

ARIZONA-SONORA
**DESERT
MUSEUM**



MEDIA RELEASE

Contact: Rosemary Prawdzik

Phone: 520-883-3070

Fax: 520-883-2500

rprawdzik@desertmuseum.org

www.desertmuseum.org

Otter This World! New Tweeter at the Desert Museum

TUCSON (May 6, 2014) Have you ever wanted to know “Who’s Who” on Twitter? Now it’s time to add one more contender to the list of the noteworthy and influential – the Desert Museum’s new and first-ever tweeting otter! What makes her different than other tweeting animals is that she triggers the tweets herself! She’ll be dispensing her views, advice, and desert trivia with style!

The system has been created in collaboration with the students participating in the EPICS (Engineering Projects In Community Service) project in their engineering class at Salpointe Catholic High School, which each year tackles engineering projects from the community. The students worked with mentors from Rincon Research Corporation. Motion sensitive cameras installed in the otter exhibit trigger tweets and photos that post directly to the otter’s Twitter account: @desertotter. Fans of the Museum worldwide can follow the otter’s antics from home and learn more about her day to day life. Followers also get a huge dose of cute from the photos!

“This project is a great way to showcase one of our most personable and playful animals” says Shawnee Riplog-Peterson, Curator of Mammalogy and Ornithology. “The river otter will also be able to use her Twitter account to educate guests about otter behaviors and provide the low-down on other Museum residents.”

The Salpointe students are part of a class co-enrolled at the University of Arizona that undertakes community projects each year. Their teacher, Sarah Streb, leads the class with the help of community mentors. "Many of the students in this program have developed real-world skills that they would not have otherwise developed. Students see what it means to work on a project with a real customer, with hard deadlines, and real life consequences" says Streb. "They mature as group members, communicators, engineers, and students." Mentor Charlie Cooper added "This was an ambitious objective for a group of high school students, but they pulled it off with the confluence of a very special group of kids, a very cool project, and force of will."

Having an exhibit animal on Twitter provides the Museum an opportunity to expand its interpretive abilities and make them more "social." The otter tweets about her daily capers but also about otters' natural behaviors and what's going on at the Museum. "This otter is a great opportunity for the Museum to reach out to a new, digital, generation of supporters" says Rosemary Prawdzik, Director of Marketing and Sales. "We're hoping that people all over the world will want to follow her!"

While there are many animals with their own Twitter handles, the otter is special because she triggers the tweets and photos with her movements around the exhibit. The project was inspired by the tweeting Honey Badger at the Johannesburg Zoo, but the students developed their own unique system for the Museum.

And now the otter needs a name! Fans of the museum are invited to participate in the naming contest which begins on Tuesday, May 6, 2014. The entry deadline is 11:59 p.m. on May 27th. Naming criteria are available on the name submission page.

Special prizes will be awarded to the winner, including a Walk On the Wild Side behind-the-scenes tour which includes an opportunity to interact with the otter! The winning name will be announced, of course, by an otter tweet on June 3, 2014.

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is ranked by TripAdvisor in the Top 10 Museums of the world. It is home to more than 230 animal species, 1,200 varieties of desert plants, and 56,000 individual specimens in addition to a world-class mineral collection, aquarium and art

gallery. Its mission is to inspire people to live in harmony with the natural world by fostering love, appreciation, and understanding of the bi-national Sonoran Desert region. The museum is located at 2021 N. Kinney Road in Tucson Mountain Park adjacent to Saguaro National Park (West). It is open daily year round with operating hours varying by season. Call (520) 883-2702 or visit www.desertmuseum.org for more information.

###