

# The Groves Report

April 2016



Visitors to Falcon Field's open house watch as one of the vintage airplanes takes off

## Expansion set in motion for Greenfield Water Reclamation Plant

By Steven Solomon

Countless cars drive by it on the way to the nearby Gilbert Soccer Complex, the occupants not giving a second thought to the iconic egg-shaped domes that have defined its presence since it opened nine years ago. But big things are in store for the Greenfield Water Reclamation Plant, jointly owned by the City of Mesa, Town of Gilbert and Town of Queen Creek, located at 4400 S. Greenfield Rd. in Gilbert.

A \$1.2 million contract has been awarded to the Southwest division of McCarthy Building Companies for pre-construction services, which will be followed by an expansion project costing between \$145 million and \$165



The egg-shaped water reclamation plant on Greenfield Road will double its capacity after the expansion.

million to nearly double the plant's capacity. McCarthy constructed the original plant in a joint venture with Sundt Construction.

"The plant is nearing its treatment ...continues on page 13

## MCC's wildlife habitat thrives, receives certification

By Scott Shumaker

The Mesa Community College's Red Mountain campus has earned a Wildlife Habitat Certification from the National Wildlife Certification for its efforts in housing threatened native species in an outdoor water feature on campus.

The certification, announced in early March, encourages organizations and individuals to create wildlife-friendly landscapes with native plants.

In 2010, Mesa Community College's Red Mountain campus was entrusted by the Phoenix Zoo and Arizona Game and Fish Department to house threatened native species, including the mud turtle, desert



A chuckwalla, a native species that calls the MCC campus home, perches on a sunny rock.

tortoise, lowland leopard frog and various fish species.

These species not only have thrived in an outdoor water feature that ...continues on page 16

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**Habitat**  
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MCC faculty and staff observe wildlife inside one of the campus wildlife habitats. Pictured are front row from left, Darrell Woolf, Kyra Perry, Dr. Andrew Holycross, and back row from left, Dr. Dennis Wilson, Emily Dimson, Liz Csikar and Dr. Alex Cheraske.

mimics a desert cienega, or wetland, but also successfully bred on MCC's campus—some too much, according to Emily Dimson, MCC's science lab coordinator.

"We put a stop to the [desert tortoise] breeding because there was too much breeding going on," Dimson said. "They are quite content and prospering."

In a prepared statement, the National Wildlife Federation praised "the efforts of MCC-Red Mountain to create a garden space that improves habitat for birds, butterflies, frogs and other wildlife by providing essential elements needed by all wildlife—natural food sources, clean water, cover and places to raise young."

Preserving native habitat always was a priority for the college, Dimson said. "When we built this campus there was a commitment to preserve as much of the surrounding desert as possible," said Dimson.

In 2010, the college decided to convert a rain-collecting depression on campus into a native species wetland. According to Andrew Holycross, a professor of biology at MCC, the depression contributed little to campus before the wetland.

"All the [water] runoff from much of the campus...went into that depression, and it would sit there as standing water for long periods of time," he said. "We really couldn't get much to grow in there because there aren't many plants that are adapted for [an environment of] soaking wet, bone dry, soaking wet, bone dry."

The cienega installed in 2010 solved the standing water problem by creating a naturally draining wetland surrounding by native plant species.

According to Holycross, the cienega does exactly what the NWF's certification designation

aims to promote—provides shelter and habitat for wildlife. The cienega attracts wildlife from a wide area surrounding the campus, Holycross said. Dragonflies, bats, roadrunners, coyotes and even great blue herons visit the campus to take advantage of the cienega.

Besides providing a habitat for native wildlife, MCC's cienega also provides an outdoor classroom for MCC students and a breeding center for state and federal agencies. The campus habitat houses valuable reserve populations that wildlife managers like Arizona Game and Fish can tap if a wild population collapses. This helps threatened species like the lowland leopard frogs to recover. Last week, Dimson discovered that the leopard frogs added to the outdoor cienega in November had already produced eggs.

But the campus habitat is not just for wildlife professionals. Dimson and Holycross are proud of the fact that MCC's cienega provides a place for the public to see native wildlife close up.

"I see moms bringing their kids here to look at stuff just like they'd go to the zoo," said Holycross. "And what's really cool about the cienega is that it's open access...You get to actually go in, be in with the wildlife, walk around the pond and step across the stream. That's different than going, for example, to Phoenix Zoo, where [the wildlife is] on one side of the fence and you're on the other."

Dimson hopes that the efforts of MCC's faculty, staff and administration to create an eco-friendly campus will continue to receive recognition. MCC's cienega is competing for the Maricopa Community College District's Innovation of the Year Award. The winners are expected to be announced soon.