



Docent Training Commitment and Job Description

2016

WHAT IS A DOCENT?

Adapted, courtesy of the Beach Art Museum

The word docent comes from the Latin word "docere" meaning to teach. During the 1800s it was used to describe lecturers who were not on the salaried staff of an institution or a private/volunteer tutor. Today the term is used by many museums to describe the trained volunteers who provide educational services for the museum visitor. Other terms include tour guide, interpreter, and volunteer educator.

The role of a docent is three-fold. 1. Docents serve as hosts, to provide a welcoming atmosphere. In many cases they are the museum's "front-line" or main human representatives. 2. They serve as interpreters of the Arboretum's exhibit and grounds, helping to give the visitor a deeper understanding and appreciation of the environment and mission. 3. In addition, docents assist in preserving the gardens and exhibits by providing auxiliary security.

The interpretive or educational role of the docent is the most important and challenging aspect of the job. In order to be effective, a docent cannot just lecture to an audience. Docents must strive to actively involve visitors in the interpretation, giving them the tools of visual literacy. A docent should help the visitor attain some sort of "ownership" of the knowledge provided, and enable them to include such topics and concerns in their own lives. In order to do this, the docent should provide a broader understanding of the Arb's concepts and provide a context for the area with which they are working.

In her or his role as interpreter, a docent must be careful not to force value judgment or opinions on a visitor. Docents should strive for objectivity. The goal of a good tour or program is to enable the visitor to think for themselves about their relationship with the world. A docent must be sensitive to visitors' differences - learning style, cultural backgrounds, age level, and special needs. Today's audience is as varied as the artwork of a museum and requires open-mindedness, flexibility and respect.

The following characteristics make a good docent:

1. A sincere and genuine interest in people of all ages.
2. A love for and excitement about learning and teaching.
3. Attention to detail and accuracy.
4. A sense of flexibility and cooperation.
5. An attitude of tolerance and respect for all people's points of view.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ARBORETUM DOCENT

1. Prepared - This means not only knowing your material, but also being on-time (actually a bit early is better, since your group may show up early), and having everything you need for an outreach program or activities/projects handy.
2. Friendly - You are the hosts and hostesses; the front line of The Arboretum. Enthusiasm is contagious.
3. Good voice and good dress - This relates back to being a good host/hostess. You may want to practice by having someone follow you to see if your voice is loud enough, and always remember to face your audience so that those who lip read can see you and for the best projection. Communication includes the eyes and face! Appearance is important but so is comfort and a healthy respect for dirt! Remember your docent vests and try not to wear sunglasses on your tours.
4. Interactive - The best tour is one in which the audience feels that they have participated. Not only does it help them to remember more of what they have seen and heard, it gives them a sense of ownership. In addition, a docent should be responsive to the audience's interests and needs.
5. Open-minded and Respectful - We all come from different backgrounds and have unique beliefs and opinions. It is important to respect each person's views and be open-minded to new information. It is also important to remember that our own individual views should not be a part of the tour - we are here to guide visitors. Our role is to help them understand the work of the Arboretum, communicate the love of nature, and connect it to their own lives. Whether we like a particular issue, plant, or not, it is our duty to present it in a positive, informative manner.
6. Able to Read your Audience - Age levels, learning styles and cultural background enter into every tour. With practice you can learn to read your audience and see what methods of touring suit them best, what learning styles are represented, and if you are keeping their attention. Timing is another aspect of reading your audience - let them set the pace with their interest level, but remember to control the over-talker, etc.
7. Exercise Good Judgment - This will help to control visitors and help in emergency situations.

8. Admit that you Don't Know Everything—and that's ok! While preparation is mandatory, we can't know everything. Admit when you don't and assist the visitor in finding out.

The Arboretum's Docents are our educational outreach ambassadors. The success of our tour program is based upon your commitment to lead tours once trained. Thank you for choosing to join our family at The Arboretum at Flagstaff!

Training Classes from April-May 2016

Classes will be held in the Walter Reichardt house living room from 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m., every Wednesday, beginning April 6th for two months. Please bring a sack lunch. Trainings begin promptly at 10 a.m.—please plan to arrive 5-10 minutes early and give yourself time to maneuver the road and get coffee (provided). Due to speaker availability, there may be occasions when training will be scheduled on alternate days. Guest speakers, who are authorities in their fields, will offer presentations designed to increase the trainees' understanding of subject areas and their ability to lead public and school tours. Workshops, garden orientations, and model tours will provide other avenues for learning.

Subjects of Training Classes:

- The Arboretum at Flagstaff's Mission and History
- Botany and Ethnobotany
- Ecology and Sustainability
- Research and Conservation
- Programs and Projects
- Interpretative Techniques
- Horticulture and Gardening Techniques
- Forest Health
- Climate Change, etc.

Docents will learn:

- Botanical and environmental content related to the conservation of resources of the Colorado Plateau
- How to apply a variety of interpretative techniques
- How to confidently communicate key ideas to diverse audiences
- How to lead and create meaningful and engaging public tours
- How to lead and assist school tours and community programs

First Year Requirements

-A commitment to provide a minimum of **35 hours of service** primarily through public tours and school field trips of the gardens each year.

-**100% Attendance** at each of the 10 training sessions for the 2016 training session. If a trainee is absent, he/she is responsible for collecting the missed information. All cancelled classes will

be rescheduled.

-Pay the **one-time docent fee of \$75** to assist in covering the cost of supplies, family membership, and materials, and for providing experts in the fields of botany, sustainability, forestry, etc.

-Upon graduation, commit to working **two to three times a month** or more (1-2 hour time slots) for the remainder of our open season May-October.

-**Participation** in special events is part of your service. Special events often take place on Saturdays.

-**Keep track of all hours** volunteered in the volunteer notebook in the Arb administrative offices. These hours are important for grant applications. **Hours spent in docent training are not considered volunteer hours and need not be recorded.**

- Docents are expected to commit to volunteering at the Arb for at **least two years** after they complete training. Exceptions may be made for special circumstances.

- Arrange for your own **substitute** if necessary for a tour or program you are unable to attend and notify your volunteer manager of any changes. In the case of an emergency, please notify the office by 8:30 am.

Additional Information:

Developing confidence and leading quality interpretive programs takes time, practice, and commitment. **Course expectations** include: reading required texts, participating in training discussions, practicing public speaking/interpretative skills, learning to lead tours and workshops.

STATUS

Docents will be considered In-Training until they have completed the initial training course and had their tour evaluations. After completion, they will be considered a Docent.

While docents will not be placed in special categories, the Arboretum Staff will try to honor programming preferences. For example, a docent may express their preference for working with seniors or with adult groups rather than working with school groups. There may be times when desperation requires all hands on deck with a particular program, but every effort will be made to honor these wishes.

Continuing Docents are encouraged to:

- Provide a **minimum of 20 hours** of service throughout the season, primarily through public and school tours.
- Attend the annual **Docent Refresher** potluck
- Volunteer on **one weekend** day per eight weeks.
- Participate in special events.
- Retain current membership status.

Benefits

First-Year Benefits

- A **FREE family membership** to the Arboretum at Flagstaff
- Educational **classes** provided by professional naturalists and educators.
- Instructional **materials** and name tags are provided during training.
- Participation in Brown Bag Lunch Lectures and Lecture Series
- Docents providing 50 or more hours of service within a year receive a **20% discount** in the gift shop (family membership includes a 10% discount).
- Docents serving 25 hours or more by October 1st each year will be invited to the **volunteer appreciation breakfast**.

Continuing benefits in subsequent years of docent service

- Docents providing 50 or more hours of service will receive a **20% discount** in the gift shop.
- Lecture series and Master Gardener Brown Bag Lunch Lectures are open to all docents.
- Docents can attend all subsequent docent training sessions and continuing education lectures at **no cost**.
- Docents serving more than 25 hours per year will be invited to the **volunteer appreciation brunch**.
- Further recognition** opportunities based on hours served may be possible

Withdrawal

If circumstances require a docent to withdraw from the program and they wish to become involved again at a later date, they can contact the Volunteer Program Manager to discuss reentry options. If more than two years has passed since being active in the program, retraining may be required.