

Riverside Nature Center: A Valuable Community Asset We All Need to Support

Riverside Nature Center (RNC) has been located at the confluence of Town Creek and the Guadalupe River in Kerrville at 150 Francisco Lemos street for over 25 years. In that time the many native trees and shrubs that were planted have grown into beautiful mature specimens, the 4 acres of grounds have become even more beautiful, the visitor center has been built and remodeled and this valuable community asset is even more important to the community than ever.

Nowhere else in Kerrville can the public visit such a collection of native vegetation and nature-related exhibits as well as find experts to answer all sorts of questions about plants and animals. The benefits the community derives from having RNC can only be appreciated by relating some facts about the center.

On average, every year, over 1000 students from Pre-K through 5th grade attend environmental education programs that combine classroom instruction with hands-on activities. In addition, over 150 families attend several family-oriented programs hosted by RNC.

Last year, over 5,500 visitors signed the visitor book. From my personal observations, I would guess that at least half again that many visit but do not sign the visitor log. Last year RNC was the site of 77 meetings and presentations on various topics (that's one about every 5 days!). And attendees at these meetings are estimated at about 1400, who also do not sign the log book.

RNC is a partner and the host of two native plant sales each year, one in the spring and another in the fall, and each of these events draw an average of about 300 people. Throughout the year, RNC offers a number of adult education presentations, workshops, etc., on a number of nature-related topics.

The arboretum and gardens contain specimens of over 100 species of trees/shrubs and over 250 species of forbs that people can observe close-up and photograph if they wish on the easy trails though the four acres. Birders find species here they may not see in their own yards.

Like most non-profits, RNC could not function without the 100 or so volunteers who put in an average of 4000 hours every year maintaining the grounds and lots of other activities. People wanting to learn more about nature and native plants first hand can volunteer for any of the many tasks at Riverside and learn from experts as well as make new friends.

My thanks to Becky Etzler, Executive Director of RNC, for most of the above information.

The point I want to make, however, is not so much about all the great things that happen at RNC and the many folks that utilize the center every year, but how important this facility is to the greater community, even those folks who have not yet visited there.

The very existence of such a facility is important to our younger generation (and their parents) to help fight the condition of “Nature Deficit Disorder” in which kids today spend almost no time in any natural area or even outdoors and are thus deprived of an essential part of life on earth.

And adult homeowners occasionally need help understanding the natural world around their homes.

It is important to point out that RNC is a local, non-profit organization that does not receive any government funds. So it is totally funded by voluntary donations and membership dues from individuals, businesses and organizations. The funds RNC receives from these sources not only “keep the lights on”, but pay for unexpected expenses just as all of us have to do occasionally. And furthermore, sponsoring and hosting public gatherings and presentations, most of which are free for attendees, also costs money.

Without the support of the Kerrville community, this valuable asset, could not exist.

So I urge all individuals to consider becoming members of RNC, or at least making donations on a regular basis. But I especially urge local business, some of which benefit directly from some of the events which draw out-of-town visitors, to become members. And finally, many organizations benefit from the existence of RNC and should contribute to its upkeep. And of course, philanthropic foundations contributions are especially encouraged.

Donations may be made on the RNC website, www.riversidenaturecenter.org, or in person at RNC or by phone at 257-4837. A new “Partners in Nature” program for businesses will begin this summer and interested businesses can contact Becky Etzler directly at the above phone number.

There is an old cliché that goes, “Give Till it Hurts,” but I would say, Give Because it Feels Good!”

Until next time...

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. Caption: “American beautyberry showing the dramatic, unusual arrangement of purple berries.”