

**TUCSON MOUNTAINS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER - JANUARY, 2008**

**ANNOUNCING:  
SPECIAL CONCERT AND GATHERING FEBRUARY 23 4-7 P.M.!**

**See p. 2**

**PHOTO CONTEST! See p. 4**

**PRESIDENT'S LETTER**

It is so energizing to walk in the Tucson Mountains and see what this organization has accomplished, and what we can continue to do in 2008! As I contemplate what I want to say in this letter, I am flooded with gratitude for past efforts to preserve and protect our beautiful desert highlands, and a sense of responsibility for the efforts we must continue. We need only look around us to recognize the results of people caring how we treat the greenest desert on earth. This is a great tradition to continue.

We have a strong and dedicated Board with a multitude of talents and perspectives, from a biology professor, to a city planner and architect, to several entrepreneurs skilled in organizational matters, to (heaven help us!) three lawyers. We have a new Board member with great software knowledge and experience to help bring our web site and communications into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – at last! We have Jane West's continuing diligent work to keep our books and records in order and preserve our history. All are committed to the mission of TMA. We need input from you, our members, and we welcome greater participation from each of you. But this Board has what it takes to continue TMA's dual mission: to protect this scenic desert environment and preserve its biodiversity, while continuing to improve the health and well-being of our members. If you would like to attend a Board meeting or learn more about TMA and its current efforts, I welcome you to contact me.

We have some specific goals for this year. We have a membership event on February 23 you should not miss! What better way to further discuss our goals than to get together at a gorgeous home overlooking the Sweetwater Preserve and the Tucson Mountains, with music that reflects a love of this land and its history? We hope to have the County purchase additional open space land through bond funding, most especially to connect the Sweetwater Preserve with Saguaro National Park West. We have been working with the Pima County Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation on the plans for the Sweetwater Preserve; and, to give you an advance hint, we intend to celebrate finalized plans and thank the donors who made the Preserve possible, at another beautiful event later in the spring. And see inside, for details about our photography contest, to help our web site reflect the beauty of the Tucson Mountains. To improve west-side living, we plan to begin work towards establishing a good local branch library. Finally, we believe that in light of the area's population we ought to have at least 1,000 members. We do not expect to reach that goal this year, but we will begin to strive towards it.

**Reminder: Dues are Due in January! See form, p. 7**

**(President's Letter, continued)**

Please join us in our efforts. We need additional volunteers as board members and to assist with events and special projects. And whether or not you can volunteer to participate directly, please let us hear from you about our goals, our work, the issues you read about in this newsletter, and other matters you believe are important to TMA's mission. And what better opportunity than the February 23rd event!

All the best for 2008 - and please join and participate! Judith D. Meyer, President

### **ANNOUNCING: NEW OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS**

At the Annual Meeting, the membership elected Peter Chesson, Deb Hicks, Liz Kelley, Kurt Luscombe, Judith Meyer and Pamela Ridgway to the Board of Directors for two-year terms. Then, at its January meeting, the TMA Board elected officers for the year. Judith Meyer will be President, Deb Hicks will be Vice President, Pamela Ridgway will be Secretary, and Jane West will be Treasurer.

### **FEBRUARY 23, 4-7 P.M. SPECIAL EVENT!** **CONCERT AND GATHERING TO CELEBRATE THE BEAUTY AROUND** **US**

Please come – and invite your neighbors and friends to come – to celebrate the beauty of our Tucson Mountains at a gorgeous event intended to increase our membership and get your input into our goals. Enjoy glorious music, meet our 2008 Board of Directors, and give us a piece of your mind!

**International recording artist Gary Stroutsos**, cultural storyteller and world flutist, will perform in a “living room concert” over an ancient fire circle. Gary is a performer who cherishes Native American and other ancient flute traditions, and who has shared the stage with R. Carlos Nakai, as well as many other well-loved performers and storytellers, including on his recording, *Echoes of Canyon de Chelly*. His music was featured on the Ken Burns PBS film *Lewis & Clark*, which led to a command performance at the White House for President Bill Clinton. He has shared the traditions of American Indian, Afro-Cuban, Pan Global and American Jazz, performing on American Indian flutes, Chinese bamboo flutes and 100-year-old Haynes Concert C woodwinds.

Former TMA Board member Ron Carswell has invited us to come to his magnificent passive solar home, which he designed and built, at 5655 West Sweetwater Drive, for this gathering over an ancient fire circle, see the sun set, listen to music inspired by ancient sounds, and talk about TMA's goals and future.

Tickets for this event are \$10.00 per person for members (and you can join at the event!), and \$15.00 per person for non-members. Light hors d'oeuvres, wine and soft drinks will be offered, and we will hold a raffle of some lovely items related to life in our mountains.

We are limited to 200 tickets, so be sure to RSVP no later than Feb. 18. You can RSVP right on the membership form in this newsletter or call 743-8058. \_\_\_\_\_  
Let us know how many people will be in your party. We hope to see as many current members as possible, and welcome new members and friends!

### **SWEETWATER PRESERVE UPDATE**

One of TMA's greatest successes is the creation of the Sweetwater Preserve. It was the outcome of a committee of private citizens, chaired by Paula Chronister and former TMA President Debbie Hecht. Their four years of hard work culminated in the County's purchase of 695 acres, bounded on the south by Sweetwater Drive and cut by Sweetwater Wash. It is one of the true gems of the Tucson Mountains. It is craggy foothill country of great scenic beauty, full of rocky outcrops, little gullies and washes, and numerous hollows with palo verde, acacia and mesquite.

Everywhere are stands of saguaro, along with fine examples of the many cacti and desert favorites such as ocotillo. And it teems with wildlife. Its complex topography provides numerous habitats for flora and fauna, and its many small valleys and hollows provide fertile enclaves where water infiltrates. It is not merely an area of great beauty, but a major addition to the preserved areas of the biologically diverse Tucson Mountains.

Unfortunately, the Sweetwater Preserve is not directly connected to other preserved areas. Animals move from one place to another seeking opportunities for foraging, breeding, or just hiding and keeping safe. Different places are best in different seasons and different years. Plants move, too, when they are seeds, and they too gain advantages through mobility. It is not surprising, therefore, that isolated areas lose species. Future purchases as part of the County's conservation acquisition bonds may ultimately connect Sweetwater Preserve along a portion of its southern boundary with Saguaro National Park and the University of Arizona research reserve, "Desert Station." Indeed, TMA is actively working toward this goal. For now, Sweetwater Preserve is likely to remain connected to other preserved areas mostly through private property. Much depends on the goodwill of surrounding landowners in maintaining their properties so that the fauna and flora continue to make them home.

Many of you will have noticed that the County is moving ahead with its development plan for Sweetwater Preserve. The County unveiled a preliminary trail map at a public meeting in May. That map contained the existing trails and proposals for new and replacement trails. Since then, the TMA Board has been working with county planner Steve Anderson and trail designer Mark Flint, to refine the trail system. Our joint aim has been to provide an outstanding recreational opportunity that is also friendly to the environment of this extraordinary place. Trails provide access to scenery, but should not be so dense that wildlife lacks places of solitude. Known breeding, courting and refuge areas have been avoided, and some large areas have been left without trails to ensure that Sweetwater Preserve remains a genuine wildlife refuge. Another concern has been to identify particularly inviting routes where wildcat trails might form. In these cases, the County's aim has been to channel visitors along the most environmentally friendly paths. Care has been taken to follow routes that minimize erosion, and all trails are being carefully constructed by hand under Mark Flint's supervision. Some of the existing trails are to be closed because they are eroding or pass through environmentally sensitive areas. These trails are being replaced by others, and no one should worry about the loss of their favorite hikes. These will still be possible, though perhaps along a new path. All visitors should respect trail closure, indicated by rock and branch barriers, to protect this wonderful resource.

Sweetwater Preserve is to be fenced to prevent vehicular access. However, there will be a parking area just inside the preserve at the main entrance at the end of Tortolita Road. If you come by car, that is the entrance that you should use in the future. There will be other entrances on major boundaries, but these are just for those on foot or horseback, and no parking will be allowed. The Tortolita Road entrance will be the only entrance with parking.

## **PHOTO CONTEST**

### **GIVE US YOUR BEST SHOT - HELP MAKE OUR WEB SITE REFLECT THE TUCSON MOUNTAINS!**

We want some pictures of the Tucson Mountains and their wildlife for our web site. We may also publish them in printed materials. If you have a photograph you think reflects the beauty of the mountains or the flora and fauna, please consider entering this contest. We will select the best six photographs we receive and announce the winners at the Feb. 23 Membership Event, on the web site and in our next newsletter. The contest is open to all current members and their immediate families. Photographs must be available digitally and in hard copy, and entrants must agree to allow TMA to publish the photographs digitally and in print. Please send your photographs to TMA, P.O. Box 86117, Tucson, AZ 85754. Deadline for submission: Feb. 20, 2008.

## **JUNK VEHICLE STORAGE: WE NEED YOUR INPUT**

Are you affected by the presence of junk vehicles in your neighborhood? Do you believe it would affect you to have up to five junk vehicles stored on a nearby homesite? We need your input.

Last year the Board of Supervisors adopted a new zoning ordinance that was intended to allow non-commercial auto repair in all residential zones within unincorporated Pima County. To allow people to perform such vehicle maintenance and repairs, while balancing the issue of visual blight that can offend neighbors and reduce property values, the ordinance included a provision that an inoperable vehicle could remain in open view on a residential lot for a period of only 60 days; then it must be completely screened from view with permanent fencing or mature vegetation. But there are several flaws in this ordinance, and the Board of Supervisors will review it later this spring.

First, there is no separate definition of a “junk” vehicle, which cannot be made roadworthy, and is merely kept on a residential lot indefinitely to rot away. All inoperable vehicles are treated the same, whether they are being repaired or not; and up to five of them can be stored indefinitely on any homesite over an acre in size. Second, the screening must shield the inoperable vehicles from view only from adjacent grade directly at the edge of that property. This makes no allowance for the fact that in hilly areas, such as our west-side neighborhoods, this is ineffective to screen such junk from view from homes a few doors away. This ordinance currently allows storage of two pure junk vehicles on every residential lot, if screened from view at adjacent grade, and up to five of them on any lot over an acre. This was never allowed before (the Zoning Code has allowed a maximum of 200 square feet of garbage, which would not even fit two cars). Under the guise of adopting an ordinance to allow home auto repair, a few highly vocal individuals got the Board of Supervisors to accept huge amounts of pure unsightly garbage to be stored indefinitely on residential land.

At the time of its adoption, TMA argued that in our region, screening what can be viewed at “adjacent grade” is not sufficient to mitigate the visual blight of junk vehicles, because often from three doors away there is a direct view down over the land. We have been asked, recently, to find out how many of our members actually feel they have been affected, or would be affected, by this. Do you agree that a residential zone is the appropriate place to store up to five inoperable vehicles that cannot, or will not, be repaired? If a vehicle is not roadworthy, and has not been the subject of repair efforts for a lengthy period, do you agree that it should be removed from residential neighborhoods? And if it is visible from some distance away from the home where it is located, do you agree the screening is insufficient to protect the neighborhood’s home values and preserve our scenic beauty and enjoyment of our homes? Please let Judith hear from you about this, via email or phone, so that we can attempt to have this flawed ordinance improved, or adjust our position to reflect your input. Thank you.

## **SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK WEST “URBAN INTERFACE PROJECT”**

The Rincon Institute, a nonprofit organization mostly concerned with Saguaro National Park East, recently received a National Park Service grant to engage residents from both the East

and West districts, to develop Saguaro National Park's Urban Interface Project. "Urban Interface" is a term applied where large natural areas border human communities. While SNP's proximity to a large urban area gives residents a unique opportunity to easily access and enjoy a national park, that proximity can be damaging when illegal or detrimental activities occur in or near the park. Saguaro National Park's Urban Interface Project has three major goals: to increase communication and outreach to the Park's neighbors through newsletter and e-mail updates; to involve neighbors in volunteer restoration and conservation projects; and to increase neighborhood awareness of detrimental activities by renewing the Park Watch program.

The purpose of the Park Watch program is to decrease criminal activity on public lands, while encouraging park visitors and neighbors to take an active role in keeping Saguaro a safe and enjoyable place to visit. Please be alert for any threats to the park and its resources such as arson, vandalism, off-road vehicle activity, theft of resources (archeological, cactus, minerals, etc.), poaching (mammals, reptiles, etc.), dumping of debris, illegal camping, and marijuana cultivation or drug labs. If you observe a crime in progress, **do not** attempt to intervene. Note the time and location of the incident, descriptions of the persons and vehicles involved, including license plate numbers, and report your observations to a park ranger. **For EMERGENCIES, always call 911.** Law Enforcement Rangers and park officials can be reached at either of the park's two visitor centers. But the surest way to contact a ranger, whether during or after hours, is by calling one of the park's dispatch centers: **from 7:00 am to 11:00 pm**, call the Federal Law Enforcement Dispatch Center in Phoenix at **1-800-637-9152**; **from 11:00 pm to 7:00 am**, call the Lake Mead Dispatch Center in Boulder City, Nevada at **1-800-680-5851**.

To receive the next edition of the Project newsletter, and stay up-to-date with events at Saguaro National Park, e-mail Tory Foster at: [i@institute.org](mailto:i@institute.org) and type "add me to the list" in the subject line. In the meantime, you may want to note a few upcoming events at SNP West: Sat., Feb. 23, 9:00-11:00 AM: Ranger-led naturalist outing; Sat., Mar. 22, 8:00-11:00 AM: Buffelgrass Removal; Saturday, April 26, 8:00-11:00 AM: Trail Maintenance. Get further information and RSVP for all events to Tory Foster at 647-7388 or [i@institute.org](mailto:i@institute.org).

## **MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS: DESERT ASHRAM**

*In this new segment of our newsletter, we hope to introduce some of the activities in our midst here in the Tucson Mountains and their foothills. Let us know if you have something to share with the membership, or if you are curious about what's going on somewhere.*

Desert Ashram, at 3403 W. Sweetwater Drive, is an oasis of peace and tranquility. Founded by Swami Amar Jyoti in 1975, the ashram is non-denominational with an emphasis on Eastern and universal spirituality. They invite members of the public to join them at daily *Aarati* (worship and meditation); and twice weekly *Satsang* (a spiritual discourse by their Guru, preceded by devotional music and followed by meditation).

They also offer a Hatha Yoga class open to women (all levels), on Tuesday mornings at 10:30, and could offer additional yoga classes if there were sufficient interest. More information is at their website, [www.truthconsciousness.org](http://www.truthconsciousness.org), by email to [info@truthconsciousness.org](mailto:info@truthconsciousness.org), or call them at 743-8821.

## **PAINTED HILLS LAWSUIT**

In our last newsletter, we reported what we believe was the terrible decision made by the Design Review Committee, which approved the developer's second proposed plan despite the intent to blade several stands of mature saguaros, and despite the potentially devastating reduction in wildlife corridors. We also reported the flaw in the County's procedure that failed to allow any appeal to the Planning and Zoning Commission or the Board of Supervisors from the neighbors.

In December, a small group of individuals who reside near the Painted Hills filed suit against the County. They have claimed that the cluster development option is, in effect, a rezoning; and therefore they should have been given notice and an opportunity to be heard before the County approved the plan.

We hope the County will quickly find a resolution that saves the Painted Hills from the foreseeable harm while avoiding protracted litigation. TMA has made a contribution to the legal expenses. If you would like to make a contribution as well, you may send a check to: Friends of Painted Hills, 1505 West St. Marys Rd., Box 102, Tucson, AZ 85745. We express no opinion on the lawsuit, but you may contact the plaintiffs at that address for further information.

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## **COLUMBUS PARK UPDATE**

Have you been waiting to ride your pinto along the Santa Cruz? Plans are underway for some improvements at Columbus Park, possibly as soon as this June. These include adding two new baseball fields and a ramada, with a lavatory/utility building, just south of El Camino del Cerro, between Silverbell and the Santa Cruz River. They also include adding an entrance for an equestrian staging ground with horse trailer parking, to provide access to the Juan Batista de Anza National Historic Trail. Long-term members may recall that these plans are part of a Master Plan adopted in 2004, when the Park was expanded by 55 acres. TMA had worked with many neighborhood groups, the City of Tucson and the Pima County Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation to develop a Master Plan that met the expressed needs and wishes of many diverse user groups. Funding is now available to implement this limited part of the Master Plan. Recently, TMA participated in an effort to select a public art project for this park improvement.

We do have a concern about the new ball fields. The sole access will be from El Camino del Cerro, turning south into a driveway between Silverbell and the Santa Cruz. As many west-side residents know, that bit of road is crushingly inadequate during rush hour at this time. The Freeway construction and delays in the plans to improve the Silverbell/El Camino del Cerro intersection and expand the roads are contributing to the problem, and can be expected to continue far longer than through June. Westbound (homebound) traffic attempting to pass the railroad tracks and the Freeway has been backed up all the way to La Cholla at times, so more traffic in the late afternoon and early evening will add to the misery, frustration and pollution. TMA has asked the City of Tucson and Pima County to perform traffic counts and a study, and provide some plan for coping with this foreseeable problem. With ball games taking place in the late afternoon and early evening, families bringing children from east of the Freeway to games will have to turn left from El Camino del Cerro during heavy traffic times. Those who live on the west side who are leaving the game fields must turn left onto El Camino del Cerro, which is likely to be very dangerous unless the intersection with Silverbell is substantially improved. We hope to have a solution to this problem to report later in the spring.

## **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL AND EMAIL LISTSERV**

TMA membership is by the calendar year, so dues are now due for 2008. Please return the form attached below with your dues. Your \$20.00 per household dues help educate and inform our members of issues in the Tucson Mountains, and defray expenses incurred in pursuing our mission. Donations over annual dues are appreciated. Check your mailing label for your "dues due" date. If it indicates "Dues due 1/08," then you paid your 2007 dues. If it indicates "dues due 1/07," then you forgot last year, and we would appreciate your catching up!

This year we would like to provide our newsletter via email, to conserve both natural and fiscal resources. We also need our members' email addresses because sometimes matters arise between our newsletters that require members' attention. Our policy is never to share our mailing list or email addresses with any other organization, or make them available for any purpose other than TMA business. Please take a moment to provide your current contact information and indicate if you are willing to receive the newsletter via email only. Thank you for your cooperation in saving a few trees and some postage!

Here is a form for you at the bottom, and after you cut it out, why not pass this newsletter on to a neighbor or friend you think might be interested in joining TMA, or coming to the event on Feb. 23? Thank you!

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone  
Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email  
address \_\_\_\_\_

Do you agree to receive future TMA Newsletters via email only? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes.  
\_\_\_\_\_ No.

RSVP for Feb. 23: \_\_\_\_\_ I will attend and will need \_\_\_\_\_ tickets (number of people).

Mail to: TMA, P.O. Box 86117, Tucson, AZ 85754

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Telephone  
Number \_\_\_\_\_

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