

# Frequently Asked Questions about Tohono Chul Park's Volunteer Program

Volunteers and Docents are at the heart of Tohono Chul Park, an essential part of day-to-day operations. Last year, our Volunteers and Docents contributed over 40,000 hours of service to the Park and its programs — is it any wonder we love our active and vibrant community of over 300 Volunteers and Docents!

Volunteers are active in all areas of the Park. Our Museum Shops and Greenhouse operations are open 7 days a week. On any given day, we may be staffing 20+ volunteer positions — not counting Docent activities and special events. See the job descriptions under **Volunteer Positions** for more information about the daily activities of Volunteers.

In addition to the volunteer needs at the Park, our Docent corps provides visitors with guided tours 7 days a week and community outreach to schools and adult groups. To learn more go to the **Docent Program**.

## What do we expect of prospective Volunteers and Docents?

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## What do we expect of prospective Volunteers and Docents?

- ❖ All active Volunteers and Docents are asked to maintain a current membership in Tohono Chul Park (membership rates begin at \$25/year).
- ❖ New Volunteers are required to attend a four-hour *New Volunteer Orientation* within 3 months of beginning their volunteer service. Prospective Docents must complete an 18-week training course offered on Wednesdays from 9am-4pm beginning the first Wednesday in October and continuing through the end of February.
- ❖ Volunteers and Docents are expected to work 12 hours/month. Volunteers commit to remaining active for at least one year following training, while the active period for Docents is two years following graduation (see the **Docent Program** for more information). During times of peak activity (February through April) and especially as we prepare for major events, volunteers who are able often contribute many more hours.

- ❖ Volunteers must be dependable, meeting scheduled commitments. Most opt for a regular weekly assignment; others elect to be substitutes, remaining “on-call” for openings that occur each month due to illness, vacations, etc. During the summer when visitation slows and many seasonal volunteers have left town, we may consolidate shifts and cut back on certain assignments. We are always willing to accommodate volunteer seasonal travel, vacation, and other scheduling issues.
- ❖ Be proactive! The Volunteer and Docent Coordinators are dealing with literally hundreds of volunteers and schedules that change daily. Schedules for upcoming months are posted in the Shops and the Docent Room — if there are openings you can fill, jump in! If you receive an email asking for help with a project or special event and you are able to assist, jump in! Don’t wait for a personal call and plea for your time. Volunteers (and Docents) who fail to log any hours for six months without an authorized leave of absence will be dropped from the Volunteer program. Volunteer benefits are for active Volunteers only.
- ❖ Volunteers and Docents often make more of a lasting impression on visitors than any other aspect of the Park. Volunteers should be enthusiastic, able to work with others, and willing to treat visitors with courtesy and respect.
- ❖ Keep informed of the activities and events offered at the Park in order to provide guests with current information on ways to make the most of their visits, and to take advantage of them yourself! As a Park member, you will receive the *Desert Corner Journal*, the general membership newsletter, and the weekly e-newsletter, the *Desert Corner Express*. As a Volunteer, you will also receive an e-newsletter of Volunteer and Docent announcements, *Around the Corner*.

### **Are there job descriptions for the Park’s Volunteer Positions?**

#### **General Information**

Volunteers staff a variety of regular, daily operations at the Park. Selection will be based on the availability of position openings and interests. Each person’s abilities will be matched to the needs of the Park and once accepted, volunteers are considered to be an integral part of the Park and its mission. As a volunteer, you are encouraged to try different areas and find those that interest you. Volunteering is a component of lifelong learning, an extension of your social network and a great way to contribute to your community. Studies confirm that people who volunteer are healthier and happier people!

#### **Museum Shops**

Tohono Chul Park has three Museum Shops – **La Galeria** in the Exhibit House, **La Fuente** next door to the Tea Room and **La Entrada**, the garden shop associated with the retail Greenhouse. The three shops each feature different merchandise from the focus on Native American crafts, Day of the Dead folk art and Southwest books in La Galeria to foodstuffs, cookbooks and contemporary ceramics in La Fuente to garden books and tools, hummingbird feeders and outdoor art at La Entrada.

Volunteers interact with the public in a retail setting, assisting staff with duties including Point of Sale (POS) cash registers, stocking, cleaning and displaying merchandise. Of course, the most important aspect of working in the Shops is customer service! Volunteers may also be needed for special craft sales.

The Shops are open daily from 9am to 5pm. Volunteer duty shifts are four hours (9am-1pm / 11am-3pm / 1pm-5pm) and two to three Volunteers are scheduled each day in overlapping shifts. The dress code is business casual.

On-the-job training is provided by the Retail General Manager. Volunteers in the Shops will be supervised by retail staff, including the Retail General Manager and Assistant Manager.

### **Greenhouse**

Tohono Chul Park has two separate Greenhouse operations, retail and propagation and both are great places to learn about native and arid-adapted plants. Volunteers working in the **La Entrada Greenhouse (retail)** interact with the public in a retail setting where customer service is key. In addition to such duties such as watering/fertilizing, stocking, labeling and arranging incoming plants, the number one priority of Volunteers is to assist visitors with plant selection and advice. On-the-job training includes the operation of the Point of Sale (POS) cash register. Volunteers are also actively involved in the Park's bi-annual **Spring/Fall Plant Sales**.

The Greenhouse is open daily from 9am to 5pm, though the first shift begins an hour early to allow for some watering to be done before customers arrive. Volunteer shifts are four hours long (8am-12pm / 9am-1pm / 1-5pm) and four or more Volunteers are scheduled each day. Volunteers are supervised by the Curator of Plants and the Director of General Services.

The **Propagation Greenhouse**, in contrast, is normally closed to the public except during the park's bi-annual Plant Sales (March and October). Volunteers here are engaged in propagating a variety of native plants otherwise not available in local nurseries. Plants raised are offered for sale in the retail Greenhouse and during special sales. Duties include primarily watering/fertilizing, as well as planting/transplanting, pruning, and checking for pests and disease. In addition, Volunteers are actively involved in the preparation and set-up for the **Spring/Fall Plant Sales**.

The Propagation Greenhouse is open daily. While three or more Volunteers are scheduled each day, shifts are flexible and seasonal, since many more hands needed each summer to help with watering. On-the-job training and supervision is provided by the Propagation Assistant and the Curator of Plants.

### **Grounds**

For people who love to work with their hands, there are special Volunteer project areas associated with the care and maintenance of the Park's living plant collections, gardens and public facilities. Some Volunteers have adopted gardens as their calling while others help with building and maintenance projects. Especially helpful are Volunteers with experience in desert gardening or particular skills such as carpentry or painting. Volunteer duty shifts are flexible and seasonal. Volunteers are supervised by the Director of General Services and General Services/Maintenance Staff as required.

### **Exhibit House**

For those who love to meet new people, Volunteers in the Exhibit House staff the reception desk at the entrance to the Exhibit Hall and Gallery. There they welcome guests, answer questions about the Park and specifically the current art exhibits. The Exhibit House reception desk is another point where customer service is vitally important. For many visitors, their most lasting impression of Tohono Chul Park is of the volunteers who assisted them — enthusiasm is infectious! Volunteers in the Exhibit House are expected to keep current with Park activities and events, and attend scheduled orientations on each new exhibit to be better share their knowledge.

Open daily, duty shifts at the reception desk are three hours (10am-1pm / 1pm-4pm) and two volunteers are scheduled each day. On-the-job-training and supervision is provided by the Exhibits Curator and staff. Dress is business casual.

## **Administration**

Administrative Volunteers perform a variety of clerical tasks in the Park's main office. Duties include telephones, mailings, event preparation, etc. While computer skills are not necessary, accuracy, attention to detail and good telephone skills are required. Supporting the Office Manager, primary responsibility is answering the Park's main telephone line, responding to general and specific questions about hours of operation, location and upcoming events, taking reservations for events and transferring calls to appropriate staff.

Open 8am-5pm Monday through Friday, duty shifts in Administration are three to four hours (9am-1pm / 1pm-4pm) and generally two Volunteers are scheduled each week day. On-the-job-training and supervision is provided by the Office Manager.

## **Special Events and Special Assignments**

Tohono Chul Park is a 501c (3) tax-exempt organization dependent on private support from memberships, donations, retail sales, admission and program fees. Special events are essential fund raising tools and a very important part of our outreach to the community. All are staffed by Volunteers.

There are no special skills or qualifications needed to participate in most events. Upcoming events will be announced well in advance to remind volunteers to keep the dates open. As the event approaches, notices and emails are sent listing specific duties and times and inviting volunteers to respond. See below for more information on specific special events.

Volunteers have also been placed in various special assignments because of their previous job experience, training, expertise or interest, assignments that range from phenology studies of plants in the collections to public relations and fund-raising.

### **Spring/Fall Plant Sales**

***When is it?*** The Plant Sale is held twice each year, in April and October. Each sale begins on a Thursday afternoon (open to Members only), and continues on Saturday and Sunday (open to the public).

***What is it?*** The Plant Sales are very important to our fundraising efforts and constitute more than half of the retail Greenhouse budget each year. Held in the Propagation Greenhouse and Maintenance Yard, these sales are one of the ways the Park works to promote the use of water-conserving native and arid-adapted plants in local landscapes. For each sale the Curator of Plants selects a signature native species to feature, one that has been propagated by Park Volunteers. Additional trees, shrubs, annuals, cacti and succulents are purchased from local growers. Attendance is free and open to the public.

***What do volunteers do?*** In the weeks leading up to the Plant Sale, Volunteers are needed to help with preparation and set-up unloading, labeling, displaying and caring for the plants. During the event, knowledgeable Volunteers assist buyers with plant selection and advice. Additional Volunteers greet customers, write up sales tickets, staff cashier tables, help customers load plants, and guide foot traffic.

### **Sonoran Spring Celebration**

***When is it?*** The 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in April following Easter; 5pm-9pm.

***What is it?*** This is the Park's annual gala fund-raising event (formerly known as the Wildflower Festival). The evening includes catered hors d'oeuvres served by some of Tucson's finest

restaurants, live music, silent and live auctions and dinner in the ambience of the Park's many gardens and public spaces.

**What do volunteers do?** Volunteers may be involved in the planning and preparation of the event itself, assisting with ticket sales, restaurant contacts or solicitation of auction donations. Early on the day of the event, Volunteers are on hand to help with set-up and display of silent auction items. During the event itself, Volunteers may serve as greeters, auction assistants, food and beverage servers or cashiers.

### **Night Blooming Cereus/Queen of the Night**

**When is it?** Held sometime between late May and late July, this is one of the Park's signature events and one with no set date. A "Bloom Night" is called when the Curator of Plants judges the potential for the highest number of blooms is greatest.

**What is it?** Tohono Chul Park is home to the largest collection of the Sonoran Desert's native night-blooming cereus cactus (*Peniocereus greggii*) in the world. Looking very much like a dead stick much of the year, once each summer buds appear on the cactus and on one special night open to reveal stunning, white flowers. Known as the "Queen of the Night", the cactus and its flowers are the subject of much history and folklore. This is one of the Park's two free events and is attended by close to 2,000 visitors.

**What do volunteers do?** In the weeks prior to a potential "bloom night", Volunteers make and store luminarias (paper bags filled with sand and outfitted with votive candles) for use on the event night. Once the night is called, Volunteers will position luminarias along the trails leading to the cacti ready to bloom. Once evening falls, it's time to light the luminarias. Other Volunteers are positioned at various locations along the trails to guide and assist visitors, sell cold water and ice cream, or staff the retail Greenhouse which will remain open for the evening.

### **Park After Dark**

**When is it?** A Friday evening in late October; 5pm-8pm.

**What is it?** Park After Dark is our second, annual free event. Family oriented, it is one way of reaching out to the community, inviting them to spend an evening learning about the desert after dark. Each year features activities and performances related to the current art/cultural exhibit as well as live animals like bobcats, owls, reptiles and insects presented by local wildlife rehabilitators. There are craft activities for children and refreshments. From 1,000-2,000 visitors attend this popular event each year.

**What do volunteers do?** In the weeks prior to the event, Volunteers make and store luminarias (paper bags filled with sand and outfitted with votive candles) for use that evening. The day of Park After Dark, Volunteers position luminarias along the trails leading to the various venues that will be in use that night, returning to light them as evening falls. During the event itself, Volunteers may act as greeters, assist with performers or animal demonstrators, supervise children's activities, act as food/beverage servers, direct traffic or staff the Museum Shops and Greenhouse which will remain open for the evening.

### **Holiday Nights**

**When is it?** The Friday and Saturday following Thanksgiving and the first Friday and Saturday of December; 5:30pm-8:30pm.

**What is it?** Transformed by the soft glow of over 500,000 Christmas lights in the trees and pathways lined with luminarias, the Park celebrates the holidays with multiple music venues, seasonal refreshments, and a special ornament show in the Exhibit House. The Museum Shops and Greenhouse are also open for holiday shopping.

**What do volunteers do?** In the weeks prior to the event, Volunteers assist General Services staff in stringing lights in Park trees. They also make and store luminarias (paper bags filled with sand and outfitted with votive candles) for use during the event. The days of Holiday Nights, Volunteers position luminarias along the trails leading to the various venues that will be in use that night, returning to light them as evening falls. During the event itself, Volunteers may act as ticket sellers or greeters, assist with performers, act as food/beverage servers, direct traffic or staff the Museum Shops and Greenhouse which will remain open for the evening.

## **Docent Program**

### **do´ cent n. [L. docens]**

*a knowledgeable guide, especially one who conducts visitors through a museum and delivers a commentary on the exhibitions; a unique individual with a special role to play in a museum setting*

This is how the dictionary defines “docent.” At Tohono Chul Park, we define docents as urban desert interpreters, trained volunteers excited by the rewarding challenge of explaining to visitors the complex interrelationships between the plants, animals, and people of our desert environment, providing accurate information and treating visitors with courtesy and respect. Docents conduct guided tours of the Park, staff investigation stations, and represent the Park in its community outreach to schools, libraries, social groups, and civic organizations. In addition, Docents are actively engaged in the Park’s special events, in particular **Park After Dark** and **Night Blooming Cereus**.

Docent candidates should be dependable and enthusiastic, possess good communications skills, have a strong interest in the Southwest and its natural environment, be physically able to lead tours of the Park grounds and exhibits, and be willing to work with visitors of all ages, especially children.

Prospective Docents are enrolled in an 18-week training course (\$125) which begins the first Wednesday in October; classes meet from 9am-4pm. During the program sessions cover desert ecology and plant identification, geology and archaeology, arthropods, reptiles, birds, mammals, ethnobotany, Arizona history and native peoples, environmental ethics and interpretive methods. Following graduation, Docents are asked to complete 16 hours of continuing education each year — fulfilled through quarterly Docent meetings, orientations, and/or lectures, workshops or field trips.

Docents who successfully complete the training program can opt for a regular weekly schedule of tours, roving and investigation stations, or sign up for private group tours as requested. Additional training is provided for those choosing to become part of the Park’s Outreach program to local schools and libraries.

For many visitors, their most lasting impression of Tohono Chul Park is of the Volunteers who assisted them. Enthusiasm is infectious, and Docents daily demonstrate the Park’s philosophy and purpose. Please consider this opportunity to enrich the lives of others, as well as your own. If you are up to the challenge, all it takes to make a difference is just a few hours a week!

**What's in it for me?**

**Community Involvement** - Volunteers at Tohono Chul Park comprise an active community with diverse interests, and joining this group is often the greatest benefit cited by Park Volunteers. Volunteers and Docents can experience the satisfaction inherent in public service, the reward of service to an organization dedicated to the preservation of a unique environmental setting. The fun and friends they make here keeps them coming back.

**Personal Growth** - The Park offers a chance to celebrate the Sonoran Desert, enriching daily life through a greater understanding and appreciation of the plants, wildlife, peoples and cultures of our region. Lifelong learning abounds with opportunities for participation in a wide variety of orientation/training programs, as well as the Park's public programs — lectures, classes, workshops and travel ed-ventures.

**Awards and Other Incentives** - A Volunteer's commitment in time and expertise does not go unrecognized, and there are certain perks to being a Volunteer or Docent at Tohono Chul Park. Twice a year Volunteers receive a 20% discount in Museum Shops and Greenhouse. Volunteer hours also translate into free guest passes, free or discounted lectures and discounts on workshops and travel. Our annual Volunteer/Docent Appreciation Brunch celebrates the year's achievements and is another way in which the Park says, "Thank you!"

**How do I apply?**

Contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Heather Quinney at 742-6455 ext. 235 or email her at [heatherquinney@tohonochulpark.org](mailto:heatherquinney@tohonochulpark.org). For either the Volunteer or Docent program, you will be asked to complete an application and schedule a private interview before placement.