



## MY STORY

### **BJ Tatro**, *Legacy Steward*

As with many of the people who have had an impact on the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, BJ Tatro's involvement started modestly, grew rapidly, and left a significant and visible legacy. BJ first became involved in 2004, at a time when the Sunrise Trailhead was under construction with plans to connect it to the Ringtail and Lost Dog Wash trails. As with many others, her love for the McDowell Mountains led naturally to curiosity about the Conservancy and then to active participation in its activities.

It was a mark of how seriously the Conservancy stewards took their responsibilities that BJ had to interview before she could be accepted into the steward program. Not too long after passing her interview test, BJ was asked to lead the Pathfinder program, which was still in its infancy.

Today, the Pathfinder program is one of the most well-known aspects of the work of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy. Stationed at Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve trailheads, friendly, blue-shirted stewards provide visitors with maps, trail information, and advice on how to safely enjoy the trails and appreciate the flora and fauna in the Preserve. Yet prior to BJ becoming involved, the Pathfinder program was a concept that needed to be validated.

As someone with a background in research, data analysis, and program evaluation, BJ knew that her first step was to determine whether there was a public demand for Pathfinders at the trailheads. BJ ran a pilot program, collected data, and then concluded that there was indeed support for this type of service. Soon, the Pathfinder program was born with a stated mission to promote the safe enjoyment of the Preserve.

BJ's skills in program development were called on once again when she assumed a leadership role in an initiative called Stewardship 2010, which had the ambitious goal of redefining the structure of the steward program to support the growth and evolving mission of the Conservancy. This project was especially important because the Conservancy, unlike many non-profit organizations with large staffs, relied on volunteers to help envision, analyze, and implement the strategic direction of the organization. With a small paid staff, the structure of the volunteer organization was critical to the Conservancy.

Stewardship 2010 recommended the adoption of a program-based structure that still exists within the Conservancy. With this approach, stewards volunteer in programs according to their individual interests. Today the Conservancy has nine programs, including Citizen Science, Construction & Maintenance, Education, Guided Hike and Bike, Nature Guides, Pathfinders, Pastfinders, Patrol, and Steward Experience, with many stewards working within multiple programs.

When asked to describe the approach that allowed her to have such an impact at the Conservancy, BJ is quick to outline a personal philosophy that seems to have been a good fit for the Conservancy at the time. *“First, do not complain about obstacles but figure out how the goals could be achieved. Second, in a project of any complexity, understand the importance of adopting a team approach that leverages the skills of others while also appealing to their interests. Finally, acknowledge that a tolerance of reasonable risk is often required to achieve anything of substance.”*

BJ looks back with pride on her role in developing and implementing a vision that started with a cup of coffee and thrives as an important service the Conservancy continues to provide even today. She states that her work with the Conservancy was motivated by “rational self-interest in the pursuit of the public good.” Great things can be achieved when skilled people work together on matters that have both personal importance and a clear public benefit