

Asombro Insights

Science education for eager minds

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 19, Issue 4 (Oct. - Dec. 2010)

Calendar of Events

"Get Batty" prior to Halloween with an informative program at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park on October 29. Check the calendar of events for other fun learning opportunities.
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New Science Leaders

Asombro staff members are working with students at Monte Vista Elementary (the Nature Park's closest neighbor) on an innovative science and leadership program this year. Read all about it.
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Join Team Asombro

Team Asombro will be running, walking, and cheering at the Las Cruces Half Marathon on December 18. Read more about how you can participate.
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Volunteer Spotlight

Marcella Newman loves to volunteer at the Asombro Institute office, and her work is greatly appreciated by Asombro staff. Learn more about Marcella and find out how you can help too.
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Many Thanks

See the list of donors and volunteers who make the Asombro Institute successful. Join these dedicated, talented individuals by showing your own support.
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Map to the Nature Park

Fall is a magnificent season in the desert. Find a map here and enjoy a trip to the Nature Park soon!
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Board & Staff

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- Paul Harper - Site Coordinator

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Volunteer Donna Yargosz Wins National Award

By Rink Somerday, Program Coordinator

We have always known our volunteers are the heart of the organization, and now we are not the only ones who know it! In August, Asombro Board member Donna Yargosz was presented with the National Retired Teachers Association (NRTA) *With Our Youth!* Excellence Award.

Megan Hookey, Vice President of NRTA, the AARP's educator community said, "It is an honor to recognize the extraordinary work of Donna Yargosz with an NRTA *With Our Youth!* Award. Retired educators keep giving, even after leaving the classroom. Thanks to the dedication of these volunteers, multiple generations benefit and go on to contribute to society."

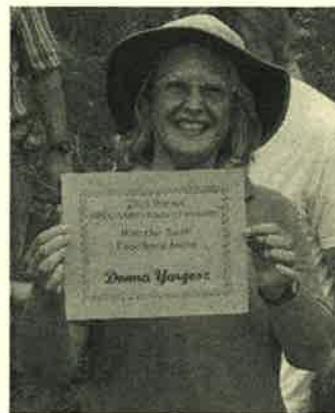
"Ms. Donna" as she is known to thousands of students, has been a

volunteer with the Asombro Institute since 2003. As a retired Spanish teacher, Donna has classroom experience and is able to translate lessons into Spanish for students. All of the reproducible worksheets in Asombro's *Schoolyard*

Desert Discovery Project are the product of Donna's expertise.

If you attended our Butterfly Flutterby last month, you enjoyed Donna's creativity at some of the booths she helped create. She designs many activities for our programs. She also creates science souvenirs that students purchase on field trips, with 100% of the profits donated to the Asombro Institute.

Stephanie, Paul, and I (along with the 14,000 students and teachers we reach each year) thank "Ms. Donna" from the bottom of our hearts.



Staff members surprised Donna Yargosz with the announcement of her national volunteer award at the Butterfly Flutterby.

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

I met recently with executive directors of five other nonprofits, and we all shared our successes and struggles. Everyone agreed that grants were getting harder than ever to find. Many foundations have stopped giving grants or are giving far fewer, for less money.

The Asombro Institute has been very successful in the last decade at funding the majority of our work with grant funds. As these funds become more scarce, the Board of Directors and I have been searching for ways to increase revenue from other sources.

We are committed to keeping our education programs priced low enough so that everyone who wants to participate can afford the fees. This means that only a small fraction of our total income (e.g., 7% in 2009) comes from program fees.

Donations are therefore the key to sustaining our programs. We recognize that times are tough, but every dollar you can invest in the Asombro Institute will go a long way to advancing our mission. Because we work very hard and have wonderful partners that help keep our overhead low, 90% of every dollar that comes into our organization goes straight into programs.

We sincerely appreciate every donation, no matter the size. Thank you for your past support, and please consider the Asombro Institute when you do end-of-year giving again this year. We need YOUR help to keep our organization strong.

Stephanie Bestelmeyer
Dr. Stephanie Bestelmeyer

Calendar of Events

October 29 - Get Batty

Just in time for Halloween, come learn about these fascinating desert dwellers under the stars at the Nature Park. Talk begins at 7:00 PM at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.



November 3 - Planning Meeting for the Native Plant Society of New Mexico - Las Cruces Chapter. 7:00 PM in the Conference Room of the Social Center at the University Terrace Good Samaritan Village (3011 Buena Vida Circle, Las Cruces).

Nov. 10 - Talk on "Penstemons of Western Chihuahua" by Richard Spellenberg for the Native Plant Society of New Mexico, Las Cruces Chapter. 7:00 PM in the Conference Room of the Social Center at the University Terrace Good Samaritan Village (3011 Buena Vida Circle, Las Cruces).

November 13-14 - Chihuahuan Desert Conference "A Desert Without Borders." The conference will be held at the Carlos M. Ramirez Tech2O Water Resources Learning Center and the El Paso Zoo. It will feature talks by Carter Smith, Texas Parks and Wildlife Executive Director, and David J. Simon, Director, New Mexico State Parks on November 13. More information and registration details can be found at www.chihuauandesert.org

Nature Activity

By Paul Harper, Site Coordinator

It is fall again, which means many of our plants begin to drop their leaves. Granted, the Chihuahuan Desert leaf drop may not be quite as impressive as in other parts of the country, but it can still be amazing.



The fallen leaves make great art and decoration. Head outside a couple of times over the next few months and collect leaves. This will be easier in the city, but head out to the desert if you really want a challenge. Look for plants that are "deciduous." Deciduous means that the plants drop their leaves. To

make your projects and hiking more fun, try to collect a wide variety of leaves. Try to get different colors and shapes, such as leaves from honey mesquite and desert willow.



Leaf Place Mats

For this project you will need a large paper bag, wax paper, leaves, iron, and an ironing board.

Cut the large paper bag in half, along an edge, from the top to bottom while open. Then cut out the bottom. Roll out the wax paper large enough for a place mat and make sure it fits into the paper bag. After you cut one, use this as a model to cut out more pieces of wax paper the same size. Now you're going to make a sandwich. Unfold your paper bag and place one piece of wax paper inside. Place your leaves on top of the wax paper with your own artistic flair. Place another sheet of wax paper on top of the leaves and fold the other half of the bag back over your soon-to-be place mat. Run a hot iron over the paper bag slowly. Check the place mat by lifting the paper bag slowly to see if the wax adhered. If you would like to create a border around the edges of your place mat, just use scissors.

Artistic Leaf Murals

For this project you will need paper, leaves, glue, and imagination.

Choose paper (recycled works great) that you would like to use as your background. Design a mural by placing the leaves in patterns and designs. Once you like your design, glue your leaves on one by one. Now that your design is done, your mural can go on the fridge, wall or even in a nice picture frame.

Don't stop there! Harvest Festivals, Halloween and Thanksgiving are all around the corner, so why not get festive and create some decorations?



Butterfly Flutterby

By Paul Harper, Site Coordinator

The 8th Annual Butterfly Flutterby was a huge success! We had nearly 300 guests come out to delight in butterflies. Of course, none of this would be possible if we didn't have more than 30 wonderful volunteers. Many groups came out in force to help, including: NMSU Entomology Club, Las Cruces Roller Derby Girls, Kohls, Master Gardeners, Rainbow Girls, and GFWC Progress Club of Las Cruces.

Butterflies were out in mass this year, and we also brought eight Painted Lady butterflies to release. Visitors admired many butterflies like Swallowtails, Sulphurs, and Checkerspots in their natural habitat. It might have appeared that we paid them to flutter about! The recent rains have really helped viewing by providing food (host plants) for the caterpillars.

We had many new activity stations this year like the "New Mexico Landscapes" station which made it easier for visitors to know where to go to find certain butterflies in the area. We had a wonderful group of entomologists that provided their expertise on butterflies. Underneath the microscope at their station, visitors got to see amazingly blue butterfly eggs and view the scales that make up a butterfly wing. Another big hit this year was a scavenger hunt for photos of butterflies scattered around the stations. If you missed it this year, make sure to mark it on your calendar for next summer - the third Saturday in August!



Young Science Leaders

If you've been out to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park recently, you have probably noticed the two new schools being built a few miles south of the Park. The one closest to the road is Mesa Middle School, which is scheduled to open as early as January. The school set a bit further back is Monte Vista Elementary School, which opened in August.

When we heard about the plans for these schools, we got excited about the possibility of partnering with our new neighbors for some innovative science education projects.

We're proud to report that one of those new projects is already off to a great start! The Young Science Leaders project focuses on 5th grade students at Monte Vista Elementary. With funding from the New Mexico Children's Foundation, we will be working with the fifth graders all year on hands-on, schoolyard science projects.

In May, 5th graders will take a leadership role as they plan, prepare, and deliver a Desert Science Day for the kindergarten through 4th graders at the school. Fifth grade docents will share all that they have learned about science and the desert through hands-on activity stations that help bring the wonder of science to the younger students.

The project ties in perfectly with the school's theme: "Leadership and Learning: It's What We Do," and we are so happy to start this unique program with our nearest neighbors!



Be Part of Team Asombro at the Las Cruces Half Marathon

On December 18th, U.S.R.A. will host the Las Cruces Half Marathon, and Team Asombro will be on the starting line! There will be a Half Marathon, 5K Run/Walk, and a Fun Run. When you register for any of the events, list "Team Asombro" on the registration page.

Want to participate but not race? Then volunteer as part of Team Asombro or become a Team Asombro Supporter by making a donation. Race information and registration - www.usrahm.com/Events/lascruces.htm

Make a donation to Team Asombro - www.active.com/donate/asombro

Education Programs

As of September 30, we had already worked with 8,879 students and 1,481 adults this year. Thanks for supporting these programs!

- July 7 - El Paso Public Library - bats
- July 7 - Chihuahuan Desert Education Coalition - mountain lions
- July 10 - El Paso Public Library - animal adaptations
- July 17 - El Paso Public Library - animal adaptations
- Aug 7 - El Paso Zoo - Bug Fest
- Aug 21 - Butterfly Flutterby
- Sept 11 - BLM public event - archaeology day
- Sept 20 - Camino Real Middle School - scientific method
- Sept 21 - Camino Real Middle School - scientific method
- Sept 24 - Sierra Middle School - field trip
- Sept 27 - Tombaugh Elem - science interns
- Sept 29 - Dona Ana Elem - scientific method
- Sept 30 - Central Elem - scientific method

Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park

Phenology project

Have you ever wondered how variable the timing of flowering and fruiting is on the most common shrubs in our region of the desert - honey mesquite and creosotebush? We wondered, so we enlisted the help of Dawn Browning (a postdoctoral associate at the USDA/ARS Jornada Experimental Range) to help us design a study to answer these questions.

Phenology, the study of the timing of recurring plant and animal life cycle events, is a fascinating subject, and many scientists and members of the general public are collecting data to answer local, regional, and even global questions.

Starting in late September, we began weekly monitoring of several plants using criteria develop by Dawn and her colleagues. Students who visit the Nature Park will learn about this study and collect data too. We'll enter the data into databases that can be accessed by students and researchers around the world.

New Asombro brochure



Thanks to Board member Mary Beth Harper, the Asombro Institute for Science Education has a new informational brochure!

"We've needed a new brochure for a couple years," said Asombro Executive Director Stephanie Bestelmeyer. "We're so fortunate to have someone with

Mary Beth's talents work on the project. This will help us spread the word about the mission, programs, and features of our organization."

The brochure is available at the Asombro Institute office or by calling 575-524-3334.

Volunteer spotlight

Not all of our volunteers are out on field trips teaching students about desert animals or in the classroom helping explain the scientific process. Marcella Newman is one volunteer who works on many of the behind-the-scene projects in our office. Whether it is data entry or assembling binders for a teacher workshop, Marcella is always ready to lend a hand. Marcella said, "I don't always have to come to the office to do things that need to be done.



Volunteer Marcella Newman

Sometimes I can take a project home and work on it from there."

The local climate is what brought Marcella down from the Midwest where she retired from a major telecommunication company. When asked what she likes most about Las Cruces, her reply: weather, weather, weather. She chose to volunteer with the Asombro Institute to learn more about the Chihuahuan Desert and she stays because of the staff.

Marcella is also a Master Gardener, a prolific reader, and enjoys attending seminars about desert plants, especially succulents. Her knowledge of plants is an asset at events like our nighttime desert program last summer. Both Marcella and her husband were on hand with their collection of desert plants to educate the public about what grows here.





Asombro Institute for Science Education
P.O. Box 891, Las Cruces, NM 88004-0891

I want to support the Asombro Institute for Science Education's efforts to increase scientific literacy by fostering an understanding of the Chihuahuan Desert. All donations are welcome. Please sign me up in the following category:

- | | |
|--|--|
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Many Thanks

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Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park

Open Tuesday - Saturday, 7:00 AM - 5:00 PM

- From I-25 in Las Cruces, head east on Highway 70.
- Take the Mesa Grande Drive exit (at Oñate High School).
- Make a U-turn under the highway to head west. After the U-turn, stay in the right lane.
- Turn right (north) on Jornada Road.
- Follow Jornada Road north for 6.5 miles. After approximately 2 miles, the road is unpaved.
- Turn left at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park sign.
- Follow the entrance road to the parking area and trailhead.

