



MY STORY

Dan Gruber, *Legacy Steward*

During his career as a management consultant, Dan Gruber worked with large companies around the world on critical, strategic and organizational issues. Often this work required asking the right questions, developing the most useful data and conducting the most appropriate analyses. The success of a project could be measured by the enduring positive change created within the client organization.

Dan began volunteering with the McDowell Sonoran Land Trust (the original name of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy) in 2003 and became a steward in 2004. Like other stewards, he found the Conservancy at a time when he was looking for interesting and rewarding work to do in his retirement. As a lifelong hiker and backpacker, he was attracted to the conservation mission of the organization. However, more importantly, he became increasingly excited by the great potential for growth and impact that he saw in the Conservancy.

Dan has held many steward leadership roles, but the area that he is most excited about is the scientific work done by the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Parsons Field Institute with the support of the Citizen Science program. In its early days, the Conservancy was primarily focused on advocating for the acquisition of conservation land, but as time passed, the Conservancy assumed greater responsibility for managing Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve. This raised a host of interesting questions about the impact of human use, the effects of climate, and the effects of invasive plant species, among other things. As a consultant with an academic background in science, Dan was eager to apply data and the scientific method to these questions.

In 2008-2009, Dan led a project conducting detailed geologic mapping of a pre-iron age tool making site within the Preserve. The result of the project was a new geologic map for part of the Preserve and a peer-reviewed paper published by the Arizona Geologic Survey. The paper was the first published by the Survey that was not principally written by a professional geologist. The success of this project demonstrated that high quality, scientifically valid research could be performed by a committed group of volunteers with modest supervision by experts.

This led to the creation of the Field Institute in 2010 and became the model for work done by the Citizen Science program, which was initiated in 2012. Now, the Field Institute retains the necessary scientific and technical experts, who then leverage the skills of the volunteers in the Citizen Science program to gather data and help

answer some of the most important questions relating to the operation and maintenance of the Preserve.

The Parsons Field Institute and the Citizen Science program are examples of Dan's strategic approach to the work of the Conservancy. When evaluating projects, he likes to think about how relevant the work is to the mission of the organization but just as importantly, he wants to do work that has the potential to benefit people in the community and beyond.

Dan believes that the creation of the "self-managing, self-evolving" steward organization may be the most far-reaching achievement of the Conservancy. Many non-profit organizations rely on volunteers to solely execute the instructions of staff, but the Conservancy has developed into an organization where the stewards are directly responsible for many aspects of the strategic direction of the organization. The scope of the steward involvement in the work of the Conservancy stems from an acknowledgement that volunteers as a group have significant skills and capabilities and when given the opportunity, can organize and direct themselves to great effect. Dan can see a day when the Conservancy's uniquely effective volunteer organization is an example that is emulated across the non-profit world.

Dan and his wife Elaine are committed philanthropists who have identified conservation and education as two of their principal areas of interest. Both objectives are central to the work of the Conservancy and the organization is fortunate to have benefited greatly from their support as well as from Dan's experience, strategic thinking, and expansive vision.