



## MY STORY

### **Christine Kovach, *Legacy Steward***

Christine Kovach moved to Scottsdale in 1983 and cannot think of a reason why she would ever live anywhere else. Growing up in Iowa where her grandparents were farmers, she learned that people and communities are intimately connected to the land. After moving to Scottsdale she came to appreciate the majesty of the McDowell Mountains, not just as beautiful feature of the landscape but as home to a broad diversity of plant and animal life. Christine describes the Sonoran desert as a complex ecosystem that is both hearty and fragile. While life thrives in the harshest of conditions, the landscape is extremely vulnerable to damage from human activities.

In the early 1990's, development in Scottsdale was accelerating and extending eastward toward the McDowell mountains. As a resident of the Shea corridor area, Christine became interested in how development might impact the mountain range that she regarded as a signature feature of the City. One day in the fall of 1993 she found herself attending a meeting of the Board of the McDowell Sonoran Land Trust (later to become the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy).

Whether or not she knew it at the time, Christine was joining the Land Trust at a pivotal juncture. From its formation in 1991 until mid-1993, the members of the Land Trust had been occupied with defining a vision for preserving the McDowell Mountains, which were largely privately owned, and exploring the feasibility of strategies for achieving that objective. Over the course of 1994, the Land Trust actively engaged the City, the business community, and other local stakeholders in discussions about preservation. Working with a newly formed City's McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission, a proposal was developed to fund the City's acquisition of land with a .2% increase in the City's sales tax.

One of Christine's primary objectives as a leader of the Land Trust was to make the economic case for the tax increase and the creation of the Preserve. As she says with a twinkle, the idea was not just to please "cactus huggers" but to help make Scottsdale even more attractive as a destination. Many cities offer golf, fine dining, and shopping, but no other city could also offer such a unique natural feature within its boundaries. Working not only as chair of the Land Trust but as vice chair of the Commission, Christine was instrumental in making the case to the public that taxes should be raised to acquire the land that would become the Preserve. Despite some

initial resistance from some groups, in May 1995 a vote on that sales tax increase was passed by the City's residents.

In 1995, after the birth of her first child, Christine stepped down as Chair of the Land Trust but remained on the board for 18 years and again served as Board Chair from 2003-2005. She is a Legacy Steward (Class 8), a 'Preserve Pioneer', a 2017 inducted into the Scottsdale History Hall of Fame, and the donor of two ADA trails in the Preserve (Bajada and Kovach Family Nature Trail). After the creation of the Preserve, Christine helped oversee the transition of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy from an organization focused only on the acquisition of conservation land, to a large volunteer-driven organization that assumed responsibility for managing many aspects of the Preserve's operations on behalf of the City. She is excited by the continued growth and evolution of the Conservancy and its expansion into important scientific and educational activities associated with the McDowell Mountains and the Sonoran Desert.

Christine says that the community, like the desert, has many layers. To accomplish something of significance, you have to consider economics, politics, finance, culture, neighborhoods, and the environment. Christine always loved the multi-faceted nature of her volunteer work for the Conservancy, and the result of that work will benefit Scottsdale residents and visitors for years to come.