

# Friends of PINNACLE PEAK PARK Newsletter

Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park • PMB 288, 8711 E. Pinnacle Peak Road • Scottsdale AZ 85255 • www.pinnaclepeakpark.com

## Banana Yucca

By Challie Facemire

The banana yucca (*Yucca baccata*) is a plant indigenous to the southwest in America. There are many yucca species, about forty in the world, but this one is easily spotted. You have probably seen it on the trails in Pinnacle Peak Park when it is in flower. The banana yucca flowers in spring, and has a mass of flowers that shoot out of its middle on spikes in a giant cluster of cream colored bells.

One of the things that makes the banana yucca so distinctive, and gives it its name, is the fruit it produces. The fruits of banana yucca, unlike most yucca fruits, are fleshy. They are also banana shaped. Traditionally, the Navajo and Apache, used these fruits as food in their tribes. They would bake or roast them, strip out the seeds, and pound the flesh into a pulp. This pulp was then formed into flat cakes and allowed to sun-dry. The Navajo and Apache would pick these fruits before they had ripened and allow them to ripen off the plant in order to keep wildlife from eating them (McDonald, USDA Forest Service Plant of the Week, ND).

Banana yuccas had other traditional Native American uses as well. Their

leaves could be woven into baskets or made into brushes. When the flesh is removed, the remaining fibers are very stiff and can be made into a combination of needle and thread. Finally the roots can be used as a natural soap.

Several animals rely on the banana yucca for part of their sustenance as well. Animals such as javelina have been spotted eating the fruit. The fruit is also consumed by elk and by bighorn sheep, though the chance of seeing these two in Pinnacle Peak Park is low for elk and bighorn sheep are not in the area. Desert mule deer also eat banana yucca. Aside from these ungulates, insects, birds, and small rodents eat various parts of the banana yucca. If you watch out in the park you may not only see the banana yucca in bloom in the spring, but you might also catch sight of some of the wildlife it supports.



Photo by Stan Shebs



Photo by Stan Shebs



Photo by Stan Shebs

## Lucky 13: Featured Volunteer Joe Zveglich

By John Loleit



Photo by Leona Weinstein

For many years (2004-2017) Joe Zveglich was an integral part of the trail maintenance operations at Pinnacle Peak. Joe left his mark on the trail and can be credited with the excellent condition the trail was left in before turning over the maintenance duties to the current trail crew leaders, Thale and Ken.

The privilege was mine to work so close with Joe for all those years and learn so much from him. But, he started out as a trail maintenance rookie. Fresh out of retirement from Motorola as an engineer, his first day on the job with the trail crew he slopped soil cement mixture on me that left a stain and me already thinking this guy has sure left his mark. And mark he did over the years as he learned the integral dynamics of trail maintenance. As he became more in tune with the particular characteristics and the uniqueness of the Pinnacle Peak trail, the Monday morning maintenance projects became more planned and methodical than reactionary. A couple times a week Joe would hike the trail to plan for future projects or finish a piece of work from a previous Monday. Joe knew what storms could do to the trail and would show up the day after a storm without having to be called in for help.

When Joe was working on the trail the rest of the crew knew he was in charge and we confidently followed his lead. It was all work – until the project was done or we had come to a good stopping point. It was hard for Joe to sit still. He was a doer with no dilly dally. I once asked him if he had read a particular book and he said he did not have time for that! At home he made his own ‘honey do’ list and his lovely wife Liz always got various projects fixed, painted, repaired, built, or hung and never had to nag Joe to get them done!



Photo by Leona Weinstein

One day Joe and I were moving some large rock on the trail and it was difficult for 2 people to handle this one large rock without getting into each other’s way. He stated that if we had a rock sling with handles this rock would be so much easier to move. A day or two later he comes into the office with a rock sling. I asked him where he got it and he said I made it! He had gone home and with his engineering mind figured out the complicated knot system to form the net, how handles could be incorporated into it for easier lifting and carrying and how much nylon rope he would need. The last year that Joe worked at the Peak he gave me a Christmas present that I cherish more than all the others – he made me a rock sling!

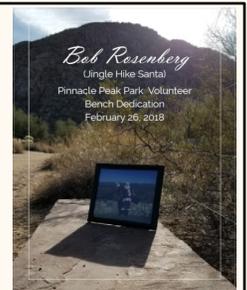
Years of lifting heavy rocks, hiking steep trails and carrying heavy loads has worn out some of Joe’s joints and made it harder for him to get along on the trail and he retired a second time in his life. Joe had spent 13 years working tirelessly on the Pinnacle Peak trail, and that has been a lucky number for all of us!



Photo by Ken Boschen

## Have a Seat!

By Yvonne Massman



Pinnacle Peak Park has two new benches for you to have a seat and enjoy the view!

In February of this year, the trail crew, park staff and Brian Carson (who is our Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park chairman), installed a bench at the Jomax gate side of the trail. The funding for the bench was in the form of a generous donation to the Friends from the family of one of our previous volunteers, Bob Rosenberg. You may have known Bob if you and your family every participated in the Jingle Hike to Santa activity in the early years of the program. Bob passed away last summer.

In October 2017, another bench was placed at trail marker #2. This bench was an Eagle Scout project, by Devin Hanratty, and his Troop 201. It is an incredible piece of gabion art and is positioned with an eastern view of the Four Peak Mountains framed by 2 saguaros, and to the west the view is Pinnacle Peak! Visitors just love stopping there to take in the sites! As well, it has become a nice destination for some of our hikers who aren’t as mobile to hike the trail but can make the 200’ journey to it.



Photos by Yvonne Massman

# Tarantula Hawk

By Thomas Eye

A tarantula hawk is a type of spider wasp that hunts tarantulas as part of its reproductive cycle. It has a black body with bright, rust colored wings. The tarantula hawk's body is about 2 inches long, and it has long legs with hooked claws that grab ahold of its prey.

If you encounter one at Pinnacle Peak Park, or anywhere else for that matter, it's best to stay well away as its sting is extremely painful. In fact, it delivers the most painful sting of any insect in North America. Fortunately, the tarantula hawk is fairly docile and will generally not sting humans unless provoked.

Because of its powerful sting, only a few animals, including the road runner, will eat tarantula hawks. The wasps are nectivorous, meaning that they mainly consume sugar-rich nectar produced by flowering plants. They are most active in the late spring and summer during daylight hours.

The tarantula hawk's reproductive strategy is fascinating, and quite ghoulish. The female stings and paralyzes a tarantula, drags it to a nest, and lays a single egg on the spider's abdomen. It then seals the nest. When the wasp larva hatches, it feeds on the paralyzed but still living tarantula, avoiding vital organs to keep the spider alive as long as possible. It emerges from the nest several weeks later as an adult and the life cycle repeats.



Photo by Charles J Sharp

# Remembering Morrie Chernis

By Yvonne Massman

Our previous volunteer, Morrie Chernis became a full-time resident of Scottsdale in 2000, after a 40-year career with Boeing in Seattle, Washington. His "give back to your community" way of living, landed him at Pinnacle Peak Park, a prominent land formation that he could see from his home. He was in the first group of volunteers, who were essential in the opening of the park in April 2002.

Morrie was a Pinnacle Peak Park visionary, and founded the 501c3, Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park (FOPPP). This was by no means a quick or easy process either! Morrie worked hard on the park's behalf getting the non-profit in place with determination for 2 years! He sought out advice and consulted with a variety of other local non-profit organizations learning all that he could on how to get a non-profit started. He worked through the City, State, and Federal requirements, and filled out

numerous forms and applications while personally financing any of the out of pocket costs required to file the various paperwork.



Photo by John Loleit

Morrie died on March 30, 2017. At the time of his death, Morrie had logged in over 1,485 volunteer hours. However, these hours did not include all the fund-raising events he helped with, board meetings he attended, coffee meetings he arranged, and the hours and hours of thinking he did on how to generate more money for the Friends of PPP! He was the park's oldest volunteer at age 85. Every Wednesday, Morrie would work four hours a week in the office, showing up for each shift with Starbucks' coffee for all who were working! He attended and worked every park event and activity and served on the board of the FOPPP for its entire 13-year existence.

On December 20, 2017, the day that would have been Morrie's 86<sup>th</sup> birthday, (and coincidentally a Wednesday), the City of Scottsdale dedicated the park's ramada in his name! The mayor, city council members, family, city staff, park volunteers and friends all attended the celebration! On your next visit to the park, please be sure to admire the "Morrie Chernis Ramada" plaque now adorning the ramada!

Photo collage by Leona Weinstein

## Scheduled Activities at the Park

- 11/10/18 10AM Liberty Wildlife
- 11/25/18 Thanksgiving Weekend Eat Mesquite - display of pods and ground meal from native velvet, honey, screwbean, and assorted South American varieties; small tasting samples of mesquite food such as mesquite snickerdoodle or a one bite mesquite mancake; mano and metate, plus stone grinding hole and mortar for actual grinding of pods should a guest wish to try.
- 12/01/18 Jingle Hike to Santa (online registration only)
- 12/07/18 5:45PM Astronomy Talk
- 12/08/18 10AM Southwest Wildlife
- 12/09/18 Prickly Pear Fruit and Pads - ongoing, casual demo on how to process prickly pear pads and juice prickly pear fruits; mini samples of both raw and cooked pads, plus a small taste of prickly pear juice.
- 12/22/18 5:30PM Full Moon Hike
- 12/29/18 6PM Astronomy Talk
- 01/12/19 6PM Astronomy Talk
- 01/19/19 10AM Liberty Wildlife
- 01/20/19 6PM Full Moon Hike
- 01/21/19 6PM Full Moon Hike
- 01/26/19 Sonoran Desert Superstore - common native plants used by Native Americans for food, medicine, and materials displayed alongside their modern day counterparts.
- 02/02/19 10AM Southwest Wildlife
- 02/08/19 6:15PM Astronomy Talk
- 02/16/19 10AM Wild at Heart
- 02/18/19 6:30PM Full Moon Hike
- 02/19/19 6:30PM Full Moon Hike
- 02/24/19 6:45PM Astronomy Talk
- 03/09/19 10AM Liberty Wildlife
- 03/13/19 7PM Astronomy Talk
- 03/20/19 7PM Full Moon Hike
- 03/23/19 10AM Pat Rickard, flute player
- 04/05/19 7PM Astronomy Talk
- 04/06/19 10AM Wild at Heart
- 04/19/19 7:15PM Full Moon Hike
- 04/20/19 10AM Phoenix Herpetological Society

\*Reservations are required a week ahead of time for full moon hikes, two weeks for astronomy. Weekend 10:00 am programs and native food presentations do not require reservations. Astronomy Participants must be 8 year of age or older to attend. Please call the Park's main number at 480-312-0990 for more information, or to make your reservation. Pinnacle Peak Park is located at 26802 N. 102nd Way, Scottsdale 85262.



**This Newsletter is published by  
the Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park  
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