



Riverside Nature Notes

The Riverside
Nature Center

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So What Does the Education Committee Do for RNC? GOOD QUESTION!

Recently, the Buildings & Landscape Committee shared what they have been busy doing at RNC, so this brought up the idea that the Education Committee could do the same thing—esp.! The Education Committee consists of the following members: Barbara Noblin (Chairperson & Board Representative), Gloria Olsen, Adrienne Grubb, Jennifer Bone, & Bryan Koerlin. This committee oversees the educational programming for kids and adults and sometimes combines the two.

ADULT EDUCATION

By Barbara Noblin

From rain water harvesting to relaxation techniques, RNC's adult education programming has offered a little something for everyone during this past fiscal year. Our Brown Bag Lunch and Learn Series and the Adult Learning for Living Series have covered a wide variety of topics and collectively recorded over 200 in attendance.

The Brown Bag Lunch and Learn Series is wrapping up its third year. Its 1-hour programs were designed to give people a mid-day break from their routine—a chance to come to Riverside and unwind while having lunch and discovering something new. The Learning for Living Series is a more recent development and has been met with great success. Held on Saturday mornings, the programs each generally have an expanded time frame (1.5-3 hours), which allows for a deeper look into the subject matter. Topics covered in these series included land management, Hill Country insects, and basic birding skills.

SEARCHING FOR STARS at RNC!

By Jennifer Bone

At our March star party, one of the ladies attending said to me after look through the telescopes that she had seen Saturn. With a smile on her face & wonder in her eyes, she said, "I've never seen it that way before!" That's what RNC's star parties are all about—pausing for a moment to look up at the night sky and see something you haven't seen before.

Our parties are designed for all ages. As the sun sets, the adults listen to a program by a local astronaut or NASA Ambassador or astronomer. Meanwhile, kids take part in a related lesson and craft project about the stars, planets, the moon, or space travel. Once night falls, everyone has a chance to go outside and look around at our universe through the telescopes.

The telescopes themselves are computerized marvels. Brought in for the star parties and operated by Dr. Bill Sliva of Schreiner University and his volunteer team of serious amateur astronomers, the telescopes are so large that each one takes up practically the entire bed of a pick-up truck. Each is so precise that it can digitally zoom in on and track planets, nebulae, individual stars and moons, star clusters, even galaxies. It's great to read about these distant objects, & see them on television or on the internet, but it's truly spectacular to see them for yourself through such equipment. It's an opportunity that many people never get.

RNC hosts between four and six star parties each year, and our next party is right around the corner on August 11th. If you haven't attended one yet, make plans to join us; bring your family and friends. It's an experience that will broaden your perspective and let you see something as you've never seen it before.

Admission to RNC's star parties is \$2.50 for RNC members, \$5.00 for non-members. Kids age 12 and under are free. Starting time for the August 11th program TBA—watch for details on our website at www.riversidenaturecenter.org or call RNC at 257-4837.



SCOUT PROGRAMS

By Adrienne Grubb

The Riverside Nature Center offers two exciting programs for girl scouts in the area. Junior girl scouts earn their wildlife badge via a two-day sleep over event, while Brownies come to earn their Eco-Explorer Try It badge via a Saturday program.

The wildlife badge allows the girls to experience a night hike along the river, handle live critters, listen to frog calls, roast marshmallows, and make a neat craft to take home. They also learn about poison ivy, the five classes of animals, and try their hand at microscopes.

The brownies hike through RNC's ecosystems to locate animal habitats, observe different environments, and hunt for living and nonliving items. They watch a puppet show, create food chains, discuss endangered animals, and make seed balls to take home.

Riverside Nature Center provides a wonderful opportunity to encourage young girls to experience wildlife in their environment. We are proud to offer these highly successful programs to both girl scouts and brownies throughout the area.

Soon Riverside will be offering various programming opportunities to various age levels within the Boy Scout organizations in our area. This programming expansion has just recently begun to develop, but the need for programming like this is there.

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Meet RNC'S Volunteer of the Month, Shannon Smith

By Barbara Staggs



Shannon is our "Knight in Shining Armor", but his photo is not available. Check for it in our August Newsletter!

Shannon Smith was born in Tampa, Florida back in the days when FL. was not wall-to-wall people. He loved wandering the woods and enjoying the wildlife. He mowed lawns, installed landscapes and worked on golf courses as a teenager giving him an early love for plants and horticulture. He spent a lot of time with his grandfather who, at one point in his life, had a small nursery and a great collection of native plants. His influence also encouraged Shannon's botanical interests.

He went to Univ. Tenn. on a golf scholarship and started studying business administration which he found not to his liking. Luckily, he got into horticulture/agronomy which he found was his 1st love; well, 2nd love! He married Catherine, his first love, his senior year at the university. He completed his B.S. and M.S. at Tenn. then moved to Univ. Fla. and completed his Ph.D. in 1971. After graduation he worked in Dept. of Environmental Horticulture in extension, teaching and research for 6 years. Part of his job was to manage the Wilmot Garden on campus and also assist in developing the entire campus as an arboretum. By this time Shannon and Catherine had sons Stephen & Greg. In 1978 he was offered a position in Horticultural Sciences at Massey Univ., in New Zealand and the travel opportunity was something they couldn't pass up. Shannon taught ornamental horticulture & landscape design for

3 years. They were able to travel all over the country, even to eastern Australia to see their unique gardens & flora. Shannon and his family returned to the U.S. and back to the Univ. Tenn. in 1978 where he taught ornamental horticulture & landscape design and coordinated the state's nursery production program.

In 1980 he had the opportunity to become president of the Dallas Arboretum Society in order to build their botanical garden. Preparing the master plan, educational programs & establishing the garden as a new "living museum" was challenging, to say the least, but unfortunately, Shannon found himself far removed from horticulture and was having to spend most of his time in activities like development & fund raising.

One day a friend told him about a large, wholesale nursery in San Antonio that wanted to hire a horticulturist to be director of research and development—specifically to introduce new plants and concentrate on natives from Texas, Mexico and the Southwest, so in 1985 Shannon joined the Lone Star Growers. At the time there were very few nurseries growing Texas natives and most were small, retail operations. Lone Star was the first large, wholesaler to specialize in natives and to make them available on a large scale to retailers and landscapers as container-grown plants. Collecting, breeding, learning how to propagate and grow the 'best' of the native Texas ornamentals was a fantastic job allowing Shannon to work with great native plant experts. Lone Star eventually changed their emphasis to more mass marketing of introduced ornamentals and reduced the R&D program, so Shannon accepted a position with the Missouri Botanical Garden in 1991.

Having started the Dallas Arboretum from scratch, it was interesting for Shannon to become Director of Horticulture at the Missouri Botanical Garden (MBG). The MBG is one of American's oldest botanical gardens, opening to the public in 1859. It is also one of the most

famous botanical institutions in the world with renowned international research programs, successful educational programs and beautiful horticultural displays. Shannon directed all horticultural operations including gardens, conservatories, greenhouses, the adult educational programs, gardening outreach, and, for 4 years, also managed the 2,400 acre Shaw Nature Reserve—an MBG satellite facility. Their displays and programs received the national award for "Excellence in Horticulture" from the American Assoc. of Botanical Gardens & Arboreta in 2004. Shannon was also granted Emeritus Director of Horticulture upon retirement in order to maintain contacts with MBG.

Several years before retiring in Oct., 2005, Shannon and Catherine bought property fourteen miles west of Hunt, TX. They had always planned on moving back to Texas since they consider themselves "naturalized Texans". By retirement time, San Antonio had gotten too big and Boerne and Bandera too expensive. While in Dallas and San Antonio, Shannon had worked with Carroll Abbott and Vern Wesby on the early days of development of the Native Plant Society of Texas and visited with them often in Kerrville. Therefore, Kerrville became a favorite place to visit. The Smiths finally moved into the home they built in late 2005 and in early 2006 Shannon came to RNC to offer to assist where needed. Shannon has since been primarily involved in inventorying the plant collections, getting new plant labels made and installed, and working on the Buildings & Landscape Committee, and generally doing whatever needs to be done to help. He claims coming to RNC gives him a break from clearing cedar and moving rocks on his property!

Shannon enjoys birding, fishing, golf, and all things horticultural. The Smiths love traveling and have been fortunate enough to visit gardens all over the world. Thanks to his connections with MBG, he has been able to assist with planning for botanical gardens in Quito, Ecuador; San Jose, Costa Rica; and Guatemala. The Smith's have two grandchildren, Jacob & Tyler.

RNC has been gifted with Shannon's experience & knowledge of plants. Thank you for everything, Shannon!

(Continued from page 1)

School Programming

By Cass Keen

Riverside has been offering field trips to our local schools almost since the land was purchased. Because educational programming is our mission, the development of our school programs has been a very important element in our educational program development. The State of Texas requires specific objectives that must be taught each year for all public school age children, so our lessons are developed around these objectives. We offer programming for students in Kindergarten through the 5th grade. The topics vary (and can even be developed around teacher needs/requests), but present lessons include insects, trees & plants, animal habitats, and the study of/comparison of various ecosystems—especially the desert, forest, and riparian ecosystems. For the specific lessons involving each designated grade level and the related lessons and objectives, please see the list on our website at www.riversidenaturecenter.org.

RNC has also begun to develop a good relationship with various local private schools and home-schooled students. Internal Visitor Center displays include live critters (a tarantula, a Texas Alligator Lizard, & a king snake are here presently), and informative visual displays on the walls that change every 3--4 months. Visual display topics have included Hill Country flora, animals, mammals, snakes, spiders, insects, and etc.

Again, lessons can be created/developed upon teacher request, and students are given more attention via the use of our Nature Guides. Usually, lessons include 2 main parts. One part is the inside lesson where specific objectives are quickly taught &/or reviewed. Active learning is the key here. Rarely do students sit for more than 20 minutes. Usually the inside lesson includes physical activities, games, puppet shows, and the like. The 2nd part involves the Nature Guides. Students are divided into small groups of 5-6 students, and each group is assigned a Nature Guide who takes the students out on the grounds looking for specific items. For example, in our lesson on insects, students go outside to look for butterflies, spiders, wasps/bees, flowers, webs, wasps' nests, ants, anthills, and such. Some higher grade levels use various instruments or scientific equipment like thermometers & compasses, but all are encouraged to use their powers of observation (along with their other senses) and encouraged to understand the scientific method when/as appropriate.

The connection of nature to each individual is an important one! This is as important for adults as it is for young people. The research is beginning to find that without a connection to nature, no one can be truly healthy intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally. The research is showing that without a connection to nature, people lose their senses, calling it "Nature Deficit Disorder". After reading about our programming, we hope you realize how much RNC is doing to battle NDD!!

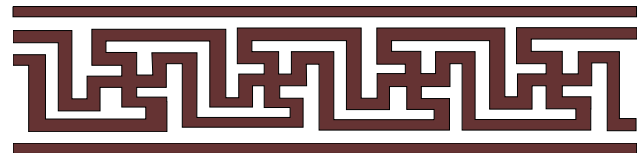


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WELCOME, New RNC Members!

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**UPCOMING EVENTS
MARK YOUR CALENDAR!**



A NEW "COMBINED" EVENT WITH FREE FOOD!!!
RNC's Volunteer/Member Appreciation Dinner
AND Annual Meeting
at Mamacita's on Wed., Sept. 5th from 4:30-6:00 p.m.
Come help us celebrate our SUCCESSES of 06-07!

Important Upcoming Events

****Star Party coming Saturday
August 11th at 7pm**

Fee, \$5.00 per adult, half
price for RNC
Members and children un-
der 12.



****Sat., Sept 15 SEED**
(Some Enchanted
Evening Dinner)



****Sat., Oct. 13 Down By the Riverside
Festival & Native Plant Sale**

****Sat., Oct. 20 Rendezvous By the River**
(A Celebration of Texas
and Hill Country Archeology)