



SUN life

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AUTISM WALK & FAIR GOES VIRTUAL FOR 2020

By Ellen Sussman
SPECIAL TO THE SAHUARITA SUN

As the significance and contagion of the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in March, the annual Autism Walk and Resource Fair planned for April 4 at the Kino Park Sports Complex in Tucson had to be canceled.

With no known time frame as to when it will be safe to hold large in-person events, planners of the Autism Walk and Resource Fair have decided

to host this year's event as a virtual online experience on Saturday, Sept. 26. "We are creating a unique online interactive resource fair

for our families to engage in and hear from our community providers, schools, state services and others so they still have the opportunity to make connections they would have at our in-person event," said Brie Seward, executive director of the Autism Society of Southern Arizona.

Ray Frieders, board president of the Autism Society of Southern Arizona, said a new website is being built to host the event.

"On the website, attendees will be able to watch the video of our opening ceremonies. They will also be able to access materials from each of our resource exhibitors. Each exhibitor will have their own page with their brochure, video and contact information," Frieders explained.

Also, a series of Zoom webi-

IF YOU GO
To register for the virtual event and for more information: Go to: as-az.org. There is a registration fee of \$20 for adults 18 and older and \$5 for ages 4 to 17. All funds raised stay in Southern Arizona. **The Autism Society of Southern Arizona** may be reached at 520-770-1541.



ABOVE: Sahuarita resident Derek Espinoza and his mother, Cynthia. **TOP:** The 2020 Autism Walk and Resource Fair will be a virtual online experience on Saturday, Sept. 26.

nars on Sept. 26 will let families hear from community providers as they would have done at the in-person event.

"We are also asking our attendees to walk on their own around their neighborhood on that day and share their photos with the hashtag #we-walk4autism," Frieders said.

"It's all very exciting and we are proud to still be able to connect with our community in this way."

Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of a child's life. It affects his or her ability to communi-

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cate and interact socially with others.

Based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as of May 2018 autism affects 1 in 71 children in Arizona.

ONE FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE

The Espinoza family of Sahuarita plans to participate in September's virtual online experience.

When Arturo and Cynthia Espinoza's son Derek was 4 years old, they noticed some behaviors that didn't seem right. There was a slight delay in speech development, he was sensitive to some fabrics, he didn't feel pain and seemed fine when he had a fever.

"Derek was diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. He was high functioning and that made it more challenging and harder to get help," Cynthia said. "He's very social and very trusting, so we have to watch him. He'll talk to anyone,"

Communication in children with autism ranges from no useful form of communication to very advanced language abilities, but little ability to use language in a social manner.

Four years ago, the Espinoza family moved to Sahuarita from Yuma, which Cynthia said added yet more challenges as they had to start anew with speech therapists,

doctors, therapists and organizations.

Derek is now 11 and in sixth grade at Sahuarita Intermediate School, where he does well academically.

The family had attended three previous Autism Walks and Resource Fairs in Tucson and planned to take part this past April.

"We've always tried to make autism a positive thing for Derek and we'll take part in this new virtual online experience," Cynthia pointed out.

Premiere Retirement Planning and Wealth Management returns as the title sponsor; Tucson ER & Hospital is the presenting sponsor; Helping Hands Behavioral Therapy, Tucson Electric Power and Tucson Federal Credit Union are gold sponsors, and the Pima County School Superintendent's Office of Dustin J. Williams is the education sponsor.

"As a parent of a child with autism I can speak first hand about the need for strong community support ... the Autism Society of Southern Arizona is that support. I am humbled and honored to announce our newly launched partnership with ASSA. Our goal is to increase awareness about this resource so that families across Pima Country can benefit from it," Williams said.

Contact Sahuarita Sun freelance reporter **Ellen Sussman** at ellen2414@cox.net.

Magical invasion time for Santa Rita Prickly Pear

Prickly Pear cactus have found a home in many of our landscapes because they are easy to propagate, need modest maintenance, and use little water. These native plants can be found throughout the Americas from South America to the Arctic Circle.

Now beginning to show up on many prickly pear are conspicuous cottony masses of soft white wax. When crushed, the white spot magically turns into a deep red blob. This is Cochineal Scale, an insect with quite a history.

Cochineal evolved with prickly pear in the New World and was used by the Aztecs for dyeing and painting. When entering Mexico City, Cortes and his conquistadors found previously unknown bright yarns that had been dyed with Cochineal. Thereafter, samples made their way to Spain in the early 1500s and became the most important source of red dye until synthetic dyes began arriving in the 1850s.

This remarkable insect is still a source of the dye used by microbiologists to stain slide specimen. The distinctive red-coat uniforms of the British Army were dyed with Cochineal Scale. It continues



Green Valley Gardeners

Mary Kidnocker



BEAUTIFUL PURPLE SANTA RITA PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS such as this one are favorite host plants of Cochineal Scale insects from now through summer. Currently the pictured specimen has not been invaded.

MARY KIDNOCKER SPECIAL TO THE SAHUARITA SUN

to be produced commercially in Mexico and India to manufacture permanent red coloring for cosmetics, foods, and artists' paint. It is often listed as an ingredient called "carmine" on labels of gelatins, candy, fruit juices, shampoos, and other red products.

Cochineal Scale is a sucking insect that uses a cotton-like wax for protection of the females and their egg masses. As she feeds, the immobile female creates eggs beneath her abdomen. These hatch into immobile nymphs that feed for three weeks. This is when they are spread among the cactus, often carried on the feet of birds.

Next the nymphs spin a waxy fiber that protects them from predators and weather. Tiny females have neither wings nor legs; males have both. The female pushes a hole into the prickly pear skin and sits in place for the balance of her life, sucking out plant juices. Even with her waxy protection, she may become

prey to birds and predatory insects such as the Ladybug.

Young females may be blown by the wind to another host prickly pear where they will repeat the reproduction process. Males will fly around to search for a mate, then die within a few days.

Cochineal infestation can weaken and occasionally kill its Prickly Pear host. Although unattractive, damage is mostly negligible. Usually a blast from the garden hose will expose and wash the insects off. It is almost magical to watch these small white masses quickly

turn bright red as the water spray hits them.

This tiny insect has become an important part of food processing, cosmetics production, textile manufacturing, international commerce, science, and probably many an artists' palette ... a big endeavor when considering that it takes over 70,000 Cochineal insects to produce a single pound of their valuable dye!

Mary Kidnocker is a University of Arizona Master Gardener who lives in the Green Valley area. Her articles are featured weekly.

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