddie and he always will be.”

In late 1984, we happily moved back to Tucson, where we had the support of my wonderful mother-in-law, “Mama Ella Mae.” Mama helped the whole family understand autism, so that I didn’t have to keep explaining to everyone. I have missed her every day since she passed on in 2008.

Freddie was referred for services through the Department of Economic Security, Division of Developmental Disabilities. When I learned about the programs they

Program Services

Spring brings out the best in Tucson. It is such a beautiful time of year in our desert home, with green growth emerging and flowers blooming. And spring is always a busy time in our program services. On January 1, 2018, Desert Survivors began working with the Downtown Tucson Partnership to help refurbish and maintain plants in all the large pots along Congress Street. Next time you go downtown, check them out, and you will see that the pots now contain native species (all of which are available at Desert Survivors’ nursery).

We send six of our workers with disabilities plus two mentors and one of our plant nursery staff to work on this project on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. They have been doing a great job potting the natives, monitoring water usage, and doing some general clean up on Congress Street. So far, everything is going really well, and we hope by summer we can expand our partnership.

Here at the nursery, we have been busy getting our recently acquired land for a new hoop house, as well as setting up another pot irrigation area and a demonstration garden, and maintaining the continuing water-harvesting project. Our workers are learning new skills to better prepare for competitive employment. We are thrilled to announce that one of our former employees with disabilities has found competitive employment in the community. A second gentleman is well on his way to competitive employment here at our nursery. Happy Spring, everyone!

Native plants on Congress Street, downtown Tucson, being planted and maintained by a Desert Survivors crew.

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ủng: UM Brown/Butter Ink

MEMBERSHIP: 550/yr
- newsletter semiannually
- 10% off plant purchases all year
- members’ day sale entry

DIRECTORY:
Karen Wilson Executive Director 884-8806
Jim Verrezz Nursery Director 791-9309
Richard Bechtold Financial Officer 609-8333

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desertsurvivors.org

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Featured Plants Spring 2018

Bitter Condalia

Condalia globosa

(sadle condalia)

Bitter condalia is a large, perennial, xeric shrub reaching up to 12 feet tall and wide. In the buckhorn family (Bhumnaceae), condalia can grow in washes and, on occasion, on rocky slopes. Its small spatula-shaped leaves grow around branchlets tipped by spines, making it similar in appearance to graythorn (Ziziphus obtusifolia). Its native range includes southwestern Arizona, Sonora, and Baja California, where it is typically found below elevations of 1,500 feet. White fragrant flowers emerge in summer and are visited by an assortment of pollinators. As the name suggests, bitter fruits follow the flowers, and these black drupes provide a great food source for wildlife. Several species of specialized moth caterpillars feed on Condalia species, including the showy silkmoth (Apatema sarae), which produces large cocoon clusters in the branches. Once established, C. globosa needs very little water and can handle full-sun or partial-sun conditions. We will have a limited number of them available in two- and five-gallon containers.

Dasyliurus wheeleri

(sotol, desert spoon)

Although we have carried sotol for a long time, at the spring plant sale we will be offering a large number of beautiful one- and five-gallon specimens of this iconic landscape plant. A member of the asparagus family (Asparagaceae), it is a large succulent that usually grows to 5 feet tall and wide, or bigger. Plants will form small trunks and produce flower stalks annually once mature.

D. wheeleri is considered dioecious, meaning that plants are either male or female. One of the remarkable things about this species is its distinctive bluish (glaucous) foliage, and full-grown specimens make stunning landscape elements. A great place to view the natural splendor of this plant is on the south side of the Santa Catalina Mountains (places like Pima or Romero Canyon). After flowering, the color of the inflorescence fades to a tan, and in wintertime even the dormant phase of bullgrass is striking. Unlike its riparian relative, deergrass (M. ripens), it grows on dry, rocky slopes, flourishing with little water. In the wild, bullgrass is found throughout our Sky Islands between 3,000 and 7,000 feet. Planting two or three of these in your yard will make a particularly stunning landscape. In general, grasses provide great habitat for birds and quality forage for wildlife, including many birds. Bullgrass is also a strong larval host for an assortment of butterflies, including Napoloboc's saty (Cytopius monopius), red-bordered saty (Gyrochlaenas patroclus), moon-marked skipper (Aptroptenus lunus) and the large roadside skipper (Amblyscirtes exotensis). Processed seeds of M. emersyli make an edible and highly nutritious grain for humans.

Jatropha curata

(rough bentgrass)

A new offering at the nursery, rough bentgrass (Poaceae family) is native across a wide geographic range, including much of North America and in Asia. Regionally, it is a tufted bunchgrass found between elevations of 1,000 and 9,000 feet, occurring in canyons, meadows, and streambeds. This species blooms during our monsoon season, producing attractive, delicate, reddish inflorescences. The plants grow quickly and require moderate water usage in cultivation. They are relatively small, typically growing to only a foot wide and several feet tall. Rough bentgrass is a larval host for the Tarry's skipper (Poanes tarsalis).

Muhlenbergia emersyi

(bullgrass)

This native, 3-foot tall bunchgrass makes an excellent, low-maintenance landscape feature. It typically forms dense clumps graced by an abundance of largely unbranched stalks with attractive pink or light-purple panicles in August and September. After flowering, the color of the inflorescence fades to a tan, and in wintertime even the dormant phase of bullgrass is striking. Unlike its riparian relative, deergrass (M. ripens), it grows on dry, rocky slopes, flourishing with little water. In the wild, bullgrass is found throughout our Sky Islands between 3,000 and 7,000 feet. Planting two or three of these in your yard will make a particularly stunning landscape. In general, grasses provide great habitat for birds and quality forage for wildlife, including many birds. Bullgrass is also a strong larval host for an assortment of butterflies, including Napoloboc's saty (Cytopius monopius), red-bordered saty (Gyrochlaenas patroclus), moon-marked skipper (Aptroptenus lunus) and the large roadside skipper (Amblyscirtes exotensis). Processed seeds of M. emersyli make an edible and highly nutritious grain for humans.

Reflections:

I am thrilled that Richard Bechtold is still here to help me through this transition. He is working part-time as our financial officer. I am forever grateful to him for his guidance and friendship over the last twenty-three years. Also, our board of directors is a wonderful group of people who care so much about Desert Survivors, and I am honored that they have given me this opportunity.

As my journey continues, I am enjoying all the exciting ideas, projects and new directions we are investigating at Desert Survivors. I am so lucky to work with the best of the best in the nursery and service business. Together we will continue to make Desert Survivors the best plant nursery and group supported horticultural employment organization in the Southwest. Thank you all—our members, our clients and their families; the amazing Stonewall Foundation; Pima County; The Tucson Downtown Partnership; Gibson’s Market; and the person that just came in to buy a plant and got handed this newsletter! Without your support, we could not do what we do best. Karen Wilson Executive Director

Our plant nursery team takes a break for the camera—client workers, mentors, and nursery staff.

Changing of Hands

You may have read by now that Karen has taken the reins from me this year. So I am writing to you in my new capacity as Desert Survivors’ financial officer, and to the board. I am so pleased to remain engaged with these special programs, but I admit that semi-retirement is wonderful! I have more time to spend with my wife and family, and when I get home after work, my responsibilities are over for the day and my mind is free! It is a liberating feeling after 40 years in the adventures I am also happy to report that Desert Survivors finances remain solid. The Tax Credit Campaign was a huge success—netting $45,000 this year. It appears that with the increases in the amount eligible for the credit, more people are spreading the credit with their other charities. Many other members have given us their entire credit allowance, and we are grateful for all our member donations. In addition to our members, many of the families of our clients made substantial donations. Thank you all so much!

In the coming years, Desert Survivors will face challenges with the stepped increases in minimum wage. All of our workers with disabilities are paid full-time, and we had to work at the nursery and at several locations around the city, and we now employ more than 45 clients. The use of State funds that support services to persons with disabilities requires constant oversight and attention. Currently, 60 percent of our funding comes from the State, 30 percent from other members have given us their entire credit allowance, and we are grateful for all our member donations. In addition to our members, many of the families of our clients made substantial donations. Thank you all so much!

As always, I am available to answer questions about our finances, donations, and memberships. I am in the office regularly on Monday mornings between 8 a.m. and noon, but if you need me sooner, just call. My direct number is 520-609-8331.

Rich Bechtold Financial Officer

Jim Verrier
Owner of Hands