

Patches of Prairie

By Dr. Valerie Wright
Environmental Educator/Naturalist, KPBS

Docents: Our Most Valuable Asset!

Since 1992 there has been a docent volunteer program at Konza Prairie to help with visitors and tours. In the last issue of *Bison & Bluestem*, Phoebe Samelson reminisced about the early years. As those of you know who attended the FOKP Annual Meeting this September, we celebrated the 10th Anniversary of the Docent Program with an afternoon of meeting old friends, hay-wagon rides and fun on the prairie. About 45 people attended, some from every graduating class. The list of docents trained over this ten-year period has 142 names! Dr. John Zimmerman and his wife, Jan, returned from their retirement home in Virginia. John was responsible for docent training from 1992 to 1996. We shared that responsibility in 1997, the year he retired and my first full year as Environmental Educator.

An outcome of the reunion was a group of stories submitted by docents, which tell of interesting events that happened while they were out with a group. Here are a couple of examples:

“I was guiding a group of elementary students one morning along the nature trail towards the Hokanson Homestead, and as we were walking along the open grassy field bordering the gallery forest, I noticed a small black and white animal running towards us across the field. A second later I could see it was a skunk and headed straight for us. I immediately thought it might be rabid to be out at this time of day and showing a more aggressive approach in coming towards the group. All I had was a long walking stick to defend us if it continued on its course. Fortunately when fairly close in the tall grass the skunk at last saw us and reversed its course as rapidly as it had come towards us. What a relief! I still do not know what caused the skunk to run across the field in broad daylight. Skunks usually walk at a more leisurely pace with not a care in the world.”

Ted Hopkins

“One of my early years as a docent, I was assigned to a busload of students along with a second docent—a friend of mine. The kids were directing their questions mostly to me. The other docent (a very proper and conservative lady) deserved a share of the questions, so I said, “You know more about a lot of this than I do, you take some of the questions!” Next question: “How do you tell bison cows from bulls?” Answer: Thomas, that’s *your* question!”

Wilton Thomas



Docents from the Classes of 1992-93 are (left to right): Chris Herald, Ernst Horber, Martha Ann Olsen, Marilyn Tilghman, Myron Calhoun, Ann Feyerharm, John Zimmerman, Phoebe Samelson, and Miriam Milleret.



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Valerie Wright and John Zimmerman reminisce about how the docent program began