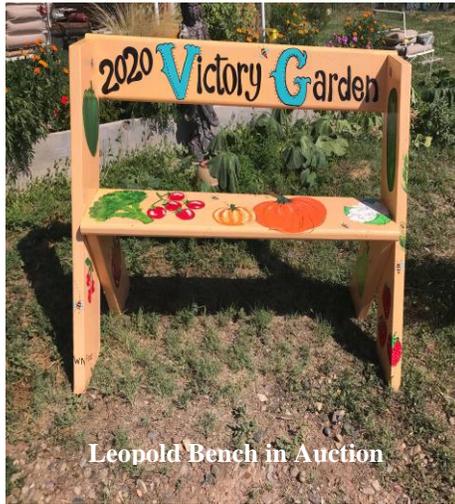


Friends of Whitfield

Newsletter



Leopold Bench in Auction



Bosque Resident



President's Message Eileen Beaulieu, President Friends of Whitfield Board

My message this month will be short as the Friends will be on a summer schedule. We must consider our Board's summer activities which may include vacations and personal time off. The Board, however, will continue to meet on the second Saturday of every month at 10:00 a.m. at the Whitfield Education Building. Please feel free to join us as we welcome visitors and potential new members. The Board will have a new opening for Vice President starting in July. Our plans are to open the position to interested Board members as well as any interested Friends member.

The Friends participated in the Earth Day and Nature Challenge that took place April 30-May 3. There were over 500 visitors that came to participate and visit Whitfield that weekend. It was rewarding to see the number of children and their parents who came out to see what the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area is all about.

We had a terrific auction! You will read more about it in this edition of the newsletter. The event raised over \$3,000. It was such a success that plans are to make it an annual event. We have requested that Tom build us a new set of Leopold benches that once again may be distributed to interested artists and volunteers to paint. The raw benches will be ready in the September time frame. Our intention is to have them ready to put up for auction in April 2022. If you are interested in painting a bench, please contact me at eluciard@comcast.net or 505 249-7929.

In this month's newsletter we are highlighting two people who have made a difference at Whitfield through their volunteer efforts. They are Tom and Robin VerEeke. The Whitfield continues to be an important education and conservation area thanks to their volunteer efforts.

As far as our activities in the next couple of months, we shall hold a program review and determine our priorities for projects over the next year. Plans are to hold our annual meeting in the Fall as our Board should be back together again.

Wishing you a safe summer and looking forward to seeing you at the Whitfield.



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**Our Featured Whitfield Volunteers
Tom And Robin VerEecke**

This will be the first of an ongoing series highlighting Whitfield volunteers helping to make a difference at the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area (WWCA).

Tom and Robin VerEecke are originally from New York and California respectively. They are an inspiration as people who have made a difference in our community. Each has been volunteering since they moved to Valencia County over 40 years ago. They originally met while Robin was attending UNM as a Fine Arts major and Tom was constructing homes. After their marriage, they designed and built their home and raised two sons. All this while both held fulltime careers -- Tom as the owner of Sun Shelter Construction and Robin as a teacher in the Los Lunas schools.

Tom and Robin have given back to the community in many ways starting with Robin becoming the director of the nonprofit Terra Bonita organization. The organization's goals were keeping Valencia County clean. Through her efforts, recycling programs were established and she coordinated efforts for volunteers to pick up tons of trash throughout the county. Tom volunteered in youth sports and spent numerous seasons as a referee. He says he has always enjoyed working with youth and especially likes to nurture children's interest and exposure to nature.

After retirement from the Los Lunas School System, Robin was recruited by Molly Madden, one of the original founders of the Whitfield, to help establish a science education program for students K-12. She wrote the initial science education curriculum for first and second grade. The program eventually incorporated all grades and become the precursor to the current education program run by Allison Martin. Robin continues to volunteer and leads student tours which includes field science activities. When not volunteering at the Whitfield, Robin is an avid horseback rider and spends time cultivating her beautiful garden and fruit trees.

Tom was recruited by Robin to work on Whitfield projects. He supports Whitfield wherever he can, but especially likes hands on cactus garden and held two benefit concerts in

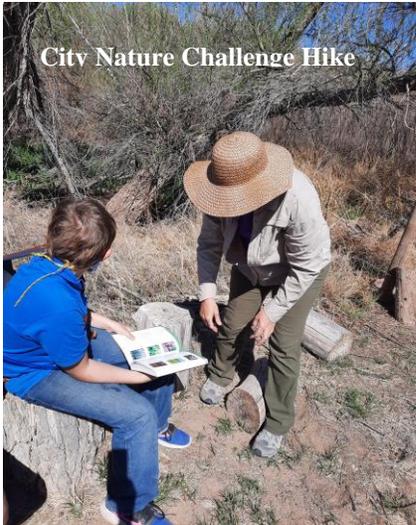


type projects. To date Tom has helped Whitfield build two shade structures, established and landscaped the cactus garden and held two benefit concerts in which his bands have played. Tom also built the sand and track box, as well as many of the Leopold Benches that are auctioned off to raise funds for the Friend's educational activities. In his spare time, he plays in two bands "Easily Distracted" and "Rift Valley Ramblers". Robin and Tom enjoy traveling to Oregon, Hawaii, and Arizona to spend time with their families.

Tom and Robin have been instrumental in the cross fertilization of activities with Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation in Oregon where their daughter-in-law Karelia VerEecke is an employee. She has shared her experiences and lessons learned with Allison Martin, Whitfield's Education Manager.

In summary, Whitfield has benefited from all the hard work Robin and Tom have contributed. It is individuals like these two who will leave an indelible legacy on our community.





**A Look Back at 2020-2021 School Year
Allison Martin, Education Manager**

The Whitfield Education Program was able to provide education programs through virtual videos, in person visits, zoom meetings, and webinars to 972 students in Belen, Los Lunas, and Albuquerque areas during this last school year.

Through help with funding from the Friends of Whitfield and the Central New Mexico Audubon Society, I was able to provide four different schools with outdoor resources through the Nature Based Resource Grant. The schools were: Katherine Gallegos Elementary, School of Dreams Academy, H.T. Jaramillo Elementary, and La Merced Elementary. There are still funds available for schools to participate in this grant opportunity. The application can be found here:

<https://www.valenciaswcd.org/education-programs/nature-resource-application-for-educators/>

Education Programs during the Hotter Months

The temperatures have been rising, but I am finding ways to get kids outside in the summer! I am very excited to announce that I will be leading a project with 20 youth over the next several months. They will be learning about the local environment including the importance of restoration, conservation, preservation while getting to plant saplings at Whitfield with their own interpretive sign! Throughout the months of June-August, students will be visiting Whitfield, Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, and Rio Abajo Conservation Area. This Conservation Area is a yet to be restored area of over 150 acres just west of Rio Communities that is owned by the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District. This opportunity was made possible by the Outdoor Equity Grant funds provided by the Economic Development Division. Special shout out to the Friends of Whitfield who provided each student with a water bottle to accompany them on their journey to throughout this project. (continued P.4)

Science Fiesta Participants and Activities

Environmental Education (continued)

I will also be working with the Belen Recreation Center to host two days of programs for 50 students who will be doing several activities relating to the changing Rio Grande landscapes over time.

We are looking to hire an educational assistant for the school year 2021-2022.

Environmental Education focused curriculum is a great way to get students outside and learning while aligning directly to the Next Generation Science Standards. I am looking to expand my Whitfield Education Program to reach more local schools and students in addition to working with other environmental educators across the state for the upcoming school year. Each program I offer will provide at least one classroom and one Whitfield visit for students. **To expand and enhance this program, I am seeking a highly motivated environment-focused Education Assistant to work alongside me to help implement these important programs to our local students and teachers.** This position will be a 20 hour a week commitment over the entire school year (August-May 2022). For more information on the program description and how/when to apply for this position, please email me at allisonmartin@valenciaswcd.org



Friends of Whitfield Water Bottles for the Outdoor Equity Grant 20 youth

Friends of Whitfield Board of Directors friendsofwhitfield@gmail.com

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Vice-President: Vacant

Secretary: Linda Frazer (2021)*
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Treasurer: Beth Crowder (2021)*
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*Term expires

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Member: Frank Mazza (2021)
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Member: Linda Zaragoza (2021)
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Coordinators

Ambassadors: Vacant

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Conservation Program Manager

Vacant

www.whitfieldwildlife.org

Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area is located at:

2424 Hwy 47, Belen, NM
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2021 Friends of Whitfield Online Auction

Our newest members of the Board, Linda Zaragoza and Frank Mazza, began soliciting donations for the Friends of Whitfield fundraising auction in early March and continued for the entire month. Their amazing efforts yielded many items for the auction. They visited over 50 businesses in Belen, Los Lunas, Bosque Farms, and Peralta. Small local business responded well. The auction was held online and went from April 1 to May 4th. The items were available for successful bidders to pick up at the Whitfield Visitors Center.

As collection of items began, Frank and Linda wrote individual thank you letters immediately which included a copy of the Friends of Whitfield IRS non-profit designation. All donated items were brought to the Conservation Center to be photographed and uploaded to the auction website. Our thanks to Allison Martin and Johnny Chavez for their valuable help with this part. They then chose initial bids to get the auction started. Items donated were focused on nature, outdoor activities, conservation, family/kid fun, gardening, tools, and artwork in various forms. Linda and Frank requested donations from local artists who favor nature subjects and/or have been supportive to Whitfield in the past. In addition, included were the beautiful Aldo Leopold benches.

The efforts led to local business being made aware of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area. These valuable connections were established and are so important for community support. Both Linda and Frank feel such positive awareness is vital for Whitfield's future sustainability. The funds raised will be used to support teacher grants, workshops, bus funding, education materials, and other needs at Whitfield.

NEXT COLUMN ARE SOME AUCTION ITEMS

