

History of the Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society

A cactus club was the dream of “Cactus John” Haage, Curator of Plants at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson, Arizona. His position at the Museum provided him with an opportunity to talk with many local visitors. They convinced him in 1960 to advertise in the local newspaper and invite the public interested in cacti to a meeting at his home on November 13, 1960. So many people attended that there was standing room only for the first organizational meeting of the Tucson Cactus Club.

“Cactus John” explained the objective of the meeting was to form a club that would entail reading sessions, discussion groups, and field trips. This club, organized among amateur and advanced hobbyists and collectors would promote interest in cacti, succulents, and other desert plants. In addition, the club would use its influence with local, state, and federal governments to pass necessary legislation for the conservation of native desert plants wherever they grow. In June of 1962, the club was incorporated as the Tucson Cactus and Botanical Society (TCBS) with a membership of 150 and began publishing its quarterly bulletin, the *Cactus Capitol Chatter*, in February of 1965. In addition to its monthly meetings, the TCBS hosted cactus and succulent sales and shows in Tucson to further its goals of education and conservation. A Holiday Party in December became a Society fixture as a means of recognizing individual contributions during the past year and to announce new officers and board members for the next year.

In May of 1965, the TCBS co-hosted with Phoenix its first National CSSA Convention. As part of this convention, the “Haag Memorial Cactus Garden” at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum was dedicated. This garden was built by volunteers from TCBS who contributed over 2,000 hours of work to honor its founder and to be a source of lasting pleasure and education to generations of visitors to the museum. The TCBS hosted its second CSSA National Convention in 1977 and repeated in 1995, and 2009. In 1989, the Society was renamed the Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society (TCSS), and its bulletin, the *Desert Breeze*, is published monthly. After the 1995 convention, the TCSS decided to host a biennial Sonoran Conference in the spring of even numbered years. The conferences have a Sonoran Desert related theme and includes lectures, workshops, and a show and sale of cacti and succulents. Sonoran XI was held in April 2016, and Sonoran XII is planned for April 27-29, 2018.

In 1999, as part of TCSS's commitment to conservation, the Society developed a rescue program for native plants that would be destroyed by development. By the end of 2016, this highly successful rescue program has rescued 78,695 plants through cooperative efforts with land developers, the mining industry, governments, and other organizations. The public sale of these plants has enabled the TCSS to fund K-12 educational grants, other educational activities, and research grants. Our rescue program strictly follows State of Arizona regulations on the removal of desert plants with each rescued plant being tagged with a permit purchased from the State authorizing its removal.

In August 2011, TCSS entered into an agreement with Pima County (where Tucson is located) to develop a former landfill into a new County park to highlight native *Opuntias* (prickly pear and cholla) and many other genera. With its grand opening in September 2012, the new 7.5 acre Pima Prickly Park was opened to the public from sunrise to sunset. With features such as an Entrance Garden, a Cholla Maze, Saguarohege, an Agave Garden, and a Hummingbird and Butterfly Garden, the Park has transformed an eyesore into a destination for education and an example of what a public/private partnership can accomplish. Native wildlife have also re-discovered the area with visits from owls and bobcats in addition to the ever present pack rats and an occasional rattlesnake.

The TCSS Board of Directors was approached in early 2013 by a few TCSS members with a proposal to underwrite the publication of a new field guide to cacti and succulents in Arizona. The Board agreed with the future authors that such a field guide was greatly needed and accepted their proposal for TCSS to support the preparation and publication of the book. All documentation and photography was provided by TCSS members who traveled all over the state to capture and document these wonderful plants. The Field **Guide to Cacti & Other Succulents of Arizona** was published in January 2015 with an initial printing of 2,500 copies and provides a much needed update of the current taxonomy, distribution, and status of native Arizona cactus and succulents. A second edition which includes a newly discovered cactus in Arizona was released in January 2017.

For more than 55 years, the Tucson Cactus Club, the Tucson Cactus and Botanical Society, and now the Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society have consistently followed their chartered purpose of aiding the protection and conservation of native flora of Arizona, studying and advancing the knowledge of succulent plants found throughout the world, and educating Arizona's citizens on the wonders of the Sonoran Desert. Our membership has climbed throughout the years with 1146 TCSS members at the end of 2016. Our goal is to continue to grow and spread the word that Tucson is the "Cactus Capitol of the United States" (CSSA Journal, May and June 1957).