



## Wild for wildflowers

By Dr. Valerie Wright

Biodiversity is a concept every child learns early in their education. Plant diversity is explored by third graders on Konza Prairie. By high school, using a botanical "key" to discover the name of a plant becomes common. Docents on Konza learn and relearn methods for plant identification and reawaken to the diversity of plant life. Among the Konza Docents, there are more than two-dozen budding botanists. Most of these volunteer for the Wildflower Walk sponsored by Friends of Konza Prairie the second Sunday in June. This year 14 docents led walks for 115 visitors on the beautiful evening of June 10. From accountant to zoologist and administrator to teacher, they all enjoy the beauty and uniqueness of prairie plants.



Some of the showiest blooms are seen in June. Butterfly Milkweed emblazons

### Walkers return to Headquarters

the prairie with its unique orange/red flowers so often frequented by butterfly and bumblebee. It even comes in a shade of bright yellow. The purple coneflower pokes up its heads all around. It's another butterfly favorite. Purple poppy mallow appears here there and yonder, as does Plains Larkspur. Lemon Beebalm's spicy fragrance becomes stronger as the summer progresses. These are the ones most of us know. What about



Wild Petunia

the lesser known but equally notable species? The other eight species of milkweeds (*Asclepias*) are just as fragrant and sought after by monarch larvae. The five species of prairie clovers (*Dalea*) and six species of sunflowers (*Helianthus*) make diverse shows in their respective seasons. Six species of goldenrod (*Solidago*) and ten species of aster (*Symphotrichum*) are rounded out by one *Zanthoxylum* (Prickly ash), one *Zigadenus* (Death Camas) and one *Zizia* (Golden Alexander). Of the 600 plus species of plants on Konza Prairie most are not commonly known, many are annuals, and some are "weeds." To learn them all is daunting, but to learn some is very gratifying. When next spring comes around, they have become friends whose names you know.

With climate change and habitat loss, scientists estimate that 1 in 5 plant species in this country are being lost. This great decrease in diversity is a threat to us all. Food plants count for one in ten species and medicinal plants for one in six. The head of a North American seed bank says, "It's pretty clear that biodiversity is being lost at a rate we really haven't seen since the dinosaurs."

# Docents Involved in Community Outreach

Konza Prairie docents do a lot more than guide hikes and bison loop driving tours. So far this year, docents have proudly represented KPBS / KEEP and FOKP at several community events impacting over 600 people.

This spring Konza Prairie was invited to participate in the Sunset Zoo Earth Day “Party for the Planet” celebration and the Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School Science Fair. At each event, docents shared information about Konza Prairie, KEEP, and FOKP. Sometimes they staffed a tabletop display or revealed natural objects to attract attention, such as the bison skin. Each group of docents reported the public was very receptive and full of questions about Konza Prairie. Thank you to the following docents who represented Konza Prairie at these events this spring! **Howard and Liz Beikmann, Shauna Dendy, Jo Foy, Darren and Shelly Gunderson**

The Konza Music Festival, sponsored by the Manhattan Music Coalition, was organized to promote live music in Manhattan and raise awareness for the Konza Prairie Biological Station. Held April 27-28, over 100 bands performing everything from bluegrass to rock, to folk took center stage at 14 venues in Aggieville and the Larry Norvell Band Shell in City Park. The Friends of Konza Prairie manned a tabletop display outside The Dusty Bookshelf Saturday afternoon where **Sue Hunt and Verlyn Richards** greeted over 75 people. Many were interested to learn about FOKP and opportunities such as the Wildflower Walk and Konza Prairie’s public hiking trails. The Manhattan Music Coalition generously donated a portion of the festival’s ticket sales to Friends of Konza Prairie.



**Verlyn Richards and Sue Hunt**

Konza Prairie docents also participated in an event sponsored by the Manhattan Convention and Visitors Bureau in coordination with the National Geographic Flint Hills Photo Exhibition. On May 19, seventeen docents manned six locations along the Nature Trail between 9am-6pm. There were 168 registered hikers from nine states and one foreign country. The docents enjoyed greeting people on the trail and helped to make this event a success. **Earl Allen, Diane Barker, Gordon Cunningham, Bob Davis, Charlie Given, Darren and Shelly Gunderson, Steve and Karen Hummel, Sue Hunt, Megan Kennelly, Larry Loomis, Jackie Mershon, Ann Murphy, Phoebe Samelson, Mary Sutton, Wilton Thomas**

In addition, the Konza Prairie Presenters’ Bureau, formed in 2006, is going strong with four program requests so far this year. Docents **Marcia Cooper, Charlie Given, Chod Hedinger, Ann Murphy and Verlyn Richards** presented to local organizations as far away as Clay Center and Salina! If you are interested in becoming part of the Presenters’ Bureau, please sign up through Valerie or Annie. Organizations interested in booking a speaker free of charge can contact KEEP to make a reservation.

Again this spring, docents met guests before dawn to view the courtship behavior of the Greater Prairie



**Post-show GPC observers**

Chicken. KEEP hosted 108 people from eight states throughout March and April, including nine Konza Prairie docents who took advantage of this unique opportunity. A big thanks to docent guides **Doris Burnett and Chod Hedinger**, as well as Dr. Dave Rintoul, who interpreted the mating ritual of the prairie chickens and gave guests information about current research on Konza Prairie.



**In the blind**

# SPOTLIGHT! On Larry Loomis

By Annie Baker

Larry Loomis graduated from the Docent Program in 2004 and received Docent Trainee of the Year recognition. He continues to enjoy dedicating his time to Konza Prairie and serves as the current Friends of Konza Prairie president.

Larry Loomis spent his youth farming with his father and grandfather in Jewell County, Kansas. Farming and ranching instilled in him an appreciation for the land and the importance of its conservation for future generations.

After high school, Larry, as well as his sister and two brothers, attended Kansas State University. Larry earned a BS in Industrial Engineering and moved to Phoenix, Arizona where he worked for seven years as an engineer for various firms. During this time, Larry met his wife, Randee, also a Kansas native working in Phoenix! Larry and Randee have been married for forty-one years and have two children: Ashley, a pediatric critical care specialist of Albany, New York; and Brian, a GIS analyst of Honolulu, Hawaii.



Following his brief stint in engineering, Larry earned his MBA from Arizona State University and began a career in banking. Pursuing a job offer, Larry and Randee moved back to Kansas, first Wichita and then Marion, their home town for the next twenty-seven years. Larry became President and CEO of the Marion National Bank before retiring in 2003.

Larry and Randee retired to Manhattan and are busier than ever. In addition to Konza Prairie, Larry loves golf and is a K-State sports fan. Through the Kansas Golf Association, Larry is a golf rules official at high school, state, college and USGA tournaments. During the K-State football season, he is the chief cook for their tailgate group. Other recreational activities include playing golf, working in the yard, traveling to visit children and the family farm, photography, computers, and singing in the church choir.

On Konza Prairie, Larry especially enjoys hiking the Nature Trail with middle school students and guiding the Bison Loop with adults groups. As a docent, he considers himself a generalist and makes a point to return to Docent Training sessions to rediscover general information and to garner something new to use on the trail. He looks forward to social events such as the Docent Potluck and the Friends of Konza Prairie holiday gatherings.

After his first docent training session in 2004, Larry immediately recognized becoming active as a Konza Prairie Docent as one of his retirement ambitions. He considers studying the ecosystem he grew up in and now lives in a true blessing. In his own words, "I am proud to be and to tell others, I am a Docent at Konza Prairie Biological Station."

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## Note of Appreciation

May 18, 2007

"We had a wonderful trip and learned so much! Thank you to all of the docents and to those of you whose terrific planning provided us with one of the most worthwhile and enjoyable field trips I've been on in 15 years of teaching.

We study insects and geology concepts in second grade as well as Native Americans and westward expansions. All of these things were touched upon and this provided a nice wrap-up to the year.

I was impressed with the knowledge of our docent and completely satisfied with the experience we had, I wouldn't change a thing!"

*Deb Shepek, Northview Elementary*

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# Tallgrass Gazette

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## Educating Catherine

Our word "prairie" in French means "tall grass."

I am a docent-in-training on the Konza Prairie,  
A long-term ecological research, biological station  
of 8600 acres. Ten minutes from my abode!

Looking into the prairie I do eye-exercises:

Breathe, stretch, reach and imagine

Up and down my eyes touch these outlines.

They are the gorgeous rolling Flint Hills!

Sunshine, earth, not much rain, fire, wind.

Kansas winds caress with angels' sweet sounds,

They resonate with these tall grasses' elated joy:

"I am so tall!" "We are so tall!"

Winds roar like the ocean waves, on occasion,

They force these tall grasses to regroup strategies.

To hide into nowhere, tall grasses outcry:

Change fury waves to white soft foam, quick!"

Fire Reversal Studies switch burnings of grasses

From 2-year to 20-year and 20 to two.

Burnings redesign cycles of life and death, and

Wildflowers do play hide-and-seek as seasons move.

Filling up with experiential learning, effective and

Affective human interactions and Jean's Handmade

Cookies! My memoir of this ever changing prairie

Is waiting for me to soar from trainee to teacher!

*By Catherine Fung, Ph.D*

*March 15, 2006*



The poem was first published  
by Noble House in their  
anthology "Songs of Honor"  
Summer 2006.

Catherine is a member of the  
docent training class of 2006.

**Dr. Catherine Fung**