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NEIGHBORS

Grants nurture native seed and plant projects at Mesa Community College

Cities of Mesa, Apache Junction want to work with MCC on future programs



Mesa Community College student Barbara Kuffour collects seeds in the Tonto National Forest. MCC

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A seed collection strategy is to attach small mesh bags to immature seed pods so, as they mature, seeds are captured rather than be carried away by the wind or small mammals.

MCC

An Arizona Lottery Gives Back Grant sprouted a seed project at Mesa Community College, which has spread its wings to engage students, nurture a butterfly initiative and launch native plant programs to benefit students, wildlife and the community.

MCC geography and sustainability professor Niccole Cerveney explains that the \$4,500 Lottery grant provided the roots of the seed project by funding an MCC American Indian Science and Engineering Society project testing soil composition throughout the Dine reservation for its ability to support plant growth, according to a release.

The AISES students were also planting the traditional Three Sisters plants — corn, squash and beans — in the MCC greenhouse.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic paused the project but the remaining grant monies were used to create a 30-plant ethnobotanical garden at the MCC Red Mountain Campus, 7110 E. McKellips Road, renowned for the lush native habitats throughout its 98 acres of Sonoran Desert. The site cultivated with traditional plants is rooted in a sabbatical project by Scottsdale Community College library faculty Danielle Carlock, which was originally designed to distribute free edible plants from a campus garden. With the Arizona Lottery Gives Back Grant funds, it morphed into a native seed collaboration among four Maricopa Community Colleges campuses: MCC, SCC, GateWay Community College and Phoenix College.

Maricopa Native Seed Library

“As urban areas expand, residential gardeners are taking on the role of creating wildlife-supporting habitat. But there are few native seed and plant sources in Maricopa County. The Maricopa Native Seed Library was founded to help the community make the shift to more intentional gardening for wildlife through education and by increasing the availability of native plant seeds,” Carlock, who gathered and directed the collecting of the seeds from around Arizona, said in the release.

A Horizon Grant from Maricopa Center for Learning and Innovation continues cultivating the Maricopa Native Seed Library by engaging students in hands-on education including service learning, civic engagement and undergraduate research.

“Student interns are collecting, growing and preparing seeds to distribute free to the public from the seed library,” Cerveney said in the release. “They are involved in botany field research as well as processing in the lab and preparing products for the public. Plus, they are learning about each of the native plants from this area whose seeds they are collecting. The Red Mountain Campus library is our seed distribution site.”

Monarch Waystations

Another beneficiary of the seed grant is the Monarch at MCC Waystations project. Seeds provided by the library help community members and students plant and grow milkweed on campus and in the community. Milkweed plays a vital role in the life cycle of the monarch butterfly, a pollinator insect famed for its massive, 2,500-mile annual migrations. Plants donated by the Southwest Monarch Study are also developing this program. Danette Turner, MCC Center for Community & Civic Engagement staff on the Red Mountain Campus, is spearheading the waystation project.

“Our goal is not only to get students excited and having activities on campus but being able to take this into the surrounding community and work with municipalities and schools to raise awareness and encourage homeowners and businesses to plant milkweed and native pollinators,” Turner said in the release. “During the Fall 2021 semester, we contacted the city of Mesa Parks and Recreation Department and one of our students took the seed project to 45 K-6, after-school program students at the Jefferson Gym and Recreation Center.”

The MCC student, a biology major, spoke to the young students about monarchs, played games, read stories and demonstrated how to create a seed ball to plant in their own yards. Turner added that the cities of Mesa and Apache Junction have indicated they too want to work with MCC on future programs.

Open to the public, the MCC seed library is within the Red Mountain Campus Library; for information, go to mesacc.libguides.com/redmountain. Call 480-654-7741 to see what seeds are available and the times to pick up the free seed packages.

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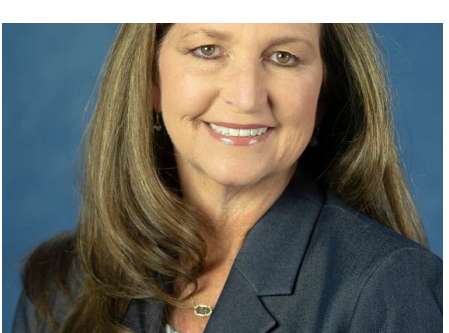
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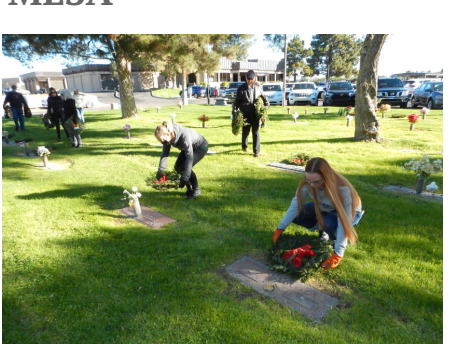


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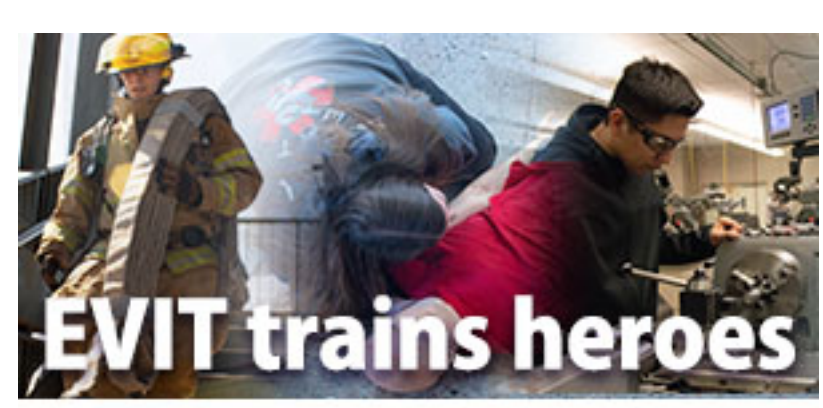
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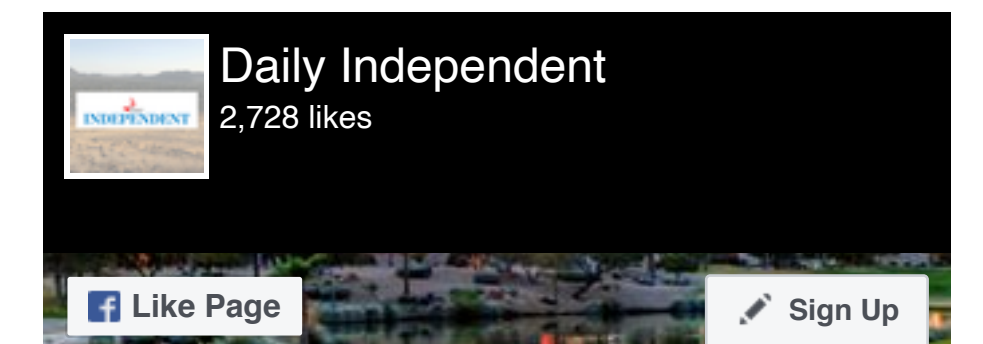


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