

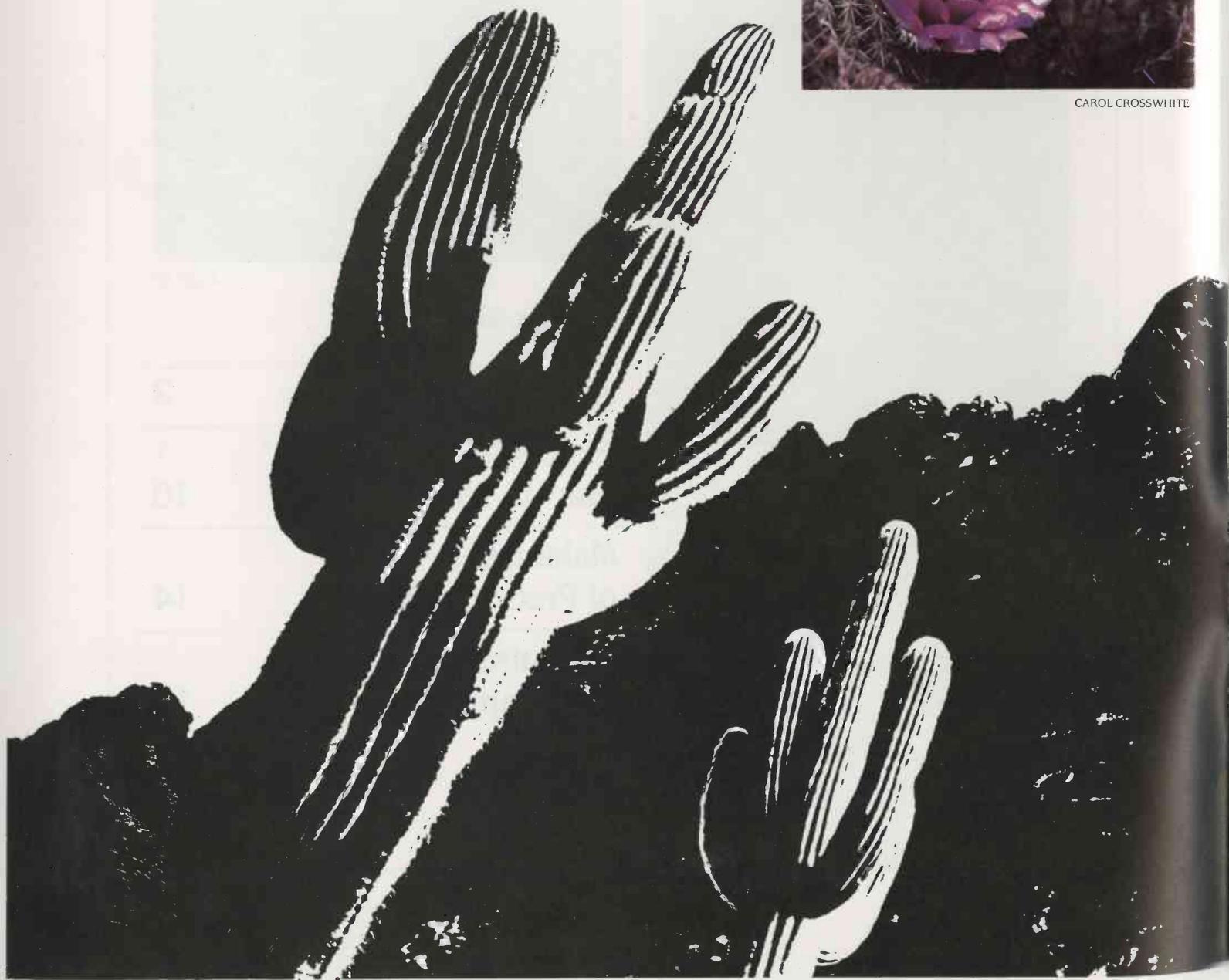
The Boyce Thompson
Southwestern Arboretum

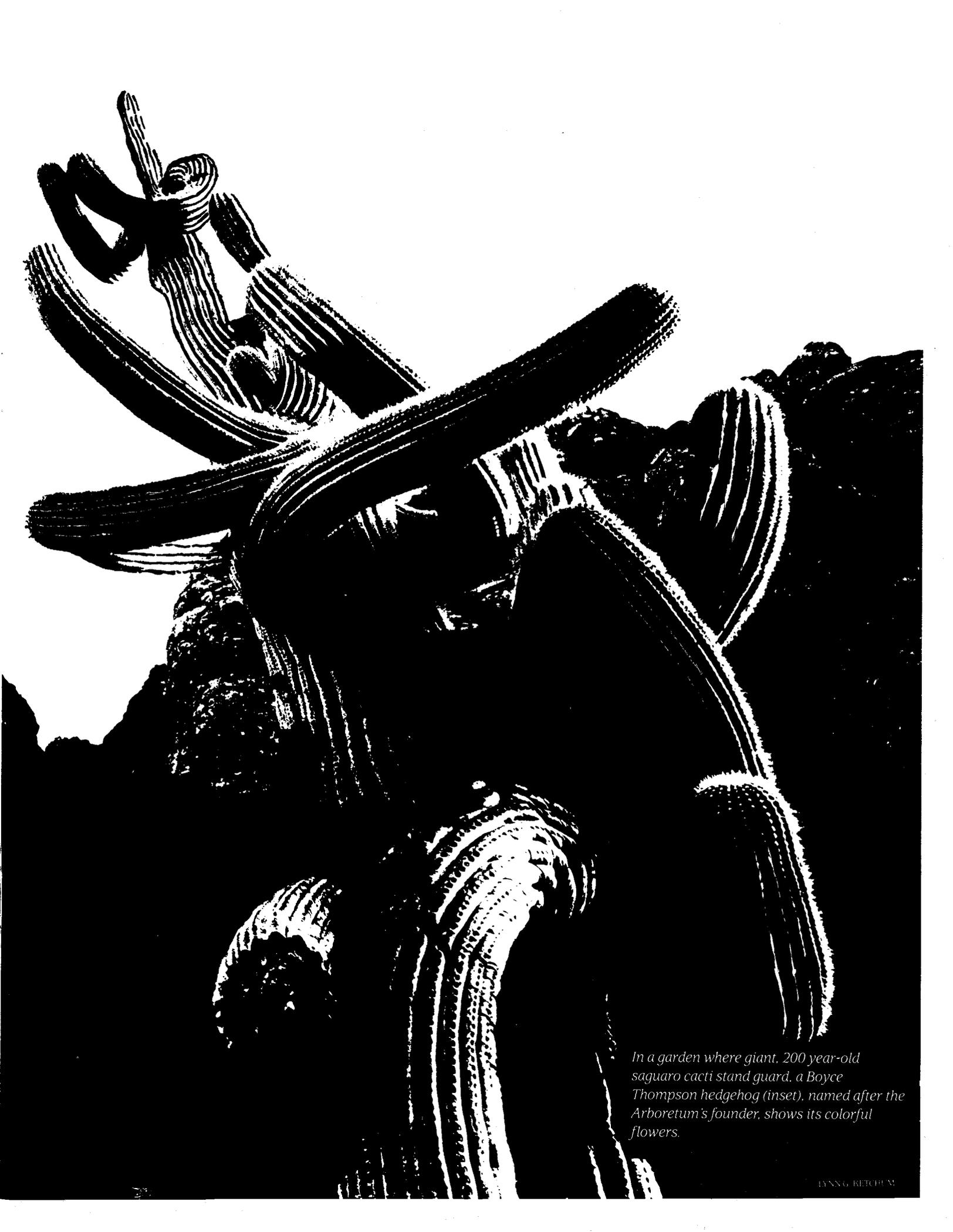
A GARDEN OASIS

By Lynn G. Ketchum



CAROL CROSSWHITE





In a garden where giant, 200 year-old saguaro cacti stand guard, a Boyce Thompson hedgehog (inset), named after the Arboretum's founder, shows its colorful flowers.

“They think an arboretum is a music camp, a rest home or something like that. They’re not quite sure what they’ve got.”

A lot of times people drive by the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum on U.S. Highway 60 and scratch their heads. Arboretum...? What’s that?

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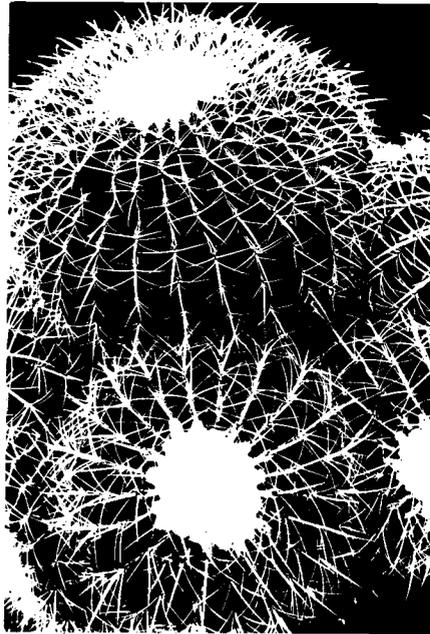
What they’ve got, Arboretum Director Dr. William Feldman says, is a special place, a botanical garden with a lot of tall trees and shrubs.

But a desert arboretum? It sounds like a contradiction in terms. Well, it is a bit of a paradox, Feldman admits. Many visitors are surprised to discover this oasis tucked away in a tree-lined canyon along Queen Creek between Apache Junction and Superior.

And even more surprising...the tall trees and lush landscape that characterize an eastern, wet-weather arboretum are actually desert plants, a collection that stems from arid climates around the world. Here the 2,500 different species of desert plants can grow on 16 inches of annual rainfall and a minimum amount of irrigation.

Besides its enormous collection of plants, there’s an added bonus awaiting a visitor to this arboretum. If the plants don’t catch your eye, then the breathtaking location will. The area’s majestic topography, colorful geology, and abundant wildlife (176 bird species have been observed here) make a visit to the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum more than just memorable. Reddish-brown canyon walls frame the 55 year-old horticultural sanctuary. It is a natural setting as grand, as magnificent as the West itself.

Operated by the UA College of Agriculture, the Arizona State Parks



LYNN G. KETCHUM

Board, and Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum, Inc., the Arboretum extends beyond its cultivated Queen Creek hub to an adjoining U.S. Forest Service preserve. The undisturbed landscape of Arnett Canyon and Picket Post mountain have become an extension of the unique botanical garden. Trails criss-cross more than a thousand acres of both private and public land, creating a nature preserve that provides a place for recreation, education and research.

This multiple use concept, a part of the arboretum tradition, was all important to William Boyce Thompson when he founded the Arboretum in 1929. It is a concept that also fits the man. Colonel Thompson, as described by his biographer Hermann Hagedorn, was a dreamer who “wedded beauty securely to utility.”

The mining magnate from Montana, owned the Magma copper mine in nearby Superior. But it was a trip to Russia in 1917 that sparked Thompson’s interest in creating the Arboretum. A co-leader of a Red Cross mission to famine-ravaged Russia, Thompson saw hunger, misery, and suffering. The experience had a dramatic impact on the philanthropist.

“He came back with a conviction that plants and our understanding of

plants were fundamental to our well being on this planet, particularly for people who come from dry areas,” Feldman says.

With that hope, Thompson first created the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research at Cornell University. Then in 1927 he selected the site for the Arboretum. Looking down from Apache Leap, near his Magma mine, he could see beyond Superior to Picket Post mountain (so named because during territorial days soldiers used the peak to watch for Indians). At its base, in the shadow of the Superstition Mountains, Thompson built not only the Arboretum, but his winter home.

It was a UA horticulture professor who roamed across the sprawling desert acres with Colonel Thompson and helped him design and plant what would become an international collection of arid plants. So, it was not surprising that Dr. Franklin Crider became the Arboretum’s first director.

When the Arboretum opened its doors in spring of 1929, Crider delivered the dedication speech on April 6, 1929. He reminded the crowd, assembled in this picturesque natural setting near Queen Creek, of Colonel Thompson’s conviction that plant study was vital to the “progress, benefit, and happiness of the human race.” Crider also predicted that plants would become even more important to Arizona’s economy, eventually surpassing then Arizona’s number one industry—mining.

Crider’s vision included an issue that has become critical to the life and to the economy of the desert Southwest...water. He realized the future of agricultural development depended on selecting, breeding, and propagating plants with low water requirements.



Photography By
Lynn G. Ketchum



More than 65,000
visitors every year,
from across the
state, the nation, and
the world find their
way to the
Arboretum.





LESLIE ELY



MARTY MCKITTRICK



LYNN G. KETCHUM



LESLIE ELY

There's no shortage of color in this Arboretum. With more than 20,000 plants in its collection, visitors can always find something in bloom... no matter what the season.

In the years since, the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum has been working towards that end. During the last half century, Arboretum research has spanned both commercial and ornamental desert horticulture, from domestication of jojoba to ground covers for home and commercial landscaping.

Currently, Arboretum researchers are screening new ground cover species that can be used in low land elevations in Arizona and California. In each case, researchers heed Crider's early mandate...develop low water use plants. They are looking at water use and determining irrigation requirements. "We are really trying to figure out," director Feldman says, "how little water we can get away with giving a plant, and still have it do what we want it to do in the landscape."

“There’s a great diversity of plant life that can exist under these stressful conditions.”

Whether it be water efficient plants, pollination biology, or natural history research, sharing the information with the public has been a goal of the Arboretum since its founding. More than 65,000 visitors every year, from across the state, the nation, and the world find their way to the Arboretum. Here they can mix recreation with education.

Two miles of well-marked trails lead visitors of all ages through this living museum. Often humming birds blaze the path past a towering boojum, through a shady eucalyptus grove, to the thorny, twisted arms of a 200 year-old, giant Saguaro cactus. All in all some 20,000 individual plants thrive in this unique botanical garden. The plant collection is a cosmopolitan one, an international garden that offers visitors

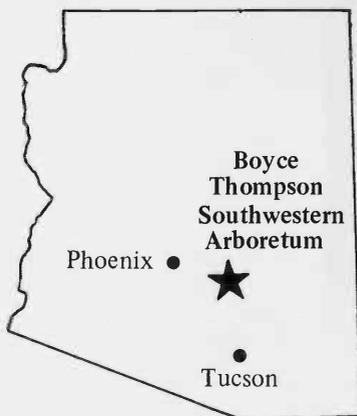


TIM CLARK

Colonel Thompson was a dreamer who
“wedded beauty securely to utility.”



Colonel Thompson's dream of a desert botanical garden devoted to recreation, research and education became a reality on April 6, 1929 when the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum was officially dedicated.



a taste of not just the flora of the Sonoran desert but of arid lands around the world.

The Arboretum staff currently is working to reorganize the giant garden along geographic lines. In the future visitors will be able to leisurely explore North American desert areas—Chihuahua, Sonora and Baja — and also Arabian, Mediterranean, Australian desert gardens.

More exotic cacti and succulents can be found in the rustic green houses, or conservatories, that have been a fixture in the arboretum since the days of Boyce Thompson. The green houses surround the original stone visitor's center. This is the hub of Arboretum activity. From here visitors can discover, on their own or with the help of a guide, the variety, the beauty, and the mystery of desert life. It is the

staff's hope that visitors will leave with not only a memorable experience but an appreciation for these unique and fragile parts of the world...the deserts.

“We'd also like them to understand there's a great diversity of plant life that can exist under these stressful conditions,” Feldman explains. “And a lot of it can be used in their homes and businesses to enhance their lives...to give them shade and shelter, privacy and an aesthetic value. And that those plants, don't have to use large amounts of water.”

There are many lessons to be learned here. The Arboretum provides not only tours of the botanical garden, but workshops and lectures on such topics as using desert plants for food, fiber and medicine; desert wildflowers; landscaping for wildlife; and drip irrigation.

In fact the "how to" of desert landscaping will become more apparent as the Arboretum works to complete a "demonstration garden". The garden is designed to show how desert plants can fit into the urban landscape. Besides a bookstore, the Arboretum offers novice desert gardens a hand by selling a huge variety of adapted arid land plants.

Today the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum continues to grow. In addition to continuing research projects, reorganization of the international plant collection, and completion of the demonstration garden, the Arboretum expects to see the number of visitors more than double by the end of the century.

In an effort to provide the thousands of tourists, school children and scientists with expanded educational programs, Arboretum officials are turning to a special building project. Fund raising is well underway for a new 6,000 square foot multi-purpose visitor center. The \$1.2 million facility will create a new focal point for Arboretum activities, and more than triple existing space used for the Arboretum's growing educational programs.

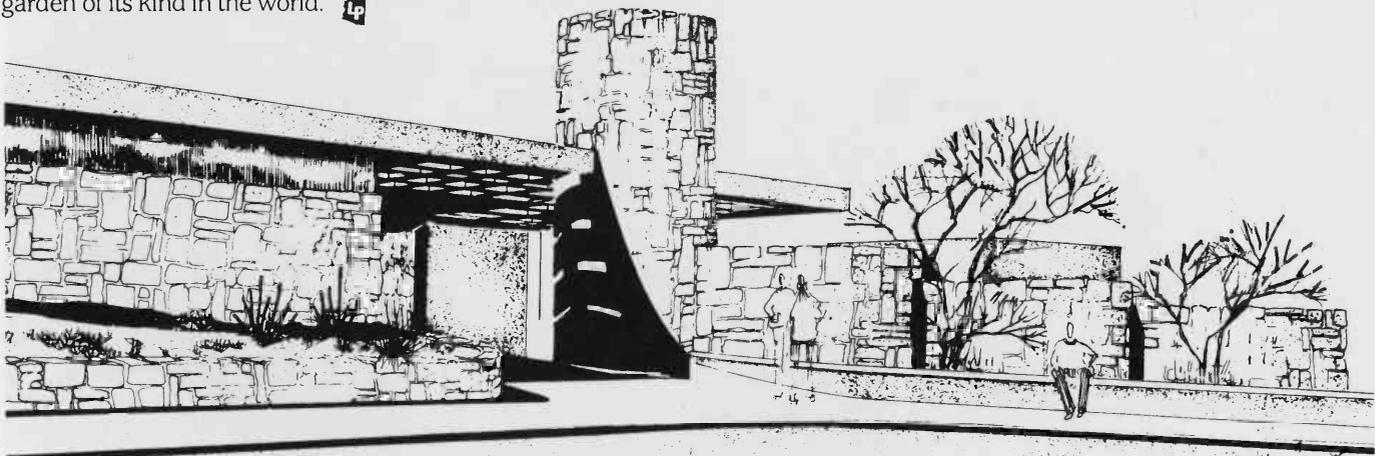
The new center will help the Arboretum continue promoting an appreciation for this unique and fragile environment called the desert. And it also represents another step towards fulfilling the dream of Colonel William Boyce Thompson — "to build the most beautiful and the most useful desert garden of its kind in the world."



LYNN G. KETCHUM



(above) A matilija flower is a welcome sight to Arboretum bees.(left) **Desert Plants**, a quarterly journal published by the UA College of Agriculture for the Arboretum, has for the last seven years provided its 3,000 subscribers with fascinating information about the world's desert plants.



LES WALLACH

Architectural rendering of the planned \$1.2 million visitor center.