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## **DESERT BOTANICAL GARDEN OFFERS FREE TOURS TO TITLE I STUDENTS**

*Funding Opens Garden Gates to 10,000 Students in 2007-2008 School Year*

PHOENIX (Oct. 1, 2007) – Beginning this month, the Desert Botanical Garden will begin offering free admission\* to Title I schools wishing to participate in the Garden’s extensive field trip programs. Education outreach is a major initiative of the Tending the Garden \$16-million endowment campaign launched earlier this year. Due in part to a donation from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona (BCBSAZ), as many as 10,000 Title I children will have the opportunity to tour the Garden, in addition to the 40,000 other students scheduled to tour this year.

“One of our biggest goals during the planning phases of our Tending the Garden campaign was to address the need to reach out to Title I schools and cast a wider net in our education system,” said Mary Lynn Mack, director of education at Desert Botanical Garden. “We are committed to our mission to teach more children about our desert environment, and welcome the chance to reach a diverse audience.”

This marks the first year of a five-year plan, designed to reach a total of 50,000 Title I students. Because of the campaign goals set forth by the Garden, paired with donations from corporate entities like BCBSAZ, education initiatives such as this one have become a reality.

“The Desert Botanical Garden is one of Arizona’s most cherished landmarks, and we feel strongly that every Arizona student should have the ability and means to experience it,” said Richard L. Boals, president and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona. “We share the Garden’s philosophy that healthy children connect with nature, and are happy to have had the opportunity to contribute to this valuable environmental education program.”

This year’s Title I free admission program is effective from October through February and is based on a first-come, first-served basis. The Garden is prepared to accommodate as many Title I students as possible and invites all qualifying schools to take part. Participating students will have the opportunity to experience the unique Sonoran environment under the guidance of the Garden’s educational staff, and participate in interactive and explorative activities based on the Arizona Academic Standards. Groups interested in scheduling a tour should visit [www.dbg.org](http://www.dbg.org) or call 480-481-8121.

\*Title I schools are entitled to free admission, excluding bus transportation and associated fees.

**About Desert Botanical Garden**

A Phoenix Point of Pride, the Desert Botanical Garden is one of only a few botanical gardens accredited by the American Association of Museums. It is a privately funded, non-profit organization and depends on revenues from admissions and gift shop sales, as well as contributions from individuals and businesses to fund its programs of environmental education, plant conservation and research. For more information about the Desert Botanical Garden, its mission and current initiatives, please visit [www.dbg.org](http://www.dbg.org) or call 480-941-1225.

**About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona**

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is the largest Arizona-based health insurance company. The not-for-profit company was founded in 1939 and provides health insurance products, services or networks to more than 1.1 million individuals. With offices in Phoenix, Flagstaff, Tempe and Tucson, the company employs more than 1,500 Arizonans. For information about Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona and its community programs such as WalkingWorks, please visit [www.azblue.com](http://www.azblue.com).

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