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Holistic approach works for environmental health

By Loni Nannini

SPECIAL TO THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Going green is all the buzz in Hollywood, but Catlow Shipek and other volunteers are bringing a holistic approach to environmental health close to home with the Watershed Management Group (WMG).

"We take a holistic approach not just about environmental and ecological linkages within the watershed system, but social and economical linkages, which evolve into political linkages: The holistic approach involves all the stakeholders, so no one is excluded," said Shipek, who holds a master's degree in watershed management from the University of Arizona. He partnered with Jared Buono and a small group of fellow students to found the nonprofit Watershed Management Group in 2003.

The grassroots organization is dedicated to creating a healthy, sustainable lifestyle for Tucson homeowners by effectively using natural resources such as rainwater, gray water, solar energy, organic waste and native plant species. The WMG partners with homeowners, schools, businesses and community groups through Greening Urban Watersheds, a program that implements water management while promoting energy conservation and local food production.

Greening Urban Watersheds provides free workshops and education on water harvesting and conservation through practical applications including earthworks — the building of berms and basins to capture water onsite and use it to its fullest potential — and installation of cisterns to supplement the water harvesting system. The WMG eventually will implement six local Urban Conservation Demonstration Sites; already in operation are sites at Originate Natural Building, 526 N. Ninth Ave., and the Nature Conservancy of Arizona, 1510 E. Fort Lowell Road. Plans are under way at the Ward III Council Office and Satori Charter School, and applications are being accepted for other locations.

Education is a key aspect of the program, according to Shipek's wife, Lisa, executive director of WMG.

"We want to help people become connected to the environment they live in and understand the processes that happen around us: where water comes from, who else is

How you can help

Celebrate Earth Day with Watershed Management Group

When: 8 a.m.-2 p.m. April 21.

Where: Originate Natural Building, 526 N. Ninth Ave.

Cost: Free.

The Earth Day Water Harvesting Celebration includes a tour of Originate's water harvesting system and a hands-on workshop on water harvesting basins and native planting. Registration is limited to 50 people. For more information and to register, call 396-3266.

The WMG also seeks volunteers and members for the board of directors. Call 396-3266 for more information. Make tax-deductible donations at www.watershedmg.org/ or send them to: Watershed Management Group; P.O. Box 65953; Tucson, AZ 85728.

using it and how activities in the watershed affect the water we have and how different players affect others within the watershed," Lisa said.

Buono, who is nearing completion in doctoral studies in the School of Natural Resources at the UA, said the overwhelming response from private and public sectors has been very gratifying.

He said it has fueled his faith in the future of the environment and the future of volunteerism for Generation X.

"I've been in natural resources for almost 10 years, and it seems the world over people are becoming more aware of our local and global environmental situations and are much more interested in participating and doing their part," he said.

One of the most effective ways for Tucsonans to become involved is by integrating change into daily life as both individuals and small communities, according to Catlow. He said the WMG provides information about ways for both rural and urban homeowners to do that.

"I think we are beginning to realize in general how we are all linked to the environment and to each other ... how whatever we do locally in our daily lives can affect others downstream or across the world in terms of climate change," Catlow said.

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Watershed Management Group executive director Lisa Shipek, left, gets help from students and volunteers, including her visiting sister Jessica Thompson, in moving a cistern for installation in Menlo Park.