



## MY STORY

### **Len Marcisz, *Legacy Steward***

One of the unique aspects of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy is the impact that it has on many of the people who have chosen to devote their time and talents to its growth and development. All non-profit organizations benefit from the work and support of their volunteers and patrons, but very few organizations have such a profound impact on the lives of their volunteers. This unique reciprocal relationship is one of the features of the Conservancy and large part of the stories of its most dedicated stewards.

Like many people who lived near the McDowell Mountains in the 1990's, Len Marcisz worried about the impact that rapid development was having on the land. Len arrived in Arizona in 1975 but moved away in 1986. Upon returning to the area in 1996, he was struck by the change that had taken place and, at that time, he became aware of the work that was being done by the McDowell Sonoran Land Trust, the precursor to the Conservancy. However, it wasn't until his retirement in 2003 that Len turned his full attention to the work of the Trust.

Len says that his long and distinguished association with the Conservancy might never have occurred but for his decision to go on the last guided hike of the season in 2003. That hike happened to have been led by Chet Andrews and Bernie Finkel, two of the more legendary figures in the history of the Conservancy. Following the hike, Chet and Bernie urged Len to become a steward, and in September of that year he became a member of Steward Class Six. In the almost two decades that followed his first hike, Len became a major contributor to the Conservancy. Among other pursuits, he served on the Board of Directors for six years, was Chair for one year, conceived and created the Conservancy's Pastfinders history program, and was instrumental in designing the Conservancy's current Steward-led organizational structure.

Whether Len's involvement with the Conservancy was happenstance or predestination, he believes that the Conservancy has, in many ways, defined him as a person in his retirement. More particularly, Len's work with the Conservancy set him on a path of a very rewarding second career as a historian.

Len had always been interested in history, which was his undergraduate minor. Working for many years in international operations for a major financial services company, he was skilled at learning about new cultures and understanding how and why systems worked in a particular way. When Len turned this natural curiosity to the Preserve and its human history, it seemed like the perfect combination of organizational need and personal interest.

After putting together his first class on the history of the Preserve, Len realized that he may have been a “frustrated teacher who was never a teacher.” He began digging more deeply into the history of the Preserve and in time, was lecturing on a diverse set of topics. His work on the history of the Preserve attracted the attention of many others outside the Conservancy. He was asked to join the Board of the Arizona Historical Society, and ultimately became President and Chairman of that Board.

While a personal interest in history drives much of Len’s work on behalf of the Conservancy, it is far from his only source of motivation. Stated simply, he supports the Conservancy because it performs a public good. Len believes that if the Conservancy continues to attract talented, motivated, mature, and team-oriented people to wear the blue Steward shirt, it will continue to positively impact the environment and the community.