

# Chuckwalla Chatter



**The Desert Outdoor Center  
Maricopa County**

Volume 5, Issue 1

## New Lizard Relief at the Desert Outdoor Center

The lizards crawling up the walls of the DOC are pretty big these days. Outside the front entrance on the south facing wall, rests one basking in the sun that measures six and a half



feet high by six feet wide. The 14 gage steel sculpture is a graceful rendition of the longstanding logo of the DOC complete with curled tail and wide-

spread feet. It is the creation of Sandy Prince, an award winning metal artist from Peoria whose work sells at shows across the Valley.

Unveiled in October, the lizard stands as a silhouette spaced off the wall surface, constantly changing in surface texture, line and shadow. Its rust patina finish fully compliments the surrounding desert colors.

The lizard is a welcome addition to an otherwise plain wall and was made possible through funding from the Friends of the Desert Outdoor Center.

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### 2005 Stargazing

#### Schedule for the DOC:

- *Saturday, Apr. 16, 7:30pm*
- *Saturday, Sept. 17, 7:00pm*
- *Saturday, Nov. 19, 7:00pm*

*For more information on times or dates for other locations, contact Tony & Carole La Conte at 623-979-1393 or visit:*

[www.stargazingforeveryone.com](http://www.stargazingforeveryone.com)

## Four New Classes for 2005

In addition to the 24 various programs the DOC currently provides, four new classes are now available for 2005. Teachers may take their pick of the following:

**Earth Energy** is a class that explores the different ways electricity is produced and the varied forms of renewable energy, such as solar, wind and hydro. The class was funded by a grant from APS and even includes an opportunity for teachers to win a Power House

teaching aid for their classrooms.

**The Day of the Dinosaur** teaches students about paleontology. It focuses on how fossils form and what dinosaurs lived in the region of what is now Arizona. Students get to piece together a 3-D dinosaur skeleton model and discuss the role of paleontologists.

**AZ Rocks** introduces students to the world of minerals and rocks. Students learn about common ele-

ments of the earth as well as conduct their own analysis of sample rocks and minerals. They are also made aware of how minerals and rocks are used in every day life.

**Weather or Not** is the last class to become available with the newly installed weather station located in the Butterfly Garden. Students observe weather patterns, and, using the data from the weather station as well as their own observations, make weather forecasts.

## A Word from the Park Supervisor

For several reasons, Fiscal Year 2004 (July 2003 – June 2004) was a good year for the Desert Outdoor Center at Lake Pleasant. Attendance was up 15% from FY03 as 17,571 clients passed through our doors. On April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004, we greeted our 100,000<sup>th</sup> visitor, 4<sup>th</sup> grader Chrystin Sanchez from Westwind Primary School. As a visitor of distinction, Chrystin was presented a gift certificate worth \$20 for a shopping spree at the DOC's Thibodeaux's Treasures Gift Shop.

The DOC also saw a revenue increase of 19%. Effective marketing by Interpretive Ranger Beth Mabie improved gift shop sales by 44% over FY03.

With numbers back on the increase, we are looking for FY05 to perhaps

set new records. The rise in attendance and revenue was enough to convince Park Headquarters that the DOC needed three additional Interpretive Rangers. Terri Martzke, John Capes and Natalie Harper joined the staff of rangers consisting of Beth Mabie and Adam Melle.

The DOC also received several grants in FY04. Two from the Central Arizona Project funded development of a weather station and an ethnobotanical garden. Arizona Public Service Company provided funds for an incentive to entice teachers to select "Earth Energy," a new class that shows students the many ways of producing electricity. Teachers who choose this class for their students are eligible for a

monthly drawing for a Power House – a teaching aid worth \$140 that they can use in their own classrooms.

Improvements for FY05 also include evening programming for schools spending the night at the DOC. From 6:30 to 8:30pm, Interpretive Rangers can conduct fun programs such as Night Hike, Campfire Songs and Group Initiatives (a teambuilding class).

The Staff at the DOC looks forward to making your visit to the DOC in FY05 enjoyable and to reporting yet another successful year.

- Rich Glinski  
Park Supervisor

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## Exciting New Garden Addition to the DOC by Adam Melle

A new interpretive garden is currently under construction at the DOC. The Sonoran Ethnobotanical Garden is being built on a 1,800 sq. ft. plot of land located west of the east dormitory. Ethnobotany is the study of plant use by human culture.

The garden will demonstrate how native Southwest cultures subsisted in an arid climate by irrigating and growing native plants. It will also reveal how ancient people were able to thrive in the Sonoran Desert by using indigenous plants for medicinal, cultural, and nutritional purposes.



The garden will consist of approximately 100 plants native to the Sonoran Desert, and used by the Tohono O'odham, Hohokom, and/or Mestizo peoples. Plants will include the Engelmann prickly pear (*Opuntia engelmannii*) used to heal infections, bee stings, and cuts; the desert agave (*Agave deserti*) the heart of which was used for food; and the brittlebush (*Encelia farinose*) which secretes a gum used to secure arrow points and waterproof material.

Signage of the names and uses of each plant will be visible throughout the garden. Other interpretive displays of 'ak-chin' agriculture will detail how native inhabitants used irrigation to grow non-native crops such as corn, gourds, cotton, and squash in the dry desert landscape.

After drip irrigation system, split rail fencing and rock/flagstone pathway are installed, plants will be put in during the Spring of 2005. Providing a visual display in a natural setting, this garden will



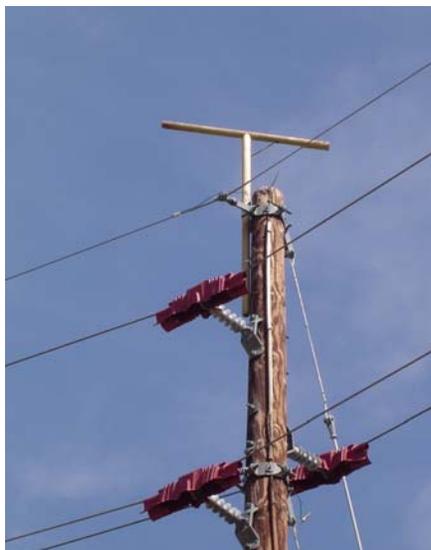
be incorporated into a class that teaches students the practical use of plants by indigenous people as well as the currently available "Edible Plants" program. It will also afford opportunities for passive education by visitors using the DOC for meetings and retreats.

A grant application to fund the garden was submitted in April of 2004 to the Central Arizona Project charitable contribution program by the Friends of the Desert Outdoor Center and was received in June 2004.

## Accommodating the DOC's Wildlife

Last August, as Interpretive Rangers Bill Talboys and Beth Mabie were conducting a desert tortoise survey in the hills surrounding the Desert Outdoor Center, they made a gruesome discovery. They came upon a dead fledgling Red-tail Hawk underneath the power lines by the main road, the cause of death unknown. Suspecting electrocution, Park Supervisor Rich Glinski contacted Liberty Wildlife to inspect the bird. They confirmed that the hawk had indeed been electrocuted. Peggy Jelen, Forestry Section Leader with APS, analyzed the situation and determined the wire configuration on the poles had the potential to kill birds.

Oftentimes, raptors and other animals are at risk when their wings, body parts or nesting materials come in contact with components of an electrical system. Raptors are



drawn to power poles because poles offer a high place to perch, roost, nest and hunt. Large wing spans make raptors exceptionally vulnerable to injury from power lines. Large species and immature raptors are most at risk.

To counteract this problem, the APS Wildlife Protection Program was designed to reduce the danger of energized lines for birds and other animals. This program sends crews out to modify pole mounted equipment with special perches, rubber or plastic bird guard covers and covered wire to accommodate the large birds of prey. This also increases safety for cats, raccoons and other wildlife.

A few poles lining the road to the DOC had the new perches installed. In addition, APS plans to produce signage to be placed near the entrance to the Center that explains the APS Wildlife Protection Program, thus providing an opportunity for passive education at the DOC.

## Meet ... Alice!

Don't let the name fool you. Our Alice is a boy. Named after the famed rock star legend, Alice Cooper for eye markings that resemble mascara, Alice the Gopher Snake is a permanent resident of the DOC's live animal exhibit. But unlike the singer who has a passion for boa constrictors, Alice's passion lies in eating rodents. Plenty of them. In fact, Alice's large appetite has enabled him to grow an extra one and a half feet in the three and a half years he has been here.

Alice is also known as a bullsnake, and belongs to the group *pituophis melanoleucus* that are found coast to coast in a wide variety of habitats. They are opportunistic feeders, desirable to have around since they will consume large amounts of rodents. They will eat rabbits, birds, eggs, and occasionally lizards and insects as well.

Gopher snakes are non-venomous and passive, and will hide from predators under rocks and in animal burrows. However, when they feel threatened, they hiss loudly, flatten their heads and vibrate their tails, mimicking rattlesnakes. This ruse can prove deadly for the snake as people oftentimes mistake them for rattlesnakes and kill them.

Alice was donated to the DOC by White Tanks Regional Park and is one of the favorites among visitors. Students often find themselves mesmerized by his steady hypnotic stare. This snake is a good climber and burrower, active during the day in winter and at night throughout the hot summer months. Alice is also quite the acrobat, sometimes hanging from a handler's belt loops. His estimated age is six years old.

Our gopher snake is just one of the twenty four various animals that are on display at the DOC's live animal exhibit.



*When gopher snakes feel threatened, they hiss loudly, flatten their heads and vibrate their tails, mimicking rattlesnakes.*

## Q & A With the Friends of the Desert Outdoor Center by Connie DeMile

*Oftentimes people are curious about joining the Friends of the Desert Outdoor Center. Chairperson Connie DeMile offers some insight as to what the group is all about:*

**Q:** “What IS IT that the “Friends” (of the Desert Outdoor Center) do?”

**A:** Let’s start with ‘who’ we are. The **Friends of the Desert Outdoor Center** is a non profit 501c 3 corporation. Our mission statement is “to support quality facilities and programs which provide opportunities in a natural environment for education, recreation, and inspiration.”

**Q:** “How can an individual help?”

**A: You can:**

**Attend** our meetings. We meet approximately six times a year to hear the Center’s news and to help plan any upcoming events. Being a 501c3 non-profit entity, we are able to accept grant money and dispense it as needed for projects. The staff is FUN to be around and they smother us

with enthusiastic appreciation even for the smallest of things. The setting is SCENIC!

**Act** as host or hostess for a special occasion at the Desert Outdoor Center. Once or twice a year, the Center produces Open Houses such as the “Mars Party,” “Educator’s Day,” or a really big one such as “Elegance at the Lake,” complete with fine art and music.

**Become** our Public Relations Contact person. (We’d love you for this one!)

**Help** with mailings: folding newsletters, stuffing envelopes, placing stamps.

**Work** as a volunteer at the register in the gift shop. You have your choice of days. This is a fun opportunity to work with children and adults with change in hand. Fun!

**Q:** “How much would they ask of me if I joined?”

**A:** You can help a little or a lot. It doesn’t matter how much time or energy you are able to give to the Desert Outdoor Center at Lake Pleasant... we’re just glad to have you with us!



Current officers of the **Friends of the Desert Outdoor Center** are: (from left) Elnora Forgia, Vice-Chair; Suzanne Cash, Secretary/Treasurer; and Connie DeMile, Chair

The Desert Outdoor Center at Lake Pleasant (DOC) is dedicated to providing an interactive educational experience in a distinctive facility staffed by experienced educators. It provides learners an opportunity to become immersed in an inspirational setting that instills a respect for the natural environment.

### The Desert Outdoor Center Maricopa County

41402 N. 87th Avenue  
Peoria, AZ 85383

Phone: 602-372-7470  
Fax: 602-372-7475

[www.maricopa.gov/parks/doc](http://www.maricopa.gov/parks/doc)

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Editor: Terri Martzke

