



Tallgrass Gazette

Fall 2005

"The Newsletter for Docents and by Docents"

Graduation With Gusto

By Dr. Valerie Wright

This year's docent trainees are full of enthusiasm and talent. They are one of our largest classes in the last nine years and the only class where so many of them had 100% attendance or have made-up every class that they missed. This kind of group keeps us all excited about our goals for environmental education and the future of the tallgrass prairie.



2005 Docent Class

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Lewis Browder | Nancy Brown |
| Nancy Calhoun | Dru Clarke |
| Larry Cooper | Marcia Cooper |
| Kabita Ghimire | June Hunzeker |
| Tor Janson | Roger Johnson |
| Bill Marshall | Miles McKee |
| Gary Mott | Ann Murphy |
| Karl Noren | Livia Olsen |
| Martin Pankratz | Peggy Potter |
| Jeff Shoop | Bill Wisdom |
| Veronica Taylor | Karla Wisdom |
| Mary Callaghan | Windholz |
| Patty Zehl | |

An audience of 75, one of the largest we have had at graduation, met in the old barn to support our 24 docents-in-training as they graduated on September 24. When they had received their name tags and Konza patches, they were congratulated by Loren Alexander, President of Friends of Konza Prairie, Valerie Wright, Education Coordinator, and Earl Allen, Chair of the Docent Committee. Several of the Class of 2005 are already participating in science activities, workdays and scouting events. From these the Docent Trainee of the Year was named. In fact, there were three of these awards given this year to Miles McKee, Veronica Taylor, and Martin Pankratz. Miles has helped with 12 bison tours, signed up for several more this fall and volunteered to aid Charlie Given in the restoration of the antique harnesses. Veronica took over some of Sue Hunt's weekly duties while Sue was on vacation and helped out at workdays and the burn at Hokanson last spring. Martin stepped into the science activities with gusto before he left for vacation this fall. The FOKP Board with the recommendation of the Membership Committee awarded these Docent Trainees of the Year a gratis membership for 2006 as thanks for their great beginning.

This year's Docent of the Year recognition went to two deserving fellows who give major amounts of their time to KEEP. Jim Morrill volunteered for more activities than anyone this year (a whopping 34!). He also serves on the Friends of Konza Prairie Board. Jim is ready to help with constructive ideas for many projects. Bob Davis is a super volunteer in many of the same ways. He worked with classes on 21 activities this year and serves on the Docent Committee. Both have been out for most workdays, Wildflower Walks, in-service and regular training Saturdays, keeping themselves up to date and knowledgeable. Thank you Jim and Bob!



Earl Allen, Miles McKee, Valerie, Bob Davis and Jim Morrill

(Continued on Page 2.)

The Docent Committee initiated a new recognition group this year. Long-Term Leaders are defined as those volunteers who consistently guided more than ten groups per year for at least five years. Also affectionately called the "Old Faithful Club", these 15 docents could be counted on for many different special events, as well as school and adult groups, workdays, teaching other docents and much more. Some have reached this group from their past work and some are still very active today. They receive a special name tag with the words "Long-Term Leader" emblazoned under their name.



Old Faithful Club

These are the people from 1993 on who have kept KEEP going: Doris Burnett, Chuck Bussing, Myron Calhoun, Gordon Cunningham, Clyde Ferguson, Charlie Given, Chod Hedinger, Hoogy Hoogheem, Ted Hopkins, Sue Hunt, Verlyn Richards, Phoebe Samelson, Wilton Thomas, Van Withee and John Zimmerman. We will add more to this vital group each year.

Trail Improvements on Konza

By Earl Allen

If you have been out to the Konza walking on the nature trail system, you have noticed that there have been improvements made to the trails this summer. If you have not been out in a while, it is time to get out and enjoy a walk with friends or contact Annie to sign up to lead a group.

A high water event earlier this summer washed the bridge across King's Creek from its supports and damaged both the supports and the approaches to the bridge. Heavy wooden posts placed on each end of the bridge improve the support piers of the bridge. The approaches have been built up and leveled out, so now the bridge is more stable and sits about two feet higher than it did prior to this year. The spreading of over three hundred tons of gravel and rock on the Nature Trail will improve the surface during wet weather. A lot of work to improve the drainage of rainfall from the trails surface was also completed.

As Chair of the Facilities Committee of the Friends of Konza Prairie (FOKP) Board of Directors, I found it interesting to learn how our trail system is maintained and improved. Joe Gelroth is responsible for the actual work done on the trails. Many of you know Joe as a fellow docent and as a teacher at Roosevelt Grade School who has participated for many years with his students in the SLTER program. While working with Joe, I learned that before his teaching career he was the first site manager on the Konza Prairie, working back in the days when Dr. Hulbert was the director. He has been familiar with the trail system from its inception. Joe continues to work on the Konza during his summers off from teaching. He divides his time into three sessions, working one session into each of the months of June, July, and August. This allows him to repair some storm damage later in August in case of heavy rains earlier in the summer, as was the case this year.



The Nature Trail

This year the FOKP provided the Facilities Committee with a budget of \$6,000.00. After paying for the rental of the Port-a-Potty that is located next to the headquarters barn, about \$5,500.00 remains for maintenance of the nature trail system. The FOKP contribution pays for Joe's salary, miscellaneous expenses, and the largest expense, which is gravel. The KPBS makes a substantial contribution by furnishing the equipment, fuel, tools and other items. After you look at the results of the summer's work, I think you will conclude that we have an excellent trail system for the money spent. If you would like to fund a special project to improve our trails, please contact a member of the FOKP board with your ideas.

Prairie Patter

by Dr. Valerie Wright, Environmental Educator and Naturalist

Recognition for hours and effort are due every year to our volunteers and staff who make KEEP the excellent program it is and Konza Prairie the valuable resource it is to the world. At graduation the staff of KEEP recognized Dave Hartnett, who has stepped down as Director of Konza Prairie after more than ten years, for his major contribution to the education program, FOKP and Konza Prairie Biological Station. Dave was always ready with a solution to a problem, a quality idea and a readiness to help with docent training and teachers' workshops. He received a small gift from the KEEP staff that anyone young of heart would enjoy, a bobble-head bison. The Friends of Konza Prairie Board presented Dave with an inscribed wooden plaque in the shape of a bison.



After many years of service to FOKP, Jean Hulbert, Faith Roach, Lois Merriman and Jean Craig were given a hearty round of applause for their work on Konza Prairie events including pot-luck dinners, BBQs, and December Holiday gatherings.

A visit from Charles Langford and Jeanie Andrews on September 13 was related to the article about their mother, Virginia Langford, in the September 2005 Bison & Bluestem. Charles and Jeanie were escorted through Headquarters and the Education Center by Loren Alexander, a family friend, and Charlie Given. Charles told us stories from the time he worked at this ranch as a teenager.



Many docents bring their important visitors to Konza for a tour. Recently Liz and Howard Beikman brought out their guests from the City Council of Dobrichovice, the Czech Republic. I especially enjoyed spending some time with them since my father's family was from the same area. Dobrichovice is the sister city of Manhattan, Kansas.

Chuck Bussing brought a guest from the Geography Department, University Distinguished Lecturer Dr. Bill Turner from Clark University. He was accompanied by the new Department Head, Dr. Richard Marston, other faculty and students.

See you all at the Fall Docent Roundup!

Announcements

The Third Annual Fall Docent Roundup and Hokanson Homestead Workday is scheduled for Sunday afternoon, **October 16, from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m.** This is a time for everyone to enjoy a beautiful autumn afternoon with friends, old and new. Bring a lawn chair and just relax or bring work gloves and participate in the list of things to do, including mowing, trimming, cleaning up the Hokanson barn and garden, checking the nest boxes and much, much more! There will be refreshments, including last year's favorite, Chod Hedinger's Camp Fire Cobbler topped with vanilla ice cream.

Tallgrass Gazette Editors:

Gordon Cunningham - cunningham@networksplus.net,
Gerry Snyder - gsnyder@ksu.edu

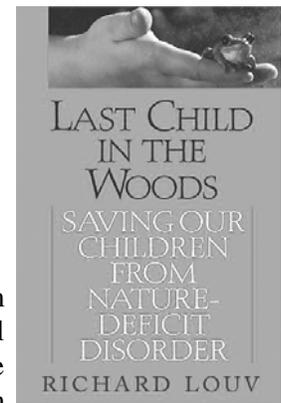
Book Review

By Dru Clarke

Louv, Richard (2005).

Last Child in the Woods. Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder.

Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill



Richard Louv scooped my dissertation research, but I'm glad he did!

Throughout my teaching career, I worried about my students becoming disaffected from the natural world, and worked hard to introduce them to its wonders. In the 1950's Rachel Carson wrote an essay for a popular magazine entitled "Sense of Wonder" and in it, she suggested to parents and caregivers that they take a child into that world and let them discover its subtleties and grandeur. Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods*, thoroughly researched and ringing true in its overt message to re-engage our children in their world - our world - which is becoming background and incidental to our frenetic life styles, is timely in its offering to us and echoes Carson's message of a half century ago. A columnist for the San Diego Union-Tribune, a Brandeis scholar, advisory board member of Parents Magazine and consummate observer of contemporary society, Louv jolts our sensibilities and is insistent that we attend to this crisis of awareness in kids under our tutelage.

He offers persuasive evidence that many of the ills our kids exhibit today may be the result of a lack of opportunity to explore the natural world, to engage with it in spontaneous and unduly supervised play. In place of leisure time spent outdoors in accessible, unmanaged, and naturally 'rough' places, that time is experienced in virtual environments, where excitement, discovery, and interaction occur in a sensory-limiting one, rich in visually and aurally artificial scenarios that require no total kinesthetic engagement: television, video games, m3p players, all experienced in isolation and/or within the comforts of "home." Obesity - fully 33% of our kids - and ADHD - a skyrocketing percentage of kids are being maintained by a pharmacy of mood tamers - are only two of the most obvious and startling of these ills afflicting our kids. Study after study reveals a widespread malaise, a societal depression being treated for symptoms, but not the underlying cause.

Not to be misunderstood, this book refrains from sentimental claptrap that might exhort us to eschew all modern conveniences and return to a more primitive state. Wisely drawing on credible observations and rich research (much of which we know intuitively), he correctly notes: Humans in general affiliate with other living things. E.O. Wilson calls this 'biophilia.' Others broaden the affection to the environments (ecophilia) or the landscapes (topophilia) in which we live and, in earlier times, knew intimately. Today, our culture has spawned barriers to interaction with and understanding of our 'places': technology, cars, asphalt and other impervious surfaces, hermetically sealed buildings and houses, kitsch in place of authentic earth-origin products, and tight schedules are a few of the more insidious ones. Kids know nothing else, and suffer from 'generational amnesia', as do many of their parents.

Louv offers some suggestions that could be viewed as therapeutic for what afflicts us, and, especially our kids. The key one is providing opportunity for our kids to experience some piece of the natural world, be it a vacant weedy lot, the unmowed edge of a playing field, a real prairie or woodland, a slender stream. The suggestions would be fairly simple to implement in our families, but perhaps more difficult to initiate in our public institutions, namely, our schools. But, as we know, it only takes one person to start a cascade that could have rippling benefits. On the local level, a visit to Konza Prairie Biological Station with children would be one example of how to counteract this disaffection.

Anyone who cares about nurturing kids to become future 'keepers' of our planet, either on a global or a local scale, must read this book and take what Richard Louv says to heart. Gandhi, when asked what he was most concerned about in the future, replied, "The hardening of the heart of the educated." This book will help us to avoid that, and to become more eco-centric in our thinking and in the raising up of our kids.

SPOTLIGHT! on Clyde Ferguson *By Annie Baker*

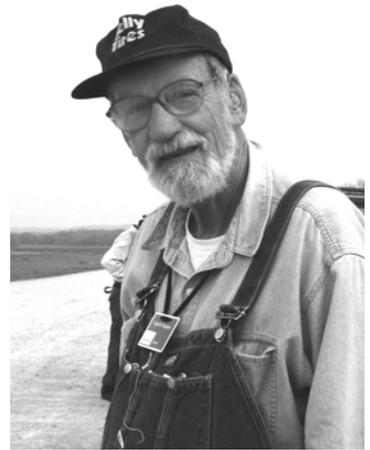
Dr. Clyde Ferguson graduated from the Konza Environmental Education Docent Program in 2000 and has guided over ten groups per year each year since. At Docent Graduation this year, he was one of fifteen docents who were recognized for their dedicated commitment and long-term leadership on Konza Prairie.

Clyde Ferguson grew up in Marlow, Oklahoma. After high school, he earned a Bachelor's from the University of Oklahoma, and his Masters and PhD from Duke University. Also during this time, Clyde was in the Army and served in the Korean War. After college, Clyde worked for Kansas State University from 1960-1992, first as the Home Study Director for the Division of Continuing Education and then for the Department of History. Clyde and wife Lena have three children and five grandchildren.

Clyde became a Konza Prairie docent "to find the names of all those things that the chiggers had been hiding in." He has always liked the outdoors, and as a youth spent as much time as possible fishing and swimming. Clyde's favorite KEEP activities include trail hikes and Schoolyard LTER grasshoppers and stream invertebrates. Although Clyde volunteers with any ages, he especially likes interacting with the young ones. As a docent, he enjoys passing on his knowledge of the prairie to students, and declared "if I could learn anything, maybe I could pass a little of it on." On student behavior, he humorously remarked, "My old sergeant's instincts sometimes come back into play when they don't mind me [on the trail]. I remind them I carry a stick for other things than to boost myself over the hill!"

Clyde is especially interested in and knowledgeable about birds. He is very active in the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, and enjoys bird watching and hunting. Other hobbies include golf, gardening, fishing, and he supposes "eating is also way up there among my extracurricular activities".

Clyde was once idealized by a student who wrote "When I grow up I want to be a docent like Clyde." A wonderful sentiment of a valuable docent!



Dr. Eva Horne, Interim KPBS Director

When Dave Hartnett made the decision to step down as Director of Konza Prairie Biological Station, the search began for a suitable person to replace him. Senior staff were heavily committed to LTER, research and teaching. The Assistant Director of KPBS, Eva Horne, had been in place since 2000. She was a logical choice for the job.

Eva received her Ph.D. from Kansas State University in 1996. Her previous studies had been at East Tennessee State University and the University of Southwestern Louisiana. Her research has been on salamanders, coral reef and fresh water fish, and wood rats. Currently she studies the behavior of lizards, snakes, and frogs. Some of her research projects include mate choice in collared lizards and habitat use of herptofauna of the tallgrass prairie. Her teaching position and the coordination of the Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program for three years have given her a number of students to work with.



Eva's interests outside of work include a fascination with dragons, dogs and cross-stitch designs. She creates her own cross-stitch patterns and has begun to market them. A new camera has brought back her interest in photography.

Why did she take the job? For the challenge and experience, she says. The challenges include writing grant proposals for KPBS, budgeting and learning to be a better politician. Eva hopes to have some influence on the long-term future of KPBS by bringing a balance between the research and conservation uses of the tallgrass prairie, and broadening the higher education use of KPBS with field-based courses during the summer.

When asked what else she would like people to know about her, she quickly responded "I like snakes!"



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Konza Prairie Office
Division of Biology
232 Ackert Hall
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS 66506-4901
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Quality Docents are Key to Konza Prairie Education!



Since 1996 when the Konza Environmental Education Program was initiated, the docents have been an integral part of education about the tallgrass prairie. Since inception of the docent program, 193 volunteers have been trained, 136 of those by Valerie Wright. Our current “active” list of docents numbers 76, but actually about 56 of these have been involved in some KEEP activity. Our experienced docents are extremely valuable. So in an excellent discussion during a recent meeting, the Docent Committee, came up with a plan to help docents keep up to date on Konza Prairie information and at the same time bring some of our less active members back into the KEEP corral.

One aspect of this plan includes a new requirement for experienced (aka “been around a while”) docents to attend at least two in-service trainings and two regularly scheduled trainings of their choice per year plus a field observation session with one of our currently active docents, or during a science activity of their choice. This would allow those docents who have been away from practice awhile to brush up on Konza information and learn some new material of interest to them. It would also assure that the quality of all our docents remains high.

We hope that all of you are taking advantage of your association with Konza Prairie by hiking the trails or enjoying the Bison Loop with guests. But please remember that change is constant and Konza research results, site rules, and general information have changed over the years. You may be giving erroneous information to friends and visitors if you have not been back for updates. Keep your knowledge up to date and relevant. There are lots of new and interesting facts for you to know. Learning about the tallgrass prairie is a life-long experience. Keep yourself on the active docent list.