

March 23, 2009
Oracle State Park
by Tina Acosta

Topic: State Parks Volunteer Recognition awards

The mission of Arizona State Parks is “Managing and conserving Arizona’s natural, cultural and recreational resources for the benefit of the people both in our parks and through our partners”. These are pretty big goals and entail much work, by more people than the State of Arizona can afford, especially in this current economic climate. Luckily, Arizona is blessed with many people willing to put in numerous volunteer hours to meet our mission. At Oracle State Park, we have the good fortune of many wonderful and hard working volunteers, all of whom deserve to be recognized for their individual contributions.

To show our appreciation for our volunteers and Friends group (a non-profit fund-raising group, which financially supports Oracle State Park (OSP) through materials donations and volunteer hours), we, the staff of OSP, nominated the president of the Friends of Oracle State Park (FOSP), Cindy Krupicka, for Volunteer of the Year (Eastern Region) and the FOSP, for the Best Friends categories in the annual Arizona State Parks Volunteer Recognition awards, held Friday March 20th at Kartchner Caverns State Park. Both Cindy and FOSP won, hands down, in light of their hard work and leadership during these trying times.



Oracle State Park assistant manager Tina Acosta, FOSP past-president Bill John, and FOSP president Cindy Krupicka proudly display the AZ State Parks “Best Friend” award won by the Friends of Oracle State Park on March 20, 2009.

Cindy Krupicka started volunteering at Oracle State Park in 2005, following in the footsteps of her parents; Ray Laase, who fills the watering holes for wildlife, and Nancy Laase, who helps clean the historic Kannally Ranch house and helps as needed with special events. Cindy started as a volunteer gardener, taking over the larger lower gardens as her own. However, she started helping the gardeners on the other levels with their challenges and soon realized that it would be more beneficial to the park and more helpful for them if they worked as a team. Consequently, the gardens were completely transformed over the last two years and are now ready for the educational signage for which they are currently raising funds. At the same time Cindy was growing the garden group, she and her mother Nancy, took on the responsibility of the “hospitality tables” for the FOSP Spring Concert series, which has allowed FOSP to collect hundreds of additional dollars per concert.

Faced with the possible disbanding of the FOSP due to the “retirement” of President Bill John, Cindy stood up to the challenge and was unanimously voted in as new President of FOSP. No more than a month into the position, Cindy was dealt the blow of the possible closure of OSP. She did not skip a beat. She immediately started emailing and calling FOSP members to start a support letter drive to the legislators and accepted the offer from the Oracle Community Center (thank you Julie!) to stage a town meeting. The next day, Cindy and Bill were at the park for an interview and the following day, Cindy picked up Senator Al Melvin, a fellow Saddlebrooke resident, at his house and drove him to the park to give him a personal tour and to sit down with other volunteers and staff to discuss the importance of the park and our educational programs. Then, a couple of days later, Cindy called an emergency FOSP meeting at the park to organize an intensive letter campaign to the State Parks Board. In addition to all this, Cindy started a calendar of volunteers to man the gatehouse every weekend, to ensure we were counting every visitor to the park and collecting every possible dollar. Cindy has been tireless in her quest to do whatever was necessary to keep the park open. She went from a hard-working garden volunteer who organizes a mean (beautiful) hospitality table, to overseeing an organization of over 80 members and, in crisis mode, was able to drum up more support for our small little rural park than most any other park in the State! This dedication and determination deserves recognition. Congratulations to Cindy Krupicka, Arizona State Parks Volunteer of the Eastern Region!

The Friends of Oracle State Park started in 1995, by volunteers of the park who were frustrated at not having the materials needed to complete the projects they were working on. This small group decided to form a non-profit fund-raising organization for this very basic purpose.

Over the years, the needs of the park have grown, and so has the Friends group. Now over 80 members strong, FOSP has raised just over \$40,000, most of which they had hoped to use in the construction of handicap accessible composting toilets at the Kannally Ranch House. However, in light of the current threat of closure of the park, the FOSP members voted unanimously to propose using those hard-earned funds to help keep the park open and staffed. They worked many long hours to draft the proposal and marketing plan, which was sent to Executive Staff in Phoenix.

The staff at Oracle State Park are very proud to have one of the most dynamic, as well as the FIRST, Friends groups in Arizona State Parks. They have been loyal and hard working and a huge benefit to our park. Congratulations to the Friends of Oracle State Park, recipients of the Arizona State Parks Best Friend Award, from the bottom of our hearts (and our budget!).