



Desert Breeze

Newsletter of the Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society

December 2010

President's Message



Let's end this decade up-beat.

I have written more than 100 president's messages and still enjoy telling you about the accomplishment of this society. Vonn Watkins (VP) has planned more than 100 programs and continues to engage speakers that educate and enrich our interest and appreciation for cacti and succulents. The rescue crew organizers, Joe and Patsy Frannea and Chris Monrad, Noe Mayotte, have made it possible for

50,000 plants to be rescued and returned to landscapes all over Southern Arizona.

We have provided school grants, research grants, Science and Engineer Fair awards, Funfest volunteers (this year for 960 students). We have hosted a national convention and 6 Sonoran Conferences (even numbered year). Every September our Good Time Silent Auction gets bigger and better. This year the plants were spectacular and the ice cream and toppings were superb. The great Cactus and Succulent Expo (odd numbered years) features an educational plant show and the nurseries, potters and booksellers that help make Tucson the "Cactus and Succulent Capital of the World".

In the last couple of years, we have added to this list of activities Home Tours and Round Table discussions in the spring and fall. A new feature in the Desert Breeze, lead by Mark Dimmitt on "Growing Succulents in the Sonoran Desert", which has become an instant success.

Our website has expanded and all members have access to this newsletter online and in color. This has saved large printing and mailing cost which we can invest in other programs.

I am very excited about our latest project, the potential "Prickly Park" (gardens featuring Opuntoids and other cacti and succulents). This will be a great educational, horticultural, cultural and scientific opportunity for our society and community.

The best part of all of this is YOU the 1000+ members, who support, enjoy, learn and participate in one or more of these activities. The next decade will be even better.

Happy Holiday to you and your families.

Thank you for your support.

Dick Wiedhopf, President

Sunday, December 5, 2010 3-5pm Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society Holiday Party and Gift Exchange

Junior League Facility, 2099 E. River Road

Setup Time: 1pm - 3pm

Dinner Time: 3pm -5pm

The Society will provide Turkey, Ham, Shrimp, Condiments, tableware and Drinks (coffee, punch and water). You will provide your favorite recipe (enough for 10 or more servings) Hot or Cold Salads - Starches - Vegetables - Desserts (please bring serving dish and serving utensils). For the decade or so we have been collecting money and/or food for the Community Food Bank. This year the need is greater, so let's make it special for others. Please bring donations (\$ preferred, they can get 8 times the food) for the Tucson Community Food Bank.

Gift Exchange:

Everyone can participate by wrapping (cleverly) a plant or plant related gift of at least \$10.00 value. If you bring a gift you get a gift and the fun is in the way we will distribute them.

Meeting:

Additionally there will be a short Annual Meeting, Election Results, Awards and Table prizes.

Please RSVP on the "green" notice you have already received in the mail.

Thursday, January 6, 2010 at 7:00 PM

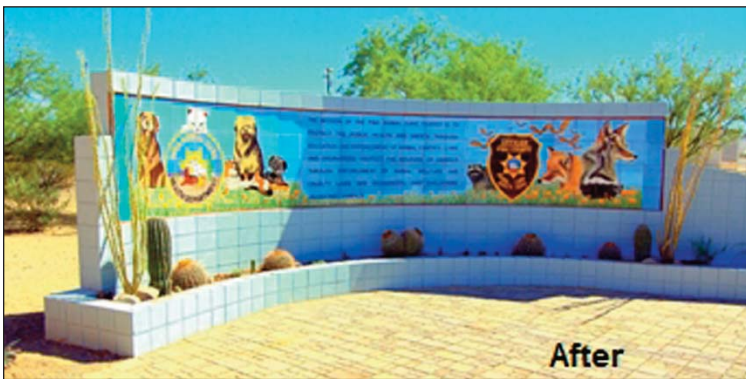
"Cactus Cultivation and More"

Presented By Scott McMahon
Curator of Cactus at the Desert Botanical Garden
in Phoenix, Arizona

Library Update

Many thanks to those who donated books and journals this past year. Next year I hope to have a new program to make checking out easier. Since there is no regular meeting in December all checked out books will be due in January 2011.

PACC + TCSS + ARF + TMR = NEIGHBORS WORKING TOGETHER.



I'd like to offer the following report, as a prime example of how several groups of citizens coming together can benefit the community and actually save taxpayer dollars.

I'm not sure if you are aware of it or not, but Pima County has recently completed a fairly extensive, and well-needed refurbishment of the Pima Animal Care Center facility located at the intersection of Silverbell Road and Sweetwater. Pima County has installed a whole block of "spanking new" kennels, and updated the older section, making it more attractive and comfortable for our canine guests. We have installed four very nice and clean visitation areas where potential families can interact with their "new best friend."

We thought that as nice and welcoming as the interior of the facility appears, that the outside area was lacking in "curb appeal," and was in serious need of some attention. Formal landscaping worthy of a facility that sees so much public activity, was virtually non-existent.

Members of the Tucson Cactus & Succulent Society you can visit their website at www.tucsoncactus.org decided to lend a helping hand. When I broached the subject with the Pima Animal Care

Center (PACC), Ed Taczanowsky, the Business Operations Coordinator at PACC, shared some of the budgetary problems facing the facility. As much as they felt that the grounds needed some attention, unfortunately, there wasn't any funding in the budget for landscaping expenditures so that's that! I happened to be discussing the situation with some of my fellow volunteers with the Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF) and several of them quickly offered cash donations to cover whatever costs might be involved in getting some native desert plants for the yard.

My next step was to present the challenge to some of my associates at the Tucson Cactus Society, they said what's the big deal we can get all the plants from one of the sites that would be on our rescue calendar. In checking with the Arizona Department of Agriculture, we determined that because these "rescued native plants" would be installed at a County property, the normal tag fees could be waived. As it turned out, all we needed was a willing donor and the proper documentation from the Arizona Department of Agriculture, and we could get the necessary native plants to complete the project.

Granite Construction, a company that we've been "partnering with" on numerous cactus rescues was planning to install some solar panels in an area that had some saguaro, barrels, and ocotillo, so they needed to be relocated before construction could begin. Several volunteers managed to salvage these plants and transport them to the PACC location.

The folks at ASARCO (Silverbell Mine) magnanimously agreed to let us have all the plants we needed, all we had to supply, was the manpower to extricate them from the rocky hillsides that are found at the mine site, and transport and re-install the plants in their new home at the Animal Shelter. When I put out a call for volunteers from the Cactus Society Joe Bannon, Kendall Elmer, Jerry Estruth and Bill Ramstad all neighbors in our development of Tucson Mountain Reserve (TMR) stepped forward and offered their services. Jim Drain and Rob Romero, also very active members of TCSS quickly volunteered their services as well.

On a recent bright and sunny Tucson morning this hardy crew of volunteers and Ed (Mr. T) Taczanowsky, piled into his truck and made the 90 mile roundtrip to the mine and managed to extricate a goodly number of native plants from the rocky hillsides at the mine site. Upon our return to PACC, we rolled up our sleeves and



Growing Succulents in the Desert

Tillandsia ehlersiana: A Superb Succulent Bromeliad

by Mark Dimmitt

Some succulent bromeliads (family Bromeliaceae) are popular with succulent collectors, primarily the terrestrial genus *Dyckia*. Most succulent collectors have neglected the genus *Tillandsia*. The approximately 600 species of tropical rosette plants in this genus range from terrestrials to epiphytes (and saxicoles) in habitats from wet rainforests to near-deserts. The arid land epiphytes are called atmospheric bromeliads, more commonly and incorrectly known as “air plants”. Atmospherics tend to have only a few roots for anchorage on the host tree or rock. The leaves perform nearly all of the water and nutrient uptake, through specialized scales called trichomes. The trichomes are so dense on species from the brightest, most arid habitats that their foliage is white. Finally, some of the atmospheric tillandsias are succulent.

Most atmospheric tillandsias are difficult to grow outside of a greenhouse in desert climates. They lose water rapidly to the dry hot air, and even watering twice a day is not sufficient to keep them alive in June. I’ve been growing tillandsias for over 40 years, and I’ve settled on one species that I think is the best

adapted to fitting into typical succulent collections without special care. It’s also a very beautiful one.

Tillandsia ehlersiana (Figure 1) has many traits that should appeal to succulent collectors. It’s squat and fat. It has bright white leaves. It has attractive flowers. Best of all, it’s easy to grow among other succulents. This species has a substantial root system for an atmospheric bromeliad, which confers two benefits. It will firmly anchor in a pot (most atmospheric species will not). The root system is functional at taking up water, so a potted plant can be grown outdoors in the desert.

The root system is still tiny relative to the size of the plant. The one in Figure 1 is in a 2-inch pot. That pot has been set into a 12-inch Mark Muradian pot filled with gravel to keep the plant upright and to provide attractive staging.

To grow this plant outdoors in the desert, give it very bright light to keep the foliage white. Full summer sun is too much, but it will do very well under the edge of a mesquite or palo verde tree. Soak both leaves and roots three times a week during the summer, and once a week or so during cool weather. Protect it from frost.



Figure 1. A mature single rosette of *Tillandsia ehlersiana*. It’s in a 2-inch pot, set into a 12-inch pot.



Figure 2. Inflorescence of *Tillandsia ehlersiana*. The actual flowers are the violet tubes; the pink bracts attract hummingbirds. 3

Growing Succulents in the Desert

Tillandsia ehlersiana: A Superb Succulent Bromeliad

by Mark Dimmitt

When mature, a branched inflorescence grows from the apex of the rosette; the pink bracts produce tubular violet flowers over many weeks (Figure 2). A flowered rosette will die in another year or two, but will first produce three to five or more offsets. Offsets mature and flower in two to three years. They can be removed from the mother plant when about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ mature size and potted separately, or they can be left to grow into a clump (Figure 3).

If grown in a greenhouse or humid climate, you can mount the plant on a branch (Figure 4). Tie or glue it securely, and in a few months the roots will hold it fast.

Tillandsia ehlersiana is rarely found in succulent nurseries. Look for it in bromeliad nurseries.



Figure 3. A colony of five *Tillandsia ehlersiana* rosettes. This is the same plant as in Figure 1, two years older. The original rosette is dying and barely visible amidst its offsets.



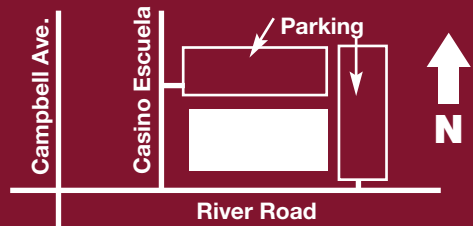
Figure 4. This *Tillandsia ehlersiana* was mounted on a stick three years before being photographed. A bigger branch would have made a better ornament.

installed about a dozen small and medium sized saguaro, eight golden hedgehogs, ten ocotillo and about eighteen fish hook barrels in and around the beautiful new mural at the Animal Shelter.

We'd like to thank the enthusiastic volunteers who provided the "sweat equity" for this worthwhile project and all of our friends at Silverbell mine and Granite construction who's cooperation, community spirit and generosity made it possible for us to acquire the plants.

Next time you have occasion to drive down Silverbell about a mile south of El Camino del Cerro please stop by the Pima Animal Care Center and take a look at the low/no maintenance landscaping and it doesn't require constant irrigation, because it's mostly "NATIVE!" We're justifiably proud of the result. While you're at it, why not stop in and visit with the puppies and kittens that are in desperate need of a good home. You'll be glad you did.

Meetings are held on the first Thursday of each month.



**Junior League of Tucson, Kiva Bldg.
2099 E. River Road**

TCSS At Funfest 2010



TCSS was at Funfest 2010 at the Tucson Convention Center for the third year on 3,4 & 5 November. The Math, Science and Technology Funfest is held every year for 4th – 8th grade students to allow them hands-on experiences related to math, science & technology. This year over 7000 students, teachers and chaperones attended Funfest over the 3 days, with over 60 exhibitors. And, over 900 students visited the TCSS booth to learn about the unique characteristics of cactus and to build a model exemplifying those characteristics. Again we got rave reviews from event organizers, teachers and students. But, this would not have been possible without the support of a great group of volunteers that got together before the event to

assemble the model kits and then staffed our booth for the 3 days of Funfest. So a big THANK YOU goes out to: Barbara Carling, Norm & Linda Dennis, Joe & Patsy Frannea, Bill Hicks, Bill Holcombe, Dale & Augie Johnson, Jan Johnson, Caryl Jones, Louise & Bill Kaufman, Sandy Kunzman, Diane Leach, Mark Mayhew, Catherine Mexal, Kristen Michelson, Wendell Neimann, Dave Palzkill & Julie Shulick. Also, a special thanks to Chris Monrad for arranging a donation of 1000 feet of copper wire from Graybar electric (for the 2nd year in row!).

John Swarbrick

TCSS BOARD

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885-6367

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(Ending Dec. 31, 2010)

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CSSA Affiliate Rep:

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Cactus Rescue

cactusrescue@tucsoncactus.org

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Educational: Joe Frannea

Free Plants: Chris Monrad

Librarian: Joie Giunta

Programs: Vonn Watkins

Refreshments: Patsy Frannea

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Deadline for copy: December 23, 2010

TCSS Web Page:

www.tucsoncactus.org

(520) 256-2447

Webmaster: Keimpe Bronkhorst

Everyone is Welcome!

Bring your friends, join in the fun,
and meet the cactus and
succulent community.

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Cacti Rescued 249 Rescues Accomplished

Please see our Website Calendar for the next rescued cactus sale. They are scheduled at various times during the year based on our inventory.

TCSS Club Members receive a 10% discount

December 2010

Sunday, December 5, 2010 3:00pm - 5:00pm

TCSS Holiday Party, setup at 1pm, dinner at 3pm

Tuesday, December 14, 2010 7:00pm

Board meeting at the U of A College of Pharmacy

Thursday, January 6, 2011 7:00pm

Monthly Meeting, "Cactus Cultivation and More"

Presented by Scot McMahon, Curator of Cactus at the Desert Botanical Gardens in Phoenix, Arizona



Martha Ames Burgess and her mother Virginia Ames welcomed many guests to their home and art studio on November 13-14. The Tucson Pima Arts Council had a wonderful open studio tour that featured many of Tucson's finest artists. Martha Burgess is one of our members who has presented excellent ethnobotanical workshops at many of our Sonoran conferences. Also a huge 12 foot *Stetsonia cornye* stands along the entrance to their home.