



Tallgrass Gazette Summer 2010

"The Newsletter for Docents and by Docents"

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By Annie Baker

Welcome to the 31st issue of the Tallgrass Gazette, "The Newsletter for Docents and by Docents." Entering its 11th year of publication, the Gazette continues its original purpose of keeping Konza Prairie Docents informed of ongoing activities and educated about ecological research that would be of interest and useful knowledge for tours.

The brainchild of then Docent Coordinators Phoebe Samelson and Janet Throne, the Tallgrass Gazette was first published in Fall 1999. The inaugural six issues were designed and edited by docents Susan Bale and Tawnya Ernst, and in 2001, docents Gordon Cunningham and Gerry Snyder took over as co-editors. In 2005, Gordon and Gerry earned the Leadership Award for their service. Beginning with this issue, Dennis Toll will replace Gordon as co-editor with Gerry.

The volunteer co-editors have continually produced a top-notch newsletter by always being on the lookout for current research topics and contacting these ecologists, recruiting fellow docents to submit articles or book reviews, and working closely with KEEP staff. Of importance to the success of the Gazette, docents have always been active contributors of articles, photos, and ideas for future issues.

"This newsletter is a very readable blend of information about research on the Konza, people, and networking links. Concise calendar of events is great." Kay Russell

"I always enjoy the Spotlight on docents. It gives me a chance to become better acquainted with the people I work with and, sometimes, to put a face and a name together." Susie Johnson

"I have found the Tallgrass Gazette articles on a wide variety of Konza Prairie topics to be very useful for docent training. The articles are written by specialists in the field and make for very interesting reading." Ted Hopkins

"HATS OFF to Gordon and Gerry for creating an important communications piece for the Docents." Bob Davis

Thank you to its many contributors, who make the Gazette a quality publication!



TGG Fall 2001



TGG Spring 2005



TGG Summer 2008

Beginning with the next issue, in 2011, you will receive this newsletter electronically via e-mail. In addition to saving money and paper, enjoy the Gazette in color! You can always find the Tallgrass Gazette archived on-line, <http://keep.konza.ksu.edu/docents/newsletter.htm>.

If you wish to continue receiving a hard copy of this newsletter by mail, please contact Annie Baker at (785) 587-0381 or by email (keepkonza@ksu.edu) by December 31, 2010.

Prairie Patter

by Dr. Valerie Wright, Environmental Educator and Naturalist

After the Wildflower Walk and Teachers' Workshop in June, we settled into our summer schedule with fewer visitors and more time at the computer. The **Butterfly Workshop** on July 8 entertained 17 enthusiastic participants. In conjunction with NRCS and the North American Butterfly Association, a Manhattan area butterfly count was held on July 14. Before the count, the workshop at Konza Prairie introduced participants to our butterfly collection, field guides and some behavioral characteristics. **Betsy Betros**, author of "Butterflies in the Kansas City Region", was our invited guest. We took cameras, nets and field guides outside for the id experience. The most of any species we saw was the Common Wood Nymph, which, despite its name, is a prairie butterfly, laying its eggs on grasses as host for the larvae.



Thanks to **Joe Gelroth**, who works on Konza in the summer, we now have an extended stone sidewalk to reach the west entrance of the Hulbert Center. Joe laid about 10 feet of limestone in front of the Ordway memorial toward the road where the grass was worn. Where water used to stand, we can walk on dry stone with Buffalo grass growing in the spaces.

Are you ready for September? **Saturdays are scheduled for fall docent training.** Grasses and biomass are the subjects for the 4th. On the 11th it's grasshoppers and galls. We will hike Godwin Hill on the 18th. These are great refresher events to get us all ready for fall classes. **September and October are the busiest months for KEEP school activities, when we need an average of 24 docents per week to staff trail hikes and science activities. We look forward to seeing you on one or more dates. Sign up with Annie soon!**

The Junior Ecologist program on Visitors' Day began as a KEEP 10th anniversary event in 2006. Activities were expanded in 2008 and were quite popular. We handed out more than 100 Junior Ecologist booklets that had children going to different stations and answering questions, even finding a real ecologist to sign for them! Other activities include the **Grasshopper Grab**, where kids net hoppers and add them live to the terrarium displays. Making an estimate of the numbers and kinds of grasshoppers in the terrarium is part of the fun. The **Bison Table** has artifacts like horns, hides and skull with someone to talk to visitors (mostly children) about the bison herd. Remember the bison silhouette made by **Byron and Betty Burlingham**? It will be on the lawn again this year for photographs! If you would like to volunteer for one or more of the 2 hour time slots of children's activities, please contact me and I will sign you up officially. These jobs will also be listed on the Visitors' Day work sheet. There are 20 time slots available. **TGG**



SPOTLIGHT! on Gordon Cunningham

By Annie Baker

Gordon Cunningham graduated from the docent program in 2000, though to many, it seems as if he's been around from the beginning. Integral behind-the-scenes, at age 86, Gordon rarely misses a Hokanson Homestead workday or the chance to man the BBQ grill during social events. At the Stream Geomorphology site, his help is indispensable. He willingly dons the waders and measures points in the deep pool water while guiding students through data collection, and after high water events, working with Myron Calhoun, Clyde Ferguson and Charlie Given, this team rebuilds the foot paths and uses a laser level to reset the transect markers.



During five of his nine years as a docent, Gordon has guided 10 or more groups annually, with a peak of 23 in 2003-2004. In 2003, Gordon earned Docent of the Year recognition, and was named a Long-Term Leader in 2004. Gordon became part of the Quality Docent Program when it was initiated in 2006, and has earned this title every year since (by attending at least two training and two in-service sessions annually). During his time as Tallgrass Gazette co-editor, from 2001-2009, Gordon also served on the Docent Committee.

In 2001, Gordon agreed to co-edit the Tallgrass Gazette newsletter, a natural fit to his 30 plus year career in communications. In 1976, Gordon set out in a VW Beetle with a typewriter, a camera, and an idea, which quickly blossomed into a lifelong career publishing newsletters for Farmers' Cooperative Associations throughout Kansas, and in Colorado, Nebraska, Missouri and Oklahoma. Valuing personal relationships as his business's foundation, Gordon meets with clients face-to-face to brainstorm topics and interview them directly. At the height of his career, Gordon traveled an average of 40,000 miles a year, and with his wife Annie produced 18 to 20 newsletters per month. Only within the last year, have the Cunningham's scaled back to five or fewer newsletters per month.



Upon meeting Gordon at his Docent Orientation, Dr. Valerie Wright recalls his determination, when he said, "I'm going to listen and learn from everything you say." Today, she admits it is she who has learned more from Gordon, about persistence and connecting with people.

Fellow docent and friend Charlie Given sums up Gordon's character perfectly, "When a job needs doing he's there and you know he'll do the job right. Always calm and cheerful, he's one of those guys whom you seldom hear about but is always making a difference." **TGG**

Follow Us On Facebook

You can now stay in touch with the Konza Prairie Biological Station through Facebook! The Friends of Konza Prairie have created a Facebook page as a place to share information about what's happening at Konza and to encourage more support of Konza's many environmental education programs.

If you haven't already, visit the page at www.facebook.com/supportkonzaprairie and become a friend today!



Docent Recognition for 2010

by Valerie Wright

Every year the Docent Committee recognizes volunteers who have given exceptional service to KEEP. This year the outstanding Docent of the Year is **Jim Mayhew**, named for the 29 tours and other events he participated in this year. Last year Jim was Docent Trainee of the Year. We are pleased that he has kept up his commitment to prairie education, even with the drive from his home in Abilene.

The Leadership Award goes to **Chod Hedinger** for his continued dedication to making this program work at all levels, from packing up boots after a stream activity to arriving early to help set up tables or organize food for a workday . This is Chod's final year as Chair of the Docent Committee, although he continues to sit on the Friends of Konza Prairie Board.

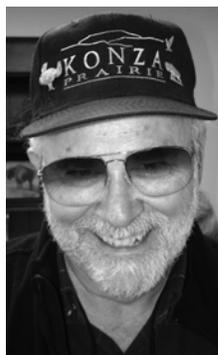
The Long-term Leadership group is joined by **Ann Murphy**, who met the requirements of guiding more than 10 groups per year for at least 5 years. She becomes the 19th docent to earn this recognition. Ann graduated with the Docent Class of 2005 and has been active with Friends of Konza Prairie as the Hospitality Chair, taking the place of Jean Craig after her long years of service.

This year we are recognizing **Gordon Cunningham** with the Silver Docent Award for his long history of support for KEEP and the Docent Program. See the article in "Spotlight" for details of Gordon's participation.

Doreen Towne is our Quality Docent of the Year for her continued commitment to learning about the tallgrass prairie and the education program. Doreen came to 10 training events this year and several in-service education opportunities. She has spent countless hours with our plant experts, Earl Allen and Nancy Goulden, combing the trails for new blooms to add to the phenology list. She exemplifies the kind of docent who continues to learn and keep up to date on Konza Prairie knowledge. **TGG**



Jim Mayhew



Chod Hedinger



Ann Murphy



Gordon Cunningham



Doreen Towne

A Message from your Docent Coordinator - Annie Baker

Thank You to all Konza Prairie docents for their hard work and dedication. We enjoy working with each one of you! Your help with just one or two tours each month (in September, October, April & May) makes a BIG difference, especially enabling KEEP to effectively staff student groups. A high Docent to Student ratio provides the best experience for Visitors and Docents!

By the Numbers:

7 - average # of docent volunteers needed per field trip, **4** - average # of field trips per week (Sept - Oct, Apr - May)

37 - # of docents who have guided 1-5 tours in 2009-2010, **30** - # of docents who guided 6-30 tours in 2009-2010

Docents Involved in Prairie Conservation

Bob Haines (KEEP Docent Class of 2006) is the recipient of the 2009 Riley County Conservation District Grassland Management Award. Bob has always enjoyed managing the family land, but this year he took it one step further when the family placed their 1,250 acres of grassland in a conservation easement with the Kansas Land Trust and NRCS. Bob thanked Kevin Religa and John Henry (Docent Class of 2008) from the NRCS, "I'm accepting the award on behalf of them and they have been fabulous in helping," he says.

The land that makes up the Haines Family LLC has been a part of the Haines family since it was purchased by Bob's grandfather, Watson Haines, in the 1920's. It is more than just a business venture for Bob; it represents a lifetime of memories and hard work. Bob recalls helping his father building fences as a kid. "There were no signs of civilization and you couldn't see any sort of manmade structures. It was peaceful and quiet enough to hear the birds sing."



The family has done a great deal of work to maintain and improve the quality of their grassland. It wasn't too long ago the pastures were sprinkled with red cedar trees and overgrazing had damaged this fragile ecosystem. Knowing that something had to be done, Bob enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program through the NRCS in 2003. Since then, the pasture has been burned on a yearly basis, unwanted trees have been mechanically removed on 420 acres, unwanted weeds have been sprayed on 1,229 acres, cross fences have been added to improve grazing distribution, and stocking rates have been adjusted accordingly. "There is a lot more grass out there than there used to be," he said, while talking about the current condition of the pastures.

The Riley County Conservation District proudly recognized the Haines family. And the Konza Environmental Education Program is pleased to have such admirable graduates. **TGG**

Open Konza's Doors, Let Guests In

To the many species of birds, mammals, and reptiles that call Konza Prairie Biological Station home, **Saturday September 25** will begin like any other day. Perhaps, as the day winds along, if they pay attention to such things, they will notice a lot of activity on the human front.

To the rest of us, the Konza Prairie Biennial Visitors' Day, which will run from 8-4 p.m., will be anything but a normal day. That's the day Konza opens its door to the public in an effort to encourage a wider and deeper appreciation of what is being accomplished on site. As in previous Visitors' Days, the Friends of Konza Prairie, the K-State Division of Biology, and The Nature Conservancy will again host the event. Konza's environmental education staff, K-State professors, graduate students, and docents will all be on hand to interpret the intricacies of the prairie landscape.

Once again, there will be guided nature hikes, hay wagon rides, bison loop tours, research activities for young ecologists, educational displays, and live animal exhibits.



To make it a day worth remembering for the many guests, volunteers will be needed to watch gates, explain exhibits, guide hikes, and more. Please mark the date on your calendar and plan to help. Look for information from Dr. Eva Horne on volunteer opportunities and how to sign up. Then be ready for an extraordinary day!

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Tallgrass Gazette

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Return Service Requested

Konza Docent Calendar - Save the Date!

Sept 4, Sat, 9:00am-12:00pm, Training: Grass Identification, Biomass Collection

Sept 11, Sat, 9:00am-12:00pm, Training: Grasshopper Inventory, Goldenrod Gall Count

Sept 12, Sun, 2:00-4:00pm, Hokanson Homestead Workday (Help clean up for Visitors Day)

Sept 18, Sat, 9:00am-12:00pm, Training: Godwin Hill Trail hike
(Meet at Gate #8, off Shane Creek Lane)

Sept 24, Fri, Konza Meeting Hall (Barn)
- 5:00pm, Docent Graduation!
- 5:30pm, Annual FOKP Meeting & BBQ

Sept 25, Sat, 8:00am-4:00pm, KPBS Visitors' Day

