

FH Times Independent: Conservancy invites residents outdoors in Fountain Hills



(PHOTO SUBMITTED BY SONORAN CONSERVANCY OF FOUNTAIN HILLS)

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By Michelle Talsma | Everson Independent Newsmedia

During the winter hiking season in Fountain Hills, desert trails settle into a familiar rhythm. Morning hikers gather at trailheads, boots crunch over gravel and conversations begin before the sun climbs too high. For many residents, these guided outings offer more than a way to stay active. They provide an opportunity to learn about the Sonoran Desert and connect with others during one of the most popular times of year to be outdoors.

Through a full season of guided hikes, interpretive walks and outdoor workshops, the Sonoran Conservancy of Fountain Hills encourages residents to experience the town's open spaces in meaningful ways. Programming runs through April and is designed to accommodate a wide range of interests and ability levels.

"The Sonoran Conservancy of Fountain Hills' mission is to preserve, protect and promote the town's open spaces for the benefit of the community," said Janice Holden, co-chair of the SCFH. "We meet those objectives by providing educational and recreational activities to the public."

Holden said the conservancy's events are designed to foster connection, both among participants and with the desert itself.

"We hope people will find a greater sense of community with others on the hike and connect to this beautiful desert and its deep, rich history," she said.

The conservancy's offerings include short walks, longer hikes, interpretive programs and themed outings focused on topics such as desert plants and wildlife, geology, birding, photography and astronomy. Events are offered at various times throughout the season, including early morning hikes, late afternoon outings and night hikes that highlight the desert after dark. One recurring program, Nature as Therapy, highlights the physical and emotional benefits of spending time outdoors.

“Getting out in nature has some amazingly beneficial effects on our senses and general well-being,” Holden said. “When people learn how unique this desert is and how plants, animals and ancient peoples adapted to such extreme conditions, it’s grounding and creates a new respect for the place we call home.”

What sets SCFH events apart from hiking independently, Holden said, is the level of preparation and guidance built into each experience. Hikes are led by trained stewards who are familiar with the routes and provide clear information about distance, difficulty and how to prepare. For out-of-town hikes, the conservancy also offers carpooling options to help participants reach more remote or obscure trailheads with confidence.

“Our educational hikes and interpretive walks are led by subject matter experts, many of whom are our own trained volunteers,” Holden said. “They share knowledge about everything from ecology and medicinal desert plants to stars and constellations.”

The conservancy also provides training, manuals and desert first aid classes for volunteers, helping ensure participant safety while creating a welcoming environment. Holden noted that many people prefer group hikes for companionship, shared accomplishment and the opportunity to learn something new.

Participant response has been consistently positive, with many attendees returning for additional hikes or choosing to volunteer. “We know we’re doing something right when we see repeat hikers and referrals from friends,” Holden said. “Participant surveys also help guide us as we plan each new season.”

The 2025–26 season, which started in October 2025, includes approximately 70 hikes, walks and talks designed to accommodate nearly every level of experience. Holden emphasized that newcomers do not need to be seasoned hikers to take part.

“There is truly something for everyone,” she said.

New this season is the Dessert in the Desert series, which invites participants to bring chairs, friends and dessert to the Adero Canyon Trailhead for outdoor talks focused on lesser-known aspects of the Sonoran Desert. Additional wildflower and naturalist-led hikes have also been added in anticipation of a strong bloom season.

All SCFH events are free and open to the public, but advance registration through the Town of Fountain Hills is required. A full list of events and registration links is available at scfh.org.

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