

Friends of Whitfield

Fall 2021 Vol. 12 No. 3

Newsletter



Johnny Chavez

Wonders of Whitfield

CALENDAR

**Friends of Whitfield
Monthly Board Meetings**
2nd Saturday of each
month - 10AM:
All are welcome!

Belen Marsh Cleanup
Saturday, Oct. 30
9 AM to 12 PM

**Volunteer Opportunity
and Orientation Meeting**
Saturday, Nov. 13
9 to 10 AM

**Whitfield 12th Birthday
Celebration and Annual
Meeting**
Saturday, December 4,
2021 - 10 AM

**For Information:
(505) 864-8914**



President's Message By Eileen Beaulieu Friends of Whitfield Board

Fall is here and the Whitfield Friends have several activities planned. First on our agenda is to solicit artists in our community to paint the Aldo Leopold benches. Through the volunteer efforts of Tom VerEeck and Chris Gorbach six beautiful benches have been provided to the Friends. The benches are unpainted. We are now soliciting for volunteers to help turn them into works of art that can be auctioned as part of our fundraiser in the Spring. You can read more about the benches in the following article.

Due to a reduced staff at the Whitfield, more volunteers are needed to ensure we continue to maintain this beautiful place. We are going to begin to put a special emphasis on building a stronger Volunteer Program. Frank Mazza, one of our newest Board members, has agreed to become the Volunteer Coordinator. He has written an important article on this issue to provide more information about his plans for this Program.

We would like to recognize the Central New Mexico Audubon Society who provided us with several funding grants that have been used to support our environmental education initiatives. They seem to always come through when we least expect funding and continue to help us in our efforts to support Valencia County's school children.

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President's Message

Continued

The Fall newsletter will be the last edition Dolores Varela-Phillips will develop and deliver for us. Dolores has been a volunteer on the Board for over ten years. She feels it is now time to pass the mantel so she can spend more time doing other things of interest. The article about her in this issue tells you more about this amazing volunteer and environmentalist. She has truly made an impact in education and environmental preservation.

We are proud to announce, through generous donations to the Friends, we have been able to support a part-time position helping the environmental education programs. Her name is Natalie Duncan. We are so happy to welcome her to the Whitfield team.

An important date to put on your calendar is Saturday, December 4. The Friends will be holding a combined twelfth WWCA Birthday and Annual meeting. Plans are to hold the event outdoors where a tent will be erected for the event. We tentatively scheduled Sandra Noll and Erv Nicholson to present Crane Basics. All our Friends members are invited to come and listen to the presentation and enjoy birthday cake.

On October 30 from 9:00 to 12:00 the Friends are invited to participate in the Belen Marsh and Don Felipe Road cleanup in Belen. Volunteers will be provided with trash bags, safety vests, gloves, snacks, and water. Due to Covid the area has not been cleaned in over two years. The activity is being sponsored by the Central New Mexico Audubon Society. **Hope to see you all at these events.**



Volunteers Needed

Frank Mazza, Volunteer Coordinator

The Friends of Whitfield, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the Whitfield Conservation Area Complex by promoting habitat restoration, education and conservation, has been confronted with huge question during the Covid pandemic and its resulting roller coaster ride:

What does volunteerism look like going forward?

This isn't a question unique to our organization. All volunteer organizations have had to confront this new reality. And as the recently elected Volunteer Coordinator, I've been pondering this question and several others. I'd like to hear your thoughts and suggestions. We want volunteering to work for you. In addition, we want the Friends of Whitfield to be your organization. You can contact me at: fmazza@live.com or 802-772-5320.

I'm also scheduling a volunteer orientation meeting at Whitfield Conservation Area on Saturday, November 13 from 9:00 – 10:00 to discuss volunteer opportunities.

What are some of those opportunities? We have fund raising activities and environment related projects. Under the first category we held a very successful online auction in the spring that raised over \$3000 for the education programs at Whitfield and in area elementary schools. It was held in conjunction with a Science Fiesta weekend at Whitfield where we also manned a Friends booth. Soliciting auction items from local merchants requires volunteers as does publicity. We could hold other fund raising events depending on how Covid progresses and volunteer interest. Examples of environment related activities include maintaining/weeding the cactus garden at Whitfield and the garden in front of the center.

A project could include removing invasive species in the conservation area. In years past we've provided a person called an Ambassador who greeted the public and answered questions from a desk at the center. We've had volunteers participate in citizen scientist type projects, **continued p. 3**



Volunteer Opportunities

Continued

specifically one related to water quality measurements from wells at the conservation area. We have our annual meeting on Saturday, December 4, and will need volunteers to help on that day for approximately 2 hours. We'd also would like to see if there's interest in a monthly clean up/special projects day at the center, perhaps on a Saturday morning.

These are example of activities that have happened or are continuing to occur. The list isn't all inclusive nor does it limit other possibilities. Training and support is provided. The important thing is to be involved in an activity you enjoy and that supports the mission of the Friends. There are no minimum or maximum hours that are expected of you. Every hour you provide is a gift that will be much appreciated.



Leopold Benches Need your Artistic Talents

The Friends of Whitfield are asking for volunteer artists to give of their time and talent to paint the Aldo Leopold benches. Six benches have been built and donated to the Friends. The painted benches will be used as part of our annual online fundraiser in April. If you are interested in painting one of the benches please contact Erika Novich at erikanovich@gmail.com or by phone at 505 859-5909.

Artists painting the benches will have until March 1, 2022 to paint them and return them to the Whitfield. The benches which weight approximately 40 pounds can be picked up at the Whitfield or delivered to your home. Completed benches can also be picked up and brought back to the Whitfield.

Belen Marsh Cleanup

It has been almost two years since Don Felipe Road and the Belen Marsh were cleaned (trash pickup). On Saturday, October 30th from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a cleanup of Don Felipe Road and the Belen Marsh has been scheduled. Please come help make this wonderful place clean again. Volunteers will be provided with safety vests, trash bags, gloves, water and snacks. All you have to do is come by and help make a difference. The effort is being sponsored by the Central New Mexico Audubon Society. The Marsh is adjacent to the Taco Bell across from WalMart in Belen. Contact Eileen at: eluciard@comcast.net

Our issue this month features an important volunteer and someone who will be saying goodbye to her Whitfield Friends to spend time on other endeavors.

This month we have chosen to highlight **Dolores Varela-Phillips**. Dolores has been a Whitfield volunteer for over ten years. She first began her service as the Friends treasurer where she spent six years ensuring our fiscal accountability. When she transitioned out of this position after serving her full allowed tenure, she became our communications and membership manager. She has served in this capacity for five years. Dolores was responsible for ensuring our newsletter being delivered on a quarterly basis to Friends members. She will be sincerely missed as we find new volunteers to fill her shoes.

Dolores retired from Albuquerque Public Schools after 32 years as an elementary teacher. She used the environment as her curriculum theme. Her crowning achievement was spearheading the creation of an 5 acre outdoor learning laboratory at Los Padillas Elementary School called the Los Padillas Wildlife Sanctuary. In addition, she wrote and secured a \$150,000 five year grant to train the staff in the use of this facility.

It was after retirement that she put her talents to work at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. Here she spent five years as an educator and conducting antelope research by monitoring herds on the refuge.

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Dolores was born in New Jersey and her husband, Clyde, was born and raised in New Mexico. He is a graduate of Valley High School. They love traveling. In the past twenty years they have visited every state in the Union except Florida. Camping at least four times a year is also one of their joys. Dolores says Alaska is one of their favorite places having been there twice and planning for another trip in the future. Although she claims to be a homebody, she often invites her very large family to visit her beautiful home. She says that "We are quite unassuming people who enjoy our 20 bosque acres".



Spending time at home for the past six years she and her husband have turned their twenty-acre homestead, which is adjacent to the Rio Grande, into a wildlife sanctuary. They used a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners in Wildlife program to embellish the area with a pond and native vegetation. They also cleared for a defensible space around their home to prevent it from being burned should there be a fire. They have five trail cameras throughout the property and to date have seen elk, deer, bobcats, mountain lions, javelins, coyotes, raccoons, turkeys and squirrels. Her home is in Socorro County approximately ten miles south of Belen. In addition to being recognized as a wildlife sanctuary, their home was awarded the designation by the National Audubon Society as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat. Dolores is very proud of the plaque they received for this recognition. When not volunteering for the Whitfield or tending to her twenty-acres, Dolores also likes to dabble in wildlife photography, bird watching and, in the past, dog agility competitions.

We will miss all the support Dolores provides us but know that now it is time for her to spend more time doing the above activities. Dolores states, "It is time to make a few changes since I turned 80 this year".

Welcome Ms. Natalie Duncan to Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District!

For VSWCD's new Educational Assistant, **Natalie Duncan**, environmental education is all about interconnection. Lessons of the world's interconnectedness have followed her throughout her life, from being a child singing about how "bugs don't bug us" at the Audubon Society in her home-state of New Hampshire to being a UNM student learning about NM's landscapes and cultures through nature writing.

She is looking forward to getting to know our communities better not only by helping with our environmental education programs, but also by meeting and supporting local farmers, artists, and other producers.

Working alongside Allison Martin, Education Program Manager for VSWCD, Natalie is excited to help learners of all ages see the complexities of the beautiful and storied land at Whitfield and other VSWCD sites. She wants to help create initiatives that embed practices of environmental education in our local schools and develop interpretive materials at Whitfield to encourage visitors to maximize their understanding of and appreciation for the land.

Natalie is extremely grateful to the Friends of Whitfield for their sponsorship of her position, and for the opportunity to learn from the people and land of VSWCD over the next nine months.



Pathway to Stewardship Project: Why is Outdoor Learning Important By Allison Martin

The Pathway to Stewardship project was a fun and exciting time for me this summer. From June to August of 2021, I put together a multiple fieldtrip experience for 20 local youth to enhance curiosity, excitement and critical thinking skills relating to the local environmental needs in our community. We put together a video to capture the experience for anyone to watch. You can find it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRot6dRaPvk&t=1s>

The project ended with a restoration planting at Whitfield. The students were overjoyed in all that they have learned and how that learning transpired into connections with others about nature and how important it was to connect with the outdoors. One of the questions we asked them was, "Why is outdoor learning important?" Here are some of their answers. "Because it saves some plants and animals." "Because nature is important." "Because when you understand it, you want to help it." "Because then our brains can grow as well."



Student using the Groasis waterbox during the restoration planting at Whitfield

How to participate in environmental education programs:

Free programs grades K-12th grade are available all year long. Learn about and sign up for our programs here:

<https://www.valenciaswcd.org/education-programs/>

Nature based resource grants are available for all local public schools for up to \$1000 of materials per school. Available until funds run out! Learn more and apply here:

<https://www.valenciaswcd.org/education-programs/outdoor-learning-grant-opportunity-2021-2022/>

We were so excited to have had our first local school visit in over a year to Whitfield on September 22nd. HT Jaramillo's third graders visited Whitfield and learned about the local plant and animal habitats.



Friends of Whitfield Board of Directors friendsofwhitfield@gmail.com

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Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area
is located at:
2424 Hwy 47, Belen, NM
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