

## The Kenton Grua Memorial Scholarship, Making a Difference

Following is a letter from a first year recipient of the Kenton Grua Memorial Scholarship.

By Mike Caifa

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It's hard to believe that eighteen years have passed since I first began working as a guide in the Grand Canyon. Looking back, I can't imagine a better way to have invested those years. At the time, a college education was the furthest thought from my mind. I was young and single, and freedom from responsibility was my battle cry. Along the way, I met my wife-to-be, also a Grand Canyon guide, and together we spent our summers rafting, and our winters working in the warm waters of the Caribbean Sea. I was living the dream.

Two years ago, quite unexpectedly, I began thinking about a college education. As I closed in on forty years of age, I realized I wouldn't be able to keep up with the physical demands of guiding forever. Beverly, my wife, and I entertained the thought of starting our own dive shop along the coastal shores of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. The more I thought of the investment in not only our time, but also all of our savings, I began to have cold feet. It wasn't that I doubted our abilities to be successful in this endeavor, as it was my fears of natural disasters wiping us out. One hurricane, with a silly name like Egbert, could easily turn our dive shop into an artificial reef. I needed something to fall back on.

The drastic shortage of nurses, not only in the United States, but the world, was splashed all over the media a few years back. I began speaking to nurses on my trips through the canyon about their jobs. The more nurses I spoke to, the more I realized this was the direction I was heading. I've been an emt; on and off, for the past ten years, and always have enjoyed the work. Nursing would give me the opportunity to enter a dynamic field in an area of study, which I already knew I enjoyed.

Once I made the decision to begin school, it seemed everything just fell into place. The interest rates on home loans were at an all time low—possibly the lowest I would ever see in my lifetime—so we bought a home in St. George, Utah, where High Desert Adventures, the company we were working for, was based. St. George, also, is the home of Dixie State College, an institution with a respected nursing program. I applied for grants, which I didn't receive, but refused to be swayed from my decision. Instead of incurring any more debt, we dipped into our savings and paid for my first semester. The following summer, Meg Viera spoke to me about a scholarship program, managed by the Whale Foundation, in memory of Kenton Grua. I applied, and was pleasantly surprised to learn I was one of three guides awarded a scholarship. The funds greatly helped to offset the financial burdens a college education can be. In addition to the Kenton Grua Memorial Scholarship, this semester I was also awarded an academic scholarship from Dixie State.

In summary, change is not only a positive experience, but also an inevitable one.

Twenty years ago, I couldn't imagine working anywhere but the Grand Canyon, nor would I have guessed I would be a freshman at the age of 38. My advice to anyone entertaining the thoughts of a career change, at any point in their lives, would be to plow on full steam ahead. Assistance, in many forms, is available to make the transition

easier. I give my profound thanks to the board of directors of the Whale Foundation for their generosity, and their desires to make a difference in the lives of others.

The Kenton Grua Memorial Scholarship application is available on the Whale Foundation website at [www.whalefoundation.org](http://www.whalefoundation.org). It's not too early to be preparing your application for the 2004–2005 scholarships. The deadline is June 1, 2004. During 2003 the Whale Foundation awarded three \$1,000 scholarships to Grand Canyon river guides. We are proud of recipients like Mike Caifa and look forward to seeing more guides go back to school and receive assistance from the Whale Foundation.

### Announcements by Meg Viera

#### A Whale of a Year

During 2003 medical physicians saw seven guides and donated \$830 in services. Mental health professionals including counselors, psychologists and a psychiatrist saw fifty guides and donated 294 hours of service including Liaison Training worth approximately \$10,400. Twenty-six of the counseling hours were billed at fifty percent. The Whale Foundation was able to pay some of the guide counseling in full. If you need help in any way, please call our confidential hotline toll free at 1-866-773-0773. We also have a plethora of information at [www.whalefoundation.org](http://www.whalefoundation.org). If we can be of assistance in anyway or if you have suggestions or comments, get in touch. We would love to hear from you.

#### The First Annual Whale Foundation Health Fair

As a reminder, the 2004 Spring GTS will feature the first-ever Whale Foundation's Health Fair. This inaugural event is aimed at promoting healthier lives and lifestyles for the guiding community. It's open to all guides, and it's free!

On Saturday, March 27th, there will be two designated time slots for Health Fair participation. The first will follow the last of the morning presentations, beginning around 12 noon or so, and continue for one to one and a half hours during the lunch break. Health-fair stations will be set up within the Hatch warehouse where participants may access to a variety of volunteers from the medical community (doctors, nurses, physical therapists, etc.) who will be providing a range of free basic screenings and information on a variety of medical problems including: high blood pressure, glaucoma, skin cancer, low back pain, and repetitive motion injuries. In addition, vouchers to obtain free or discounted medical tests will also be given and will include: cholesterol (for heart disease-risk screening), blood glucose (for diabetes screening), psa's (for males at higher risk for prostate cancer) and mammograms (for women at higher risk for breast cancer). If you miss the first session, no worries! The scenario will be repeated in the late afternoon, around 5 p.m., following the last of the afternoon presentations, and continuing for about one hour around dinner. Then on Sunday, the 28th, the Whale Foundation is also sponsoring a presentation on financial planning as part of its effort to help guides attain financial as well as physical health.

More good news is that nothing is required of participants for the Health Fair other than showing up. That's right—no prerequisite fasting, embarrassing exposures or body orifice probing. So relax, enjoy the weekend! And remember it's free! We hope to see you there!

#### Shana Coupland Mental Health Memorial Fund

A new fund has been set up with donations earmarked for mental health services in memory of Shana Coupland. This fund was established by a supporter of the Whale Foundation who wanted to help others with donations given in remembrance of a young and vital woman who lost her life to suicide as a result of depression.

#### 2005 Calendars

The Whale Foundation 2005 calendar is out and filled with the artistic talents of 12 contributors from our river community. The calendars are \$12 and can be purchased through the Whale Foundation at other locations to be announced.

#### WingDing Success

The second annual Whale Foundation WingDing was held on Saturday, January 31, 2004 at the Coconino Center for the Arts. At this year's WingDing, over 350 people attended for food, drinks, music, live and silent auctions—and just to have a great time. The Whale Foundation cannot begin to thank all of the individuals that made this event happen. For fear of leaving someone out, we wish to just extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone that made this event so successful. Donations came pouring in for sponsorships, auction items, entertainment, food, signage, etc. The generosity we received was unbelievable!

When we first began talking about the WingDing, we wanted to create a party where the river community could get together to not only celebrate our old friend Whale, but also catch up with one another at a relaxing, fun event. We believe we accomplished what we set out to create. Whale was there in spirit—everyone who attended can attest to that. Many in attendance ran into friends they hadn't seen in years. This was exciting to experience. The success of our event will allow us to further extend the programs the Whale Foundation offers to the guiding community.

Once again, we wish to thank everyone who donated and/or attended the second annual Whale Foundation WingDing. If you weren't there this year—we missed you and we hope to see you all again in 2005! Thanks again.