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### Desert Master Gardeners Transition from a Popular Project—The Braille Institute



Donna Heuslein, a frequent Master Gardener volunteer at the Braille Institute, assisted students in gardening tasks.

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## One Desert Garden-Gate Closes and Another Opens

*Contributed by Mary Ann Egan, Desert UCCE Master Gardener*

“This class and these people rocked my world.” This is how one student in the gardening class offered by Desert Master Gardeners at the Braille Institute in Ranch Mirage summarized her experience. This sentiment was echoed in various ways by other students during the final class held at the Braille Institute on December 9, 2019. The mutual affection, admiration and appreciation between the students and the Master Gardeners in the room could not be missed.

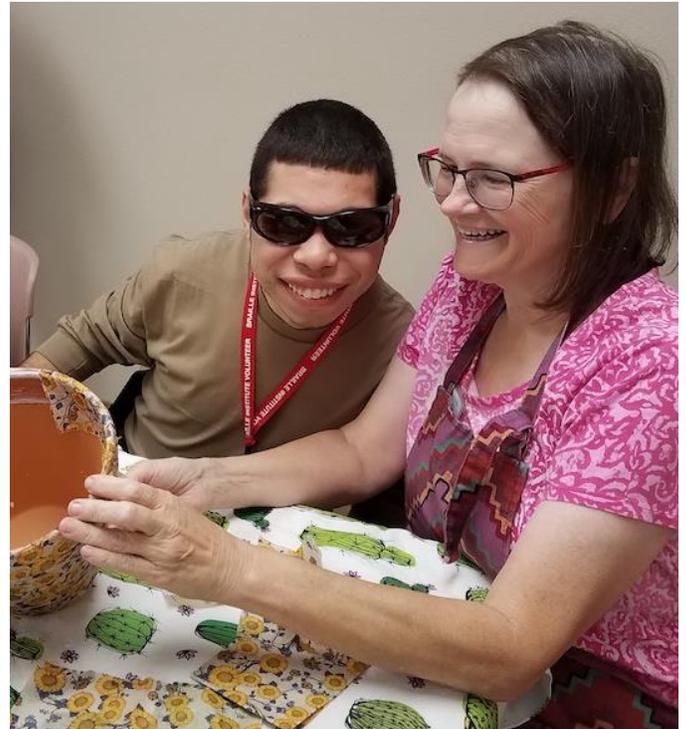
The students spoke about how knowing they could garden has enriched their lives. Even more important, though, was the sense of empowerment gained. One student, Cheryl Cervantes, phrased this as “really vital” because it “helps with healing, knowing that I can do other things.” Another student, Mary Missett, said that the class has been “life-altering.” She said, that after she became blind, not being able to complete

anything was debilitating, and the gardening class allows her to go from start to finish with a project and “makes me feel like a person.” Ninety-two year old Elizabeth Kingsley said that the Braille Institute and the gardening class “saved my life.” Elizabeth’s porch is now abloom with plumeria plants in pots (her “pot plants” as she calls them) and is a show-place for near-by neighbors.

Master Gardeners found an equal life-affirming effect from volunteering for this MG project. Donna Heuslein, a MG who has worked side by side with the students regularly since the project’s inception, said the class and the students have “restored my faith in what I can do.” From MG Tamara Kozma came this observation: “I have been inspired by the students. Coming here has

opened my eyes. I see the can-do-it mentality here and the vast amount of knowledge of the stu-

dents, particularly the older ones.” And from MG Sarah Casarez: Volunteering there on Mondays “shifts my perspective on life. I take that with me all week.” The MGs, like Bernie Rummonds in the photo below, truly enjoyed helping the students.



Master Gardener Barbara Key-Levin was the guiding force for the class’s inception at the Braille Institute in 2016. The dedicated devotion to the project and to the students by Barbara and a substantial number of other MG volunteers has sustained the class’s viability and growth. Barbara told the class at this final meeting “I absolutely adore you.” The students quite obviously feel the same about Barbara and the class. The warm, supportive environment evident in the classroom was an inspiring affirmation about how gardening can be a common ground for bridging gaps in the understanding of the paths that other people may trod.

The Braille Institute in Rancho Mirage is closing its doors as part of a larger re-structure plan. The students in the gardening class were quite worried about what the loss of the facility would mean to them. The facility has functioned as a social gathering place for people who share the experience of being totally or partially blind. The students said that the social connection and the peer support that has been available at the Rancho Mirage facility has been extremely important to them. That loss of the larger support at the Braille Institute is, unfortunately, not something that the Master Gardeners can replace.

But we can always remain open to other ways to serve the public. The opportunity for MG participation at the Braille Institute arose one Saturday morning when Barbara was hosting the Ask-the-Master Gardener Information Table at the Summer Indoor Palm Springs Certified Farmers' Market. One of the counselor-therapists at the Institute who was visiting the Market showed an interest in a gardening initiative to serve students and make use of their green house facility. The situation fulfilled a need of Desert MGs to have a place where they could propagate plants and teach others to do so. As a result of MG volunteering, the Institute won a monetary award from Lowe's to construct raised garden beds and Lowe's even provided labor for the construction.



The final gardening class at the Braille Institute is not the final class of this MG project, however. Barbara is currently arranging for a gardening class for blind and low-vision adults to continue at a senior center in Palm Desert. Hopefully, many of the students in the class will be able to continue to come to the new location, and MGs and the students can continue to share the up-lifting gardening experience. In addition, an opportunity at a local rescue mission may expand the MG's outreach efforts and become a site for plant propagation by MG volunteers and mission clientele.

## Of What Would a Garden Dream

*Contributed by Smoky Zeidel, Desert UCCE Master Gardener Trainee*

I picked the last of the pattypan squash.  
There were five of them; tiny things  
that fit in the palm of my hand.  
Days are too short,  
nights too long and chilly  
for sun- and heat-loving plants  
like amethyst beans and squash.

I turned the soil and mixed in compost.  
Smoothed it with a rake.  
The bed will now sleep through  
winter solstice and the dawning new year.  
It will rest as I savor hot chocolate and dream  
of longer days and warmer nights to come.

Of what would a garden dream?  
I know soil has a consciousness for  
it speaks to me in the language of  
squash and peas and mint.  
It tells me when it needs feeding,  
when it feels thirst.  
I sense when it must rest.

Do not tell me otherwise.  
If you do not understand the language of soil  
you probably haven't listened.

## West County School of the Month— Susan LaVorgna Elementary

*Contributed by Christine Curtis, West County UCCE Master Gardener*

Beginning in June 2017 staff, students, and community volunteers at Susan LaVorgna Elementary School in Temecula began a project to revive the school garden with a school-wide garden clean-up project. In the fall semester that year, the school formed a morning garden club that meets twice a month. Currently, the sixty 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students who love gardening vegetables and herbs are planting onions, vegetable starts, and pea seeds. A school donor recently provided a generous donation and volunteer labor to transform the garden. The efforts included painting beds and structures, weeding, cleaning a walkway, adding soil and compost to the beds, providing flowering plants and grape vines, and putting bark on the ground. For a peak at the results see the photo below.



Lead Master Gardener, Christine Curtis, and MG Volunteers, Janice Rosner and Jane Payne, support school staff (including the Principal, a counselor, and teachers), Temecula Valley Garden Club and Rose Society Volunteers in providing garden education. The sessions this semester include clearing beds and planting vegetables and

herbs, learning about succulents, pruning roses and completing garden-related craft projects with a focus on education. Master gardeners provide demonstrations on subjects such as planting techniques, plant identification, pest management and soil preparation. Water has been an issue at LaVorgna. School maintenance staff has repaired irrigation valves, but the drip system needs to be re-installed. Responsible students have been watering by hand when there is not enough rain.

The garden club students received a blue ribbon at the Temecula Valley Garden Club Flower Show for an education poster describing their garden accomplishments. This project particularly demonstrates the value of networking with school personnel, UCCE Master Gardeners, and community groups to create a viable school garden with meaningful educational programs. The programs in Temecula Valley need more Master Gardener volunteers to assist with school garden clubs. Master Gardeners are invited to help schools in Temecula Valley by signing up on VMS where events are posted.

[Editor's note: In the December issue of *Garden Views* West County MG Jonie Kipling was incorrectly named as a graduate of the Arizona Middle School. Kim Coons-Leonard should have been named.]

**You are invited!**

**County-wide social and potluck**

**March 28, afternoon**

**Banning Women's Club**

**Check VMS for details.**

## Gardening May Be Good for Your Immune System

*Contributed by Ron Jemmerson, Desert UCCE Master Gardener*

A number of years ago, when the World Health Organization developed a peanut-based paste to feed starving children in Africa, there was concern about possible allergic reactions to the peanuts as is frequently observed in developed countries. It turned out that there were none. This led to the idea that an environment rife with microbes, as in the African villages where the children run bare foot in the dirt and play in muddy water, raises the threshold for immune responsiveness. In other words, environmental “cleanliness” in developed countries causes the immune systems of children to react to peanuts as if they pose a danger, while in Africa the children are exposed to so many potentially dangerous particles in the environment that peanuts are no threat.

Now, as reported in “The Scientist,” Jan. 8, 2020, researchers in Finland have obtained evidence that microbes in both the soil and plants to which individuals are exposed help set the threshold for immune responsiveness. After World War II Finland’s side of the border with Russia became more developed than the Russian side which remained largely rural. The researchers found that the incidences of allergies on Finland’s side of the border have increased significantly compared to incidences on the Russian side. Coincidentally, there was greater diversity of bacteria on the skin of Finns along the border, including plant bacteria, than on the skin of Russians on the opposite side. Furthermore, the Finns had higher white blood cell counts indicating heightened immune responsiveness. From all of these findings, it appears that the loss of diversity in the microbiome of developed countries may be to blame for allergies and, perhaps, inflammatory diseases, as well.

One need only search Google for “gardening and health” to see the many ways that interacting with plants or just strolling through a garden can influence health, including relieving depression, lowering heart rate and blood pressure, and reducing levels of stress hormones. This recent report indicates that playing in the soil is not only good for your mental and physical well-being but also improves the health of your immune system.

## Master Gardeners at the Riverside Home and Garden Show

*Contributed by Vern Shattuck, West County UCCE Master Gardener Trainee*

The 2020 Riverside Home and Garden Show was held January 17 - 19 at the Riverside Convention Center. Master Gardeners from both ends of the County were at our information table to answer questions and advise the public about sustainable horticultural practices. Large colorful information posters as well as ollas and hydroponic displays highlighted our information site and impressed many visitors. In addition, several of our MGs presented seminars at the show. On Friday Christine Lampe provided information on gardening for wildlife. Mike Horak gave talks about backyard orchards on Saturday and the Asian Citrus Psyllid and Huanglongbing Citrus Disease and alternatives to citrus on Sunday.



## Desert Help Line Query of Note

*Contributed by Ralph Thompson and Jim Thompson, Desert UCCE Master Gardeners*

[The following is adapted from a recent posting on Collaborative Tools in the ANR portal under "Desert Help Line."]

**Question:** I have two citrus trees that have either a disease, a pest, or both. I am looking for some help on treating the problem. The trees have sap and are losing leaves. Trees are watered twice a day, 4 minutes each set. I apply citrus fertilizer every spring. I will also be sending some pictures. Any help would be great as I would hate to lose our trees.



**Response:** Thank you for contacting us about your ailing citrus. And thank you for providing the photos. Would it be possible to get some photos of the entire tree(s) and the planting area and surroundings?

Here are two immediate thoughts regarding your citrus. You are watering the trees much too often. This time of year citrus should be watered once every week or two with a deep watering. Two four-minute sessions every day is not enough to get deep into the root system but is too much overall. Constant shallow watering will stress

trees and can lead to surface root rot and fungus problems.

Which leads to the second observation; which is that this looks like a case of *Phytophthora* gummosis. The most common cause in a *Phytophthora* spp infection is irrigation practices—over watering, standing water, or poor drainage. The cause and effect are not immediate and bad irrigation practices may have been corrected (and forgotten) before decline occurs. Usually the disease has caused extensive damage to the root system before above-ground damage, as shown in the provided photos, becomes apparent. I cannot tell from the photos but by the time above ground damage is visible the root system may be so compromised that the tree cannot recover.

Below are two links to articles on the UCANR website about the fungus and condition.  
<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/r107100411.html>  
<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/C107/m107bptrunkrootdis.html>

The International Society of Arboricultural is an excellent site to find a certified arborist:  
<http://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist/arboristsearch.aspx>

I hope this has been helpful. Please contact us again if you have further questions.

### Advisory Board Meetings

10 a.m., UCCE Offices

**Desert Area: 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday, Indio**

**West County: 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday,**

**Riverside**

## Honoring Our Platinum Master Gardeners—Pauline Pedigo, Master Gardener Extraordinaire!

*Contributed by Lucy Heyming, West County UCCE Master Gardener*

[This is the second article in the series recognizing our colleagues who have accrued more than 2,500 hours of volunteering.]

Not many of you live across the street from a Master Gardener as I do! And, I have one of the best, Pauline Pedigo. I first noticed her gardening expertise when my husband and I moved to her neighborhood on Crowell Avenue in Riverside. She grew the most amazing giant pumpkins and would display them across her front yard each year. I had to get to know this lady! She admitted that growing these large beauties was a lot of hard work. She was on a first name basis with pumpkin seed growers from all over the United States. She bought seeds from them and also received the inside scoop on successful pumpkin growing. She grew so many pumpkins that she would donate them to charitable causes and give them to people. Later her success at growing pumpkins and other vegetables gave her the confidence to become a Master Gardener, eventually even teaching several classes on how to grow them.



Pauline was born and raised in Riverside. Her early interest in gardening came from visiting her grandparents' alfalfa farm next to Ramona High School in Riverside and from working in a little vegetable garden in her parents' backyard. She remembers how her Mom raised 2000 chickens and would vaccinate them each year.

Toots Bier's "Ask a Master Gardener" column every Saturday in the garden section of the "Press Enterprise" peaked Pauline's desire to become a Master Gardener. Like her pumpkins, a yearning to join the program MG grew. Once she joined the program in 2006, she devoted her time to three main MG projects: the Help Line, the UC Riverside Botanic Gardens, and Grow Lab.

Pauline coordinated the Help Line from 2007 to 2014 (see photo next page). She still goes every Wednesday and when a MG is needed to be there with a trainee. With Pauline, you are not just a colleague or a caller in need of gardening advice, but a friend. One of her favorite things to do with new recruits is to introduce them to the UCCE staff and orient them at the office. Some callers became regulars, looking to her for advice on many gardening problems. Her friendly, supportive training and organizational skills helped build a group of regular volunteers. She worked several days a week and oft times beyond noon to get information to those in need. She has seen many changes over the years. When she started, the main reference material was a cabinet lined with gardening books. Over time that gave way to using the internet. New technology also enhanced her ability to reach more callers' needs through the use of e-mail.

Working at the UCR Botanic Gardens was a thrill for Pauline. At their semi-annual plant sales she was a faithful volunteer at both the Information Table and as Refreshment Coordinator. She loved creating a pleasant atmosphere for volunteers as they lunched in the conference room. She made sure there were flowers on the covered tables and

designed the lovely arrangements herself. Also, she greeted everyone to make them feel at home as volunteers and workers. She was eventually given a badge which said, "Kitchen Mom."



From the inception of the Grow Lab in 2010, Pauline has worked in several capacities: watering, mastering seeds, and creating a composting area with her husband. Often she brought refreshments to share and greeted everyone with a big smile and a hug. No wonder that she has posted 6,056 hours since she became a MG in 2006! Our program is better for Pauline's friendly, caring participation.

Although the name "serrated knife" may be more appropriate, the plant below is called "desert spoon" due to the appearance of the leaves as they connect to the base.



## Roses, Indigenous to the Southwest, Adorn Alters in Worship of La Virgen de Guadalupe

*Contributed by Cristina Acosta, Desert UCCE Master Gardener Trainee*

For hundreds of years the cool pinks of *Rosa Californica* (California wild rose) have graced December 12th altars and processions honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Virgin Mary. According to legend, in 1531 she appeared before a Mexican peasant named Juan Diego and asked for a church to be constructed on that site in her honor. The peasant went to the archbishop of Mexico City who did not believe his story and required proof of the apparition. After several meetings with the apparition Juan was asked by the Virgin to pick Castilian roses from the usually barren meeting site, then the Virgin placed them in his cloak. These roses are native to Spain and would not be growing in Mexico at that time. Furthermore, the hillside had been barren of growth so it was a miracle to obtain these flowers at that site. When Juan returned to the archbishop the roses fell from inside his cloak to the floor leaving on the fabric of the cloak the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In 1859 the Catholic Church declared December 12th to be the Guadalupe's birthday. From that time forward December 12th became a Mexican national holiday.

Our Lady of Solitude Church in Palm Springs is the beginning of the longest December 12th Feast of the Guadalupe procession in the United States. An annual procession celebrating the Virgen de Guadalupe's birthday since December 12, 2000, it criss-crosses 34 miles of city streets and Highway 111. The trek ends at Our Lady of Soledad Catholic Church in Coachella. Before sunrise, at 4 a.m., the pilgrimage was blessed with Mass followed by an hour of birthday songs (Las Mañanitas). By 6:00 a.m. a small group of strong men hoisted the statue onto their shoulders and carried it from the church to the head of the procession. During the



Out of the darkness before the dawn, then into the sunrise, thousands of people of all ages quietly walked through downtown Palm Springs following the Guadalupe. Men, women and children, even babies, strapped to their parent's bodies or in strollers moved at a measured speed of about 2.5 to 3 miles per hour. Many people walked with bouquets of roses, statues of the Virgin, or wore clothing with her image. The quiet crowd of thousands was joyful, meditative, and prayerful for the first 7 miles. Crossing into Cathedral City with the first light of the morning, the song *La Guadalupe* began to play among the crowd and some pilgrims began singing along. The column continued marching, taking a breakfast break in Cathedral City and a lunch break at the Tennis Gardens in Indian Wells before ending at the church in Coachella.

next 10 or 12 hours a variety of people stepped in to share carrying the statue to Coachella. Another statue of the Virgin was positioned on the back of a flatbed pickup truck adorned with floral decorations. Strapped against the cab of the truck, facing towards the back, she watched over the thousands of pilgrims as they gathered behind the truck to begin the orderly march eastward.



This was the second year my husband and I participated in the pilgrimage. We have yet to finish the entire 34 miles. Nonetheless, we love being surrounded by a crowd of thousands focused on love, prayer and peace. There are so many beautiful moments in the procession. People of all ages and abilities are invited to join, even for a short walk. Others support the procession with gifts of water, food, or offers of aid. Next time I'm bringing rose petals and chocolates.

## Janet's Jottings: Use of Organic vs. Inorganic Fertilizers

*Contributed by Janet Hartin, UCCE Master Gardener Program Director*



With gardeners trending toward an enhanced desire to use organic means to grow their vegetables, it's a good time to do what Cooperative Extension does best: present science-backed information on both sides of the issue. While it's clear that Integrated Pest

Management (IPM) measures that stress preventing diseases, insects, and weeds is an environmentally sound practice and that avoiding the use of pesticides in home gardens is prudent, making the case for only using organic nitrogen products is not as cut and dried. Here are some 'talking points' when discussing this sensitive topic with the public.

Amending garden soil with compost and other types of organic matter promotes soil health and can optimize plant growth and productivity. When added in appreciable amounts, these products increase aeration and drainage in heavy clay-based soils and improve the water holding capacity in sandier soils. They also provide valuable organic matter aiding microbial health that in some cases may even ward off diseases. However, these products should not be thought of as fertilizers since their nitrogen content is rarely over one or two percent unless mixed with sewage sludge. In that case the nitrogen level can approach the five percent level. Due to contamination and health issues, home gardeners should not be encouraged to concoct their own sewage-based compost products. They may be obtained at nurseries, box stores, or occasionally

from public works departments or certified compost producers.

Since most vegetables require more nitrogen than is supplied by organic soil amendments like compost, what environmentally friendly options are there to add it? Should gardeners apply only organic fertilizers like kelp, liquid seaweed, and blood meal or venture out into the inorganic world of synthetic products like ammonium sulfate and ammonium nitrate? Major advantages of 'going organic' are that the plant is supplied with a slow even release of nutrients that are not easily leached from the soil. However, some organic products, such as urea, contain very large amounts of nitrogen and can actually contribute to as much, or more, air and water pollution as inorganic products if over applied.

Major advantages of inorganic fertilizers are their lower price and the fact that they come in a wider array of analyses (NPK: nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) that fit the needs of various plants. A major disadvantage is the fast release rates of these products that, when misapplied, can contribute more to water pollution than their organic counterparts. (Keep in mind that there are slow-release versions of inorganic fertilizers, such as Osmocote.)

Do the plants have a preference for nitrogen supplied by organic fertilizers? Since nitrogen from both organic and inorganic fertilizers is usually converted to the nitrate form before taken up by the plant, the answer is no. Nitrogen from organic fertilizers is converted through mineralization. The process is affected by the type of organic matter, microorganism populations, soil temperature (not effective below 40 degrees), moisture, aeration, and type of organic matter.

The bottom line? As with all horticultural practices, following recommended application rates when using organic and inorganic fertilizers is germane to their effectiveness and the health of

the environment. Because mistakes are often made, a greater amount of air and water pollution likely occurs from the overapplications of fast-release forms of inorganic nitrogen than occurs from organic-sourced products.

Happy Gardening! Thanks for spreading the word.

**NEWS! from Rosa**

*Contributed by Rosa Olaiz, UCCE Master Gardener Volunteer Services Coordinator*

Happy New Year!! I hope everyone enjoyed the holidays and you are ready for the upcoming busy season. We have plenty of opportunities to complete the required volunteer hours throughout the county and numerous continuing educational opportunities. Take a moment to check your volunteer hours. The UCCE Master Gardener Program requires veteran Master Gardeners to complete 25 volunteer hours and 12 continuing education hours.

As spring approaches the number of events increases. We start this month with the Riverside County Fair and Date Festival. Contact Mernell Wong who is coordinating the event. She needs volunteers to set up and tear down the event and, of course, volunteers are needed during the fair. Farmers' Markets are a great place to volunteer and there is always a need. Do you enjoy writing? Perhaps you visited a botanical garden so tell us about your adventure by submitting an article to the MG newsletter. Have you read an interesting gardening book, share what you learned.

I challenge each of you to step out of your comfort zone and volunteer in a different project. You may be pleasantly surprised. If you are having



problems completing your volunteer hours contact me to discuss options. Thank you Master Gardeners. Your generous giving of time and talent is what makes our program bloom!

**Phoenix Botanical Garden Revisited**  
(cont'd from "The Back Page")

Last May in *Garden Views* Jan Seaman reported on her visit to the Phoenix Botanical Garden. An unusual feature of the Garden is their evening light show which changes each year. Last year laser lights were used to highlight plants in vivid colors. This year there are larger-than-life sculptures of animals that are lit internally when the sun begins to set as shown in the photos.



**Riverside County Master Gardener Program**

|                                |              |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| UCCE Riverside County Director | Eta Takele   |
| UCCE MG Program Director       | Janet Hartin |
| Volunteer Services Coordinator | Rosa Olaiz   |

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| Desert Farmers' Markets                         | Ron Jemmerson                     |
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| Grow Lab  | Kathy Warner                      |
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| West County Help Line                           | David Brandtman/<br>Nancy Nelson  |
| IT/Website                                      | David Brandtman                   |
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| West County Mentoring Program                   | Juanita Wielenga                  |
| Desert Mentoring Program                        | Curtis Beyer/<br>Ken Niemeyer     |
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| Desert New Projects                             | Carolyn Daniels                   |
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| Desert School Gardens                           | Brad Hardison                     |
| West County Socials                             | Yvonne Wilczynski                 |
| Desert Socials                                  | Kathy Miller                      |
| West County Speakers' Bureau                    | Mike Horak                        |
| Desert Speakers' Bureau                         | Gail Nottberg                     |
| West County Tours                               | Linda Carpenter                   |
| Desert Veterans Events                          | Carolyn Daniels                   |
| West County Training Class                      | Patti Bonowitz                    |
| Desert Training Class                           | Mike Reandeau                     |
| UCR Botanic Gardens                             | Yvonne Wilczynski                 |
| WEL   | Linda Powell                      |
| Desert Workshops                                | Mary Moses                        |

The *Garden Views* Newsletter is published monthly, September through July, by Riverside County UCCE Master Gardeners. All contributors are UCCE Master Gardeners or UCCE Master Gardeners-in-Training.

**Mission Statement**

*Master Gardener Volunteers are trained by the UCCE Advisors, Specialists and other qualified instructors to provide the gardeners of Riverside County with research-based information to promote environmentally responsible and sustainable horticultural practices. Activities of volunteers are solely educational - without inclusion of any purpose or intention of carrying on a business, trade, avocation or profession for profit.*

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**The Back Page**

*Contributed by Ron Jemmerson, Editor*

Anyone who has spent any time in a garden probably has anecdotes about the health benefits of gardening. Scientific evidence in support of this continues to mount (see P. 5). When we help others resolve their gardening issues we are having a greater impact than just improving their gardening skills or advancing knowledge— we are impacting their well-being, as well as our own. MG volunteers at the Braille Institute know this well as the testimonials in our cover story attest (P. 2). Who has not felt elevated in spirit when meandering through a garden or hiking in a nature preserve? There are several MG-affiliated docent programs such as the Coachella Valley Preserve and the botanical gardens at Moorten's in Palm Springs and UCR in Riverside that MGs can visit for their own well-being and for continuing education. Also, MGs often submit articles to this newsletter describing a garden venue they have visited. Early in January on a trip to Arizona I was inspired by a report in an earlier issue of *Garden Views* about the Phoenix Botanic Garden to include a visit there (see P. 11). It was more than I expected. I hope MGs are also inspired to visit these gardening venues and, perhaps, write about it in this newsletter.