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National Wildlife Refuge System: Friends Forward

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Friends *Forward*



FALL 2007

First Friends Academy Hailed as a Success

The first-ever Friends Academy attracted Refuge Friends leaders from all around the country—and it was a rousing success. So successful, in fact, that tentative 2008 plans call for two sessions to be held at the National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia.

Friends who attended the late July course—representatives of 19 Friends organizations and 24 refuges in 17 states—said they especially appreciated the opportunities to network with other Friends, refuge managers, members of the Refuge System headquarters staff and representative of leading non-governmental organizations. More of those opportunities will be included in the 2008 offerings.

As was the case at the first Academy, the week-long training program will provide Friends with useful information about

making their organizations more effective. There will also be discussions of the Refuge System's programs, priorities and challenges, and plenty of time for Friends to talk through successful strategies and share ideas. An important, overarching theme will be the need for Friends organizations and refuge managers and other staff to work together as a team.

Classroom sessions will be devoted to a wide range of topics, among them the importance of Refuge-Friends partnerships; challenges raised by invasive species and the loss of habitat near refuges; how best to communicate with your community and the news media; and the Federal budget



Matt Poole/USFWS

Representatives of 19 Friends organizations and 24 national wildlife refuges in 17 states attended the first-ever Friends Academy in late July. The week-long course provided an overview of Friends group and Refuge System operations—and plenty of time to network.

process. Representatives of national non-governmental organizations that support wildlife conservation on refuges will add their insights. 🌱

Pass the News Around

Friends Forward newsletter is available online so you can pass the word around to everyone in your Friends organization and to prospective members. Due to financial constraints, a limited number of newsletter copies are mailed to Friends organizations and refuge staff. Once you get your copy, send your Friends to <http://www.fws.gov/friends/home/frontpg-blue-600.asp> to get the latest edition. 🌱

From the Chief

Out from Behind the Desk

As chief of the Refuge System, I spend some of my most fulfilling time not at my desk in Washington, DC, but at national wildlife refuges across the country. A trip I took this summer to the Midwest tells you why.

At Crab Orchard Refuge in Illinois, Refuge Manager Dan Frisk and his staff showed me just what makes this refuge so special. Established 60 years ago, Crab Orchard Refuge gets



Geoff Haskett

more than a million visits a year. Visitors enjoy boating, water skiing, camping, hunting, fishing and just watching wildlife. More than 4,000 acres are designated wilderness. Rocky Comfort is just one of the many trails that meander through beautiful oak-hickory forest. Yet, the refuge, a former ammunition production area, has had to deal—successfully—with contamination that came from the ammunition production that took place in the 1940s and didn't end until 2005.

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In the Hopper

Congressional Tour in Oregon

Field trips for members of Congress and their staff aides are among the ways the National Wildlife Refuge System tries to keep Capitol Hill up to date on its accomplishments and challenges. A field trip conducted August 20-24 focused on refuge transportation programs and involved visits to a half dozen or so Oregon refuges.

Participants included two staff members of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and an aide to Senator David Vittner of Louisiana. Vittner is a member of the committee's Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee. A staff member from the House Transportation and Public Works Committee participated, as did an aide to Representative James L. Oberstar of Minnesota, who is the committee's chairman. The itinerary included visits to on-going projects involving the Federal Lands Highway program and discussions that focused on planning, community involvement and firming up relationships among local, state and federal partners.

From the Chief

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At Cypress Creek Refuge, I talked with Dr. Jeff Hoover, an avian ecologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey, whose research has documented how preserving and restoring the bottomland wetland forest will increase the diversity and abundance of neotropical migratory birds. The data that Hoover has collected over 13 years are helping guide refuge restoration. Today, the Cache River Wetlands Joint Venture Project, which includes Cypress Creek Refuge, is one of the largest cooperative habitat restoration efforts in North America. Ultimately, the Joint Venture hopes to restore a 60,000-acre wetland corridor along 50 miles of the Cache River in southernmost Illinois.



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The Senate and House are considering legislation designed to protect the health of coral reefs managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies. The bill would speed the removal of marine debris and abandoned vessels from reefs.

Protecting America's Coral Reefs

Legislation that would put in place a new damage recovery process for coral reefs that are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System is being considered separately by Senate and House committees. The measure, the Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Amendment Act of 2007 (S. 1583 and H.R. 2185), would also enhance marine debris removal and increase the government's ability to work through

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At Middle Mississippi River Refuge, which covers 4,000 acres in Illinois and Missouri, I was happy to visit the new headquarters, donated by the American Land Conservancy. And I got the chance to get out on the river and see extraordinary cross-program collaboration that helps protect and restore sturgeon and other aquatic resources.

In short, I saw what you probably see everyday—people working hard and creatively to make sure that the resources we enjoy today will be there for our children and our grandkids. It's always such a boost to the spirit to see a national wildlife refuge—and makes my time behind a desk in Washington, DC, just that much more meaningful. 🌱

Six Congressmen to be Honored

Six Congressmen who have shown extraordinary support for the National Wildlife Refuge System were honored by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) during an October 10 reception in the Cannon House Office Building Caucus Room. The evening reception, which drew about 300 guests, was jointly sponsored by CARE and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Rep. Jim Saxton



Rep. Ron Kind

The six honored were Congressmen Norman Dicks of Washington; Todd Tiahrt of Kansas; Ron Kind of Wisconsin; Jim Saxton of New Jersey; Mike Thompson of California; and Michael Castle of Delaware. Kind and Saxton are co-chairs of the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus, which now has more than 130 members in the House of Representatives. Thompson and Castle are co-deputy chairs of the Caucus. All those honored were particularly supportive of the Refuge System during deliberations on the fiscal year 2008 budget. 🌱

Thinking of Starting a Bookstore at Your Refuge?

Savvy management, quality merchandise and a prime location have helped turn the Friends-operated bookstore at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge into a model operation.

Ding Darling Refuge spans more than 6,400 acres of Sanibel Island in southwest Florida. Most years, about 850,000 people visit the refuge, often to watch the 220-plus bird species that call the refuge “home.” Last year, visitors spent nearly \$500,000 in the bookstore; a large percentage of the net proceeds went to refuge improvements and educational programs.

The bookstore started small—essentially a few *Peterson Field Guides* stacked on a table corner. Today, the store fills about 800 square feet and stocks nearly 1,200 items. It has a full-time manager paid by the refuge Friends group, the Ding Darling Wildlife Society. T-shirts that sport a special festival logo are big sellers during the annual Ding Darling October festival.

But books are the primary focus. By design, most of the books relate to the refuge, Sanibel or the rest of Florida. Many are about birds. Also by design, the store has a broad selection of children’s books, an early priority for Lise Bryant, store manager for about seven years. She is always looking for new titles, as are members of the Society’s bookstore committee, which meets monthly to review possible additions.

To keep up with new books, Bryant attends regional trade shows—a step she recommends for others. “Lots of small publishers display books that might be just right for a particular refuge bookstore,” says Bryant, a veteran of more than 20 years in the book trade. She also recommends subscribing to nature-related publications, such as *Birding News*, that often report on titles. Another approach: Open books to determine which publishers produce suitable titles and then ask those publishers for catalogues.

A few years ago, Bryant initiated weekly lectures or conversations with people who had interesting things to say—biologists, authors and researchers with nearby universities, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state agencies. It’s a crowd-building step other Friends groups could take (even if they don’t have a bookstore). “These regularly scheduled sessions bring lots of new people to the refuge—and increase sales quite a bit,” she says.

A year or so after taking over the Ding Darling operation, she attended a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bookstore training program custom-made for

- Consider whether your refuge attracts enough potential customers to support a sales outlet.
- How much space would you have? Depending on location, a Friends group might have to make do initially with a single bookshelf or a cart.
- Try to stock quality items that enhance a visitor’s experience at a refuge. Don’t overlook books and games for children.
- Do you have the people to adequately staff the store?



The Friends-operated bookstore at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge in Florida started small, but it has evolved into a model operation. Many of the outlet’s ways of doing business, including stocking books that match the interests of refuge visitors, can be adopted by others.

Friends groups. “I learned a lot,” Bryant says. “We’re still networking, and I’m still learning.” The annual weekend course, “Sales Outlets: Beyond Bookstores,” held in easy-to-reach cities, covers the basics of management, marketing, arranging effective displays and selecting and purchasing the right books. Among the planning and operational tips:

- Before you open a bookstore, ask why you want one. Do you want to generate funding for the refuge or to provide environmental educational materials or both?

- Spread the word. Let people in nearby communities know that you are open for business.
- Listen to your visitors. To meet their needs, you need to know what’s on their minds.

For information on bookstore training, contact Trevor Needham: 703-358-2392, Trevor_Needham@fws.gov. You can reach Lise Bryant at Bookstore@dingdarlingsociety.org.

From Friend to Friend

14,000 Hours and Still Working

In mid-1996, after Ron and Peggy Tillier moved from Pittsburgh to the Eastern Shore of Maryland, not far from Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, they promptly signed on with



Ron Tillier

the refuge's Friends group. "Blackwater was one of the main reasons we moved to the Eastern Shore; we love the outdoors," says Peggy Tillier. "We thought we could give something back to our community."

And give back they have. Altogether, the Tilliers have contributed more than 14,000 hours to the refuge. Their cumulative service recently earned them another 1,000-hours goose on the Volunteer Hall of Fame plaque displayed in the refuge Visitors Center. And at a Volunteer Recognition Dinner earlier this year, they were awarded pins for 10 years of continuous service.

In 1998, Ron, a former Ford Motor Company executive, became president of Friends of Blackwater Refuge, a post he held until 2005. From 1999 to 2006, his wife was the volunteer manager of the Eagle's Nest Bookstore, where she routinely logged 30-35 hours a week. Along the way, the Tilliers provided mentoring assistance to other Friends organizations.

These days, someone else is in charge of ordering and merchandizing at the Blackwater bookstore, but both

Tilliers devote many hours a month to its operation. Ron continues to edit the group's newsletter and remains on the board; Peggy, who still handles the bookstore's business operations, is focusing more on fund raising. "I'm not bashful when it comes to raising money," she says. "And people almost never say no."

Focus on Kids and Cranes

For the third consecutive year, Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge in Southern Colorado and its Friends of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges are staging a Kids' Crane Festival (KCF) during National Wildlife Refuge Week. The Kids' Festival will be held October 13 as nearly 25,000 migrating sandhill cranes are taking a break before resuming their fall migration south. For nearly a quarter century, a much larger crane festival has been held every spring during the birds' north-bound flights.

That event attracts thousands of people to nearby Monte Vista and to the refuges.

The Friends group decided to make the October festival for kids because the spring festival lacks specific children's activities. The Friends bring out animal skins for inspection. A local Amish farmer donated his time and rig for hay rides. An environmentally-themed puppet show cast includes a wolf, a hummingbird and a crane. Plenty of time is set aside for looking at sandhill cranes and scores of other visiting and resident species. And, like the spring festival, the KCF provides plenty of opportunities for recruiting new members.

The KCF has been a great way to build community partnerships. Each of the earlier festivals attracted about 150 people. The food, as well as plates and eating utensils, are donated by nearby businesses.



Jenny Nehring

In October, the annual Kids' Crane Festival takes wing at Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, CO. It is an event sponsored by the refuge and the refuge Friends group. Staff biologist Kelli Stone's "Crane Talk" drew a crowd at the 2006 festival.



Fighting Invasives With Education and Cat Traps

The Florida Keys are home to a number of specialized plant and animal communities that thrive in tropical climates. And there, as in so many other places, aggressive non-native species of plants and animals are making rapid advances. The Friends and Volunteers of Refuges, Florida Keys (FAVOR) is investing manpower and money to raise public awareness of invasives.

The group's four-year-old Keys Kids in Nature program, aimed at fourth graders, includes classroom talks and field trips—usually involving five to eight escorting Friends—that underscore the unique nature of the area's habitats, and their vulnerability.

Several animals also have been targeted. To support a drive against feral cats, in particular those whose hunting grounds include four refuges in the Keys, the Friends group contributed \$5,000 to a local animal shelter. 🐾

The group is an active partner in a broad-based coalition, whose efforts have been certified by a state environmental agency, that is implementing a hands-on “GreenThumb certified” campaign to weed out invasives. The coalition works with nurseries to limit sales of harmful species. FAVOR is, among other steps, highlighting the dangers of invasives in an outreach and education drive.

On the Fire Lines at Okefenokee Refuge

Members of the Okefenokee Wildlife League volunteered for front-line duty earlier this year when the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (GA) and much of the surrounding countryside were swept by wildfires that charred or consumed some 355,000 acres. While the Friends showed humanitarian spirit, they also evidenced some real entrepreneurial fire.

Friends helped out in a variety of ways. Some located and evaluated damage to cultural and archeological resources. Others were hired by fire teams to locate and haul in essential equipment and supplies and to drive fire crews to and from unfamiliar locations. Friends also delivered daily meals.

Behind the lines, Friends produced and sold t-shirts that many of the 800 firefighters, who typically served one- and two-week tours, wanted as mementos of their long, smoky days. The Friends came up with two designs. One has a map on the back that locates the sites of three especially big fires—Big Turnaround, Bugaboo and Floyd Island Prairie. The other has splashed on the back an image of an alligator crashing through a Big Turnaround road sign. To sell the shirts (for \$16 apiece), Friends arrived at 6 a.m. at a crew check-in station. The firefighters were delighted to have the shirts, and the Friends raised about \$25,000.

Send Us Your Stories

This is your newsletter, so we would love to hear from you. Please send your story ideas and questions to National Friends Coordinator Trevor_Needham@fws.gov. We would love to feature your Friends group.



The Friends and Volunteers of Refuges, Florida Keys have enlisted in a broad campaign against invasive plants and animals. Left unchecked, invasives can crowd out flora that provides food for native species such as the endangered Key deer.

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An Employment Dream

Friends organizations can evolve in new directions as groups grow and take on increasingly ambitious projects. In those situations, groups can, among other steps, make the most of their membership's talents. Individual board members might oversee areas such as fund-raising and special-events planning. Other Friends organizations might call on a member—perhaps someone with a background in business—to help coordinate the group's activities.

A handful of Friends groups hire full-time executive directors.

That's not a typical model. However, as groups become more successful, take on more responsibility and develop access to greater resources, the organizations may consider hiring part-time staff or potentially full-time directors where the resources are available.

Typically, executive directors possess a high level of comfort with financial records, a talent for juggling assignments and well-developed "people skills." And they have a knack for raising money; they have to—all or most of their salaries are covered by grants.

How does a Friends group find a qualified executive director?

The **Sewee Association** in South Carolina did not need to look far. Karen Beshears was already a board member. Her position was created in 2002 in large part because the Friends group wanted to move forward with several ambitious projects that would greatly benefit its refugees—



Sabrina Clark/USFWS

Growing Friends groups typically rely on members to monitor and manage activities such as raising money and planning special events. A few groups hire fulltime executive directors—for one, the Sewee Association's Karen Beshears—to coordinate activities.

Ernest F. Hollings ACE Basin, Cape Romain and Waccamaw.

Waccamaw, established in 1997, takes up about 40 percent of her time. So far, the Association has raised about \$90,000 for refuge-development projects—largely through grants she tracked down. Another \$165,000 has been salted away for a planned visitor center.

Grant Deadlines Are Fast Approaching

Check your calendar: Deadlines are coming up for two grant programs that can pay for Friends projects. Applications for National Trails Fund grants, which are underwritten by the American Hiking Society (AHS), are due November 1. Mid-November is the working deadline for Preserve America grant applications; the program is a joint undertaking of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

AHS grants have been used for grass-roots organization projects involving land acquisition, constituency building campaigns and traditional trail work. The Friends of Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge (IL) recently received a \$2,700 grant to restore a five-mile section of the 175-mile-long River to River trail. In 2006, the Friends of the Little Pend Orielle (WA) were grant recipients.

For further information, contact Nathan Caldwell, 703-358-2205 or

Nathan_Caldwell@fws.gov. You can also check the Society's Web site, www.AmericanHiking.org.

Friends groups in Alaska, Minnesota and Massachusetts were among the 11 2006 recipients of Preserve America grants announced earlier this year. The 2007 winners will be unveiled next spring. Under the program, underwritten by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, money is provided to help pay for, among other projects, efforts undertaken with partners to protect historic sites. The grants, available to non-governmental organizations, require matching funds.

For additional information, contact Eugene Marino at 703-358-2173 or Eugene_marino@fws.gov. Information is also available on the foundation's Web site (www.nfwf.org) and on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Cultural Resources Program Web site (www.fws.gov/historicpreservation). 🌿

Education projects, among them the Sewee Earth Stewards program, are a priority for Beshears. The project provides multi-week, on-site programs for 5th and 7th graders. About 600 students enroll every year; altogether, more than 10,000 local students attend refuge-based classes. In a pinch, Beshears teaches.

After casting a wide net, the **International Wildlife Refuge Alliance** in Michigan found someone who had experience in the non-profit world and a strong interest in the environment—Lisa Appel. She has been the Alliance's executive director since July 2.

The Alliance and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge it supports have big plans that will involve significant fund-raising efforts. So she initially concentrated on fine-tuning a database that includes information on prospective donors and other useful contacts.

The Friends group (and Appel), joined by numerous Detroit-area partners,

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Q: How can a Friends organization manage members?

A: It involves a lot more than keeping good records and mailing out renewal notices. Keep these good-management principles in mind:

- **Regular communications.** Members need to feel connected. At least four to six times a year, send mailings to the full membership, including action alert e-mails, newsletters and volunteer opportunity notices.
- **Invite participation.** Educational events, habitat improvement projects, interpretive programs, opportunities to lead refuge tours and contact decision makers—all of these give members a chance to support the refuge and your cause (and theirs), and to get to know one another.
- **Recruit members.** Use special events, wildlife survey days and bird counts, raffles (although, not on refuges), speaking engagements or refuge

tours and programs to create lists of people who know you and support your mission. Offer introductory or gift memberships around the end-of-year holidays. Ask people to join—and the more personal the approach, the better. People respond to people even more quickly than they respond to causes.

- **Keep members.** Consider having Friends call other Friends to ask for their renewals. You want 40 percent to 50 percent of your members to remain current every year. Aggressive efforts can produce high retention rates. 🌱

Send us your stories and questions: *We want this newsletter to serve your needs and interests. So, please send your ideas, questions events for the calendar to either Martha_Nudel@fws.gov or Trevor_Needham@fws.gov.*

Calendar of Friends and National Events

October 22, Noon – 4 p.m.: *Shark Day*, at Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge's Environmental Education Center, will include opportunities to pet live leopard sharks, a mud creature study and guided walks. For more information: 408-262-5513.

October 28, 5 a.m. – Noon: *Youth-only Hunt Day*, Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge (NY). The program, co-sponsored by Lake Plains Waterfowl Association, is open to hunters 12–17 years old. The hunt is preceded by an October 13 training session. For more information: 585-948-5445.

November 1: Deadline for 2008 National Recreation Trail designation applications. For information: <http://www.americantrails.org/nationalrecreationtrails/ApplyNRT.html>.

November 9–11: *River and Bluffs Birding Festival*, sponsored by Friends of Pool 9, Upper Mississippi Valley National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, with tours, Mississippi River cruises, speakers and sourdough pancake breakfasts. For more information: 563-538-4991.

Protecting America's Coral Reefs *continued from page 2*

cooperative partnerships. The bill also provides for the removal of abandoned fishing gear, marine debris and abandoned vessels from coral reef ecosystems in federal waters and allows for assistance to states for the removal of marine debris.

The Service now manages 13 coral reef refuges encompassing nearly 2.9 million acres and is a co-trustee (with NOAA Sanctuaries and the State of Hawaii) of a new 89-million-acre Marine National Monument, the world's largest fully-protected conservation area. The Service also manages nine Remote Pacific Island refuges, sometimes referred to as the "crown jewels" of federal public trust coral reef holdings.

Introducing Kids to Nature

As we all know, a growing number of federal land management agencies (including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), members of Congress, educators, recreation leaders and non-governmental organizations are speaking out about the need to reconnect young Americans with the out-of-doors.

Reflecting Capitol Hill's concerns, Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island and Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland have introduced the No Child Left Inside Act in their respective chambers. The legislation (S. 1981 and H.R. 3036) would create an environmental education grant program to help build national and state capacity. It would also establish a \$100 million environmental education grant program for teachers training. In addition, the measure would identify environmental education as an eligible activity for the existing pool of teacher training funds. 🌱

Study Confirms Popularity of Outdoor Activities

The early findings of a recent study managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service confirm what many a refuge Friends group has long suspected: Americans are wild about wildlife—and their habitat. Indeed, record numbers of Americans are heading for the outdoors to look at critters.

Over the past decade, according to the nation-wide survey, the numbers of people engaging in activities such as bird watching and wildlife photography have increased 13 percent. Altogether, 71.1 million Americans observed wildlife in 2006; 66.1 million did so in 2001 and 62.9 million 10 years ago.

Altogether, according to the survey, more than 87 million Americans—38 percent of the United States' population age 16 and older—hunted, fished or observed wildlife last year. The study includes some information on younger Americans, too; data show that 1.6 million 6-to-15 year olds hunted, 8.4 million fished, and 11.5 million watched wildlife. Nearly \$120 billion was spent in 2006 in pursuit of those wildlife-associated recreational activities—an amount roughly equal to total spending at all spectator sports, casinos, motion pictures, golf courses and country clubs, amusement parks and arcades.

“Wildlife-associated recreation not only sustains our spirit and connects us to each other and the natural world,” said Service Director H. Dale Hall, “but also provides significant financial support for wildlife conservation in our nation’s economy.”

The study—the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation—draws on information gathered by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The survey

is conducted every five years at the request of state fish and wildlife agencies to measure the importance of wildlife-based recreation. 🌿



More and more Americans are pursuing outdoor activities—among them bird watching, fishing and wildlife photography—according to a recent survey. In 2006, nearly \$120 billion was spent on wildlife-associated recreational activities.

An Employment Dream

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will be assisting in the development of a planned Refuge Gateway project that will encompass 44 riverside acres. Once completed, the gateway will include a refuge visitor center and wildlife viewing stations. Appel will work with a fund-raising committee and otherwise help coordinate the drive.

Last year, the **Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge** (NM) financed a \$500,000 educational annex for the refuge; this year the group is buying 140 acres for incorporation into the refuge. And then, year after year, there’s the high-profile Festival of the Cranes.

Leigh Ann Vradenburg was already the Friends organization’s supervisor of operations when a two-year

foundation grant allowed the group to name her executive director, effective May 1. “The board wanted me to be accountable for projects that can require almost constant attention,” she says.

Among many other responsibilities, she has a substantial management role in the Festival of the Cranes, for which the Friends are lead sponsor. Though the Friends group does not set out to raise money during the event, the group last year received an \$18,000 payment from the town of Socorro, a co-sponsor of the festival, which brings nearly \$2 million into the town. The payment was plowed into planning for this year’s special 20th anniversary celebration. 🌿

Friends *Forward*

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