

The Habitat Gardens at
Elizabeth "Liz" C. Archuleta County Park
A Multicultural Art and Nature Park

2022 Accomplishments and Plans for 2023



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2022 Summary

2022 was an outstanding year! Most notably, Geoffrey Gross and crew completely rebuilt the Pond and Wetland. They look absolutely beautiful and have prompted many appreciative comments from nearby residents and other visitors.

Our gardening year began April 1. As usual, the first three months were dry and windy. We used stored roof water to keep the gardens going until the reclaimed water was turned on, and spread fresh mulch to hold in the moisture as we have in the past. But mulch is expensive. We learned that Master Gardener Frank Brandt uses chopped pine needles as mulch because they acidify our alkaline soil, allowing for better uptake of nutrients. They're also free. We successfully applied for a grant from the Master Gardeners Association to purchase a pine-needle mulcher for future use.

The gardens and all of the County Park were meticulously prepared for the August 13 Rededication Ceremony to change the name of *Sawmill Multicultural Art and Nature County Park* to *Elizabeth "Liz" C. Archuleta County Park: A Multicultural Art and Nature Park*. No effort was spared; no detail overlooked. The volunteers enjoyed working with CCPR staff to help get everything ready, including online content for the garden signs. Although a series of thunderstorms prevented officials and guests at the event from seeing the park at its best, the work already done allowed volunteers to take things easier for the rest of the season. It also helped that the summer rains continued until the end of October.

The Willow Bend Board gave a party in the Ponderosa Ramada for the volunteers again, this time with a string sextet. We also had a year-end potluck at Susan's home. Volunteer hours logged for the year totaled 1,170. A group of NAU transfer students helped in April but other NAU groups canceled their plans to volunteer due to uncertainty about the pandemic. ACE volunteers quite rightly helped with flood mitigation efforts this summer instead of in the gardens. FALA students visited the gardens with their science teacher and asked lots of good questions about native plant communities and gardening strategies. Willow Bend educator Melissa Eckstrom would like to present a welcome and orientation session to garden volunteers at the beginning of the season. We will meet with Willow Bend staff, probably in late February, to talk about that as well as to coordinate our activities for the coming year.

2022 Report and Plans for 2023, Garden-by-Garden

Lizard Garden

The Lizard Garden was a problem we volunteers had not been able to solve. The steep south-facing slope was unstable, making it a struggle to keep the garden weeded and the plants thriving. Enter Eagle Scout candidate Mikey McCullough and his dad, who proposed reconstructing the slope with the help of Caleb Eckert, a family friend who works on the trail crew at Grand Canyon National Park.

April 1: Volunteers dug up and potted all the agave pups and cactus from the Lizard Garden, and kept them watered and sheltered for the next 5½ weeks.

May 5: Mikey led a team of fellow Scouts and their parents in digging terraces into the slope and fetching large stones from around the gardens. As he worked, Caleb taught the Scouts how to build stone retaining walls reinforced with concrete and rebar. He included large pieces of weathered old wood because fence lizards apparently like to bask on wood as well as stone. The Lizard Garden now has stable, level plant niches that will require less water and maintenance.

May 13/14: Volunteers replanted the agaves and cactus. To our relief, the cactus had flourished in their pots in the shade of the EE Center's north wall. All of them soon bloomed! We had so many healthy cactus that we planted some along the rim across from the sundial too.

Before:



During:



After:



The Lizard Garden project was finished on a Science Saturday that happened to be on the subject of fire. Smokey joined the Scouts in celebrating their accomplishment. He also had fun tickling the toes of George, son of Willow Bend educator Melissa Eckstrom.

The flat space below the Lizard Garden also needed attention. Volunteers removed the weeds, dug down 4 inches, put down weed cloth, and spread crushed rock. We didn't have enough crushed rock to finish but we plan to obtain more in 2023 to complete this step.

Milkweed Terraces

An NAU entomology professor asked us to raise milkweed plants and harvest the seeds, which NAU's Milkweeds for Monarch would distribute to expand monarch butterfly habitat in northern Arizona. He asked us to build flood irrigation terraces to host the plants, then brought genotyped milkweeds and helped us plant them. However, the soil turned into brick when flooded. We plan to apply for a grant from the Northern Arizona Chapter of the Audubon Society to create a Bird Garden in the space instead. Fritz of Colton Gardens has offered to help us improve the soil. We will include fruit-bearing local shrubs, seed-bearing perennials, and hummingbird plants, and add more butterfly plants because caterpillars are an important food source for nestling birds.

Native Bees

The Arboretum hosted a Pollinator Festival in June. Unfortunately, it took place on the same morning the Pipeline Fire started. Word about the fire soon spread and almost everyone left to make sure their homes were okay. Native bee expert Dr. Joe Wilson of Utah State University, who was there on behalf of the Pollinator Partnership, suddenly had a lot of free time. Susan asked him a few questions and Joe ended up coming to the gardens the following day. He caught several different native bees, explained their diverse and fascinating life habits, pointed out holes in the dirt that are actually bee burrows, and provided tips on how to attract bees and keep them happy. There are at least 369 native bees in the greater San Francisco Peaks area! Susan shared her notes with other volunteers, used them in writing text for the Native Bee Garden, and will refer to them when making decisions about maintaining the gardens.



Dr. Joe Wilson



The Gardens in June

Ethnobotany Garden

Local ethnobotanist Mike Masek will collaborate with Willow Bend staff to present a one-day Herb Fest on June 17, 2023. In the meantime, Mike is coordinating with garden volunteer Margery Sorensen to add appropriate plants to the Ethnobotany Garden. Up to now, volunteers have concentrated their efforts on the shady end of the garden because many plants of ethnobotanical interest are riparian. Mike has now suggested adding a number of sun- and heat-loving plants. To create a thermal pocket for these plants, we will move several basalt boulders that are currently providing niches for weeds in the Wildflower Meadow to the sunny end of the Ethnobotany Garden before we obtain the plants.

Greenhouse

The gardens need a number of new plants every year to replace short-lived perennials and plants that just didn't make it for some reason. We talked with the City Sustainability Commission about acquiring funds for a greenhouse. When we realized there was no suitable place in the gardens to put it, we let the commission know we wouldn't apply. Paul Beier, a commission member and Willow Bend supporter, spontaneously offered us his used greenhouse for free. Volunteer Mary Gaseau generously agreed to keep it at her place, which is perfect for it. Volunteers will help Mary start and maintain the plants. If we are able to grow more than we need, we hope to sell any extras at the annual Master Gardener Plant Sale to raise funds for the gardens.



Compost System

Eagle Scout Mason Takeuchi and his family continued to maintain the system throughout 2021 and 2022, bringing food waste from the Family Food Center to create the right mix of green and brown. In 2022, the Takeuchis contributed 40.5 hours and 430 gallons of food waste. November 28, ACE members watered the Native Heirloom Garden, applied the compost, mulched with pine needles they chopped up with our new pine needle chopper, and spread straw on top of that. We look forward to learning whether this approach will result in good soil for growing vegetables in 2023. We think so!



Applying Compost



Chopping/Spreading Pine Needles



Ta da!

Welcome Patio

This summer, CCPR staff repaired the drinking fountain and the attachments for the sun sail. The patio is now complete, and very welcoming!



Entrance Area in 2017



Custom frame with sign, benches and boulders for seating, flagstones, roof water collection barrels, sun sail, and planters.

Outdoor Classroom

The Outdoor Classroom is a big hit with young families, who create fun arrangements with the rough materials there. This summer, Willow Bend's Moran Henn obtained a City Beautification Grant to add an interactive mural by Richard to the north end of the classroom.



EE Educator Ash Shields



Elevated Mouse House



A-frame Mouse House



Train with tree cookies and flowers



Whimsical Face



A Meal for Rocky

Science Saturday Harvest Festival

Volunteers showed some of our produce from the Native Heirloom Garden at the festival.



Zapotec Tomatoes



Ash Shields and Foodlink Friends



Cochiti Popcorn

Seasonal Wetland

The Seasonal Wetland had become overgrown with grasses and weeds. The culvert from the parking lot to the wetland was backing up because the channel to the wetland wasn't deep enough. Willow Bend Board members Ariel Leonard and Neil Weintraub cleared out the culvert, dug the channel to the wetland deeper, and lined it with rocks. After reconstructing the pond, Geoffrey Gross backhoed a new shallow depression for the wetland and shaped the space to smooth it and keep parking lot runoff out of the pond. Volunteers scattered river rocks and planted wetland plants, including dozens we'd dug up the year before and stored over the winter and free sedges given to us by The Arboretum.



The Pond (speaks for itself!)



Red-winged Blackbird



Grand Entrance



Great Blue Heron



Boardwalk



Circulating Pool



Waterfall