



FRIENDS of UA

NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE DESK OF
PRESIDENT ANN WEAVER HART

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COMMUNITY PARTNERING:

UA Community and School Garden Program and UA Science Sky School

Take away the desks, the screens, the keyboards, and the lectures. Replace them with an outdoor classroom filled with sunshine and blue sky.

That's what is happening in two University of Arizona programs that are teaching K-12 students about science through hands-on learning.

The first one is the **UA Community and School Garden Program**. Over the past five years, the program has been involved with 12 school gardens, where UA student interns work alongside schoolchildren as they explore subjects such as ecology, soil science, conservation, art, and photography through hands-on learning projects. The projects give UA students a chance to put concepts learned in the classroom into practice, while they also help K-12 teachers develop lesson plans related to building and maintaining school gardens.

A few weeks ago, the UA Community and School Garden Program helped celebrate Manzo Elementary's designation as the first school in Pima County to obtain Arizona Department of Health Services certification to serve school-grown produce as part of the lunch menu. Among the speakers at an event marking the designation were Jonathan Rothschild, mayor of Tucson; John Paul Jones III, dean of the UA College of Social and Behavioral Sciences; Dr. Francisco Garcia, chief medical officer for the Pima County Department of Health; Michael McDonald, CEO of The Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona; and Kyesha Villa, a Manzo Elementary student.

The **Community and School Garden Program** is housed in the UA College of Social and Behavioral Sciences' School of Geography and Development. Over the years it has involved UA students and faculty members from three colleges: the College of Social



and Behavioral Sciences, for its expertise in the social science of food issues; the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, for its expertise in the science of food production; and the College of Education, for its expertise in teacher education.

The second program is the **UA Science Sky School**, which offers immersive, year-round residential science programs to Arizona K-12 students at the 25-acre Mount Lemmon SkyCenter campus in the Coronado National Forest.

Seven thousand feet above Tucson, the schoolchildren learn about the natural world and the night sky while being exposed to scientific concepts and processes. They look through telescopes, test soil, and explore dendrochronology – the study of annual tree growth rings that can be used to measure past climate – while recording observations of nature and measuring changes in temperature and elevation.

The young students also get to design their own research projects, which they conduct under the guidance of UA graduate students. They then present their findings to their peers, as if they were scientists at a symposium.

But they aren't the only ones gaining valuable educational experiences at the **Sky School**. Through their interactions with the children, the graduate students are learning about teaching and mentoring, and about communicating their research to the general public.

The teachers who come along on the trips acquire cutting-edge scientific content to take back to the classroom.

For many of the children, it's the first time they have ventured outside the city and into the wilderness or seen the clear, star-filled sky high on the mountain away from city lights. It's an outdoor classroom where playing in the dirt and gazing at the sky is all part of the lesson.

Page 1. Schoolchildren explore subjects such as ecology, soil science, conservation, art, and photography through hands-on learning projects in the UA Community and School Garden Program.

Page 2. The UA Community and School Garden Program gives UA students a chance to take the concepts they have learned in class and put them into practice. They also help K-12 teachers develop lesson plans related to building and maintaining school gardens.

Photographer: Moses Thompson, coordinator of the UA-Tucson Unified School District Community and School Garden Program.

