

Member Profile: Jaime Dickerson

By Lydia Saldaña, Friends Board Member

[Editor's note: Each issue, we will be profiling a Friends member whom the Nature Center has impacted in some way. Would you like to share your story? Contact us at info@naturecenterfriends.org.]

Jaime Dickerson has been visiting the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge for more than 40 years. First as a university student, then as a husband and father, and now as a devoted volunteer.

"I remember visiting for the first time and being surprised that a city the size of Fort Worth could have such a wonderful resource for its citizens," recalls Jaime. "Thousands of acres of really beautiful, wild landscapes and North Texas habitats being preserved forever. It's even more remarkable today as we've seen the city grow all around us."

Jaime studied biology at the University of Texas at Arlington, where he met his wife, Nancy. She hailed from Fort Worth, which led to the couple's decision to settle there. In graduate school, Jaime wanted to do a research project at the Nature Center, and, as now, Nature Center management welcomed the opportunity.

"I studied the territoriality of dragonflies at a pond's edge and spent a lot of time out there gathering data," Jaime remembers. "It ended up being my first peer-reviewed paper that was published in a scientific journal."

Jaime went on to earn a doctorate in biochemistry and, soon after, settled into a professional career and married life. He and his wife became members of the Nature Center in the early 1980s and have been members ever since.

"After we got married and had kids, we didn't visit the Nature Center as much, maybe one or two times a year," says Jaime. "But we wanted to show our support, and becoming a member was an easy way to do that."

It wasn't until after his kids were grown that Jaime really took advantage of the free visitation benefit of membership.

"A few years ago, my best friend, Bert Slade, and I were planning a trip to Big Bend, and Bert wanted to get in some training hikes. He had never been to the Nature Center, so I suggested he check it out," says Jaime. "The Canyon Ridge Trail is fantastic because it's got such varied topography. It's a great place to train and exercise."

The two friends now hike together at the Nature Center pretty much every weekend.



Several years ago, Jaime Dickerson (L) and Bert Slade (R) began hiking the Canyon Ridge Trail at the Nature Center to train for a hike to Big Bend National Park. They are pictured on one of the trails at Big Bend in September 2020. Photo courtesy of Jaime Dickerson.

"Now, I'm really using my membership visitation benefit and am out there all the time," Jaime says. "In fact, I'm pretty sure I'm not paying enough!"

But Jaime and his friend found another way to pay it forward. It started with picking up small pieces of trash they found as they hiked. During the fall as the leaves dropped, however, they started noticing a lot more garbage. The trail parallels a cliff that fronts Jacksboro Highway, and the two began noticing lots of bigger stuff, like a rusty water heater and an old boat.

"We both thought maybe we should do something about that," notes Jaime. "We progressed from picking up the random plastic bottle that popped out of someone's backpack to, hey, let's go get that water heater."

The two men figured out a way to get the water heater out—and the boat—and as they pushed farther off the trail, they noticed a couple of tires by the creek.

"We thought we should get those, too," recalls Jaime. "And when we



A trailer full of tires sits ready to be hauled away. Photo courtesy of Jaime Dickerson.

did, we looked up the creek and saw a literal waterfall of tires, more than a thousand of them."

Undaunted, they contacted Nature Center staff to work out a way to clean up the mess. The Nature Center provided a trailer, and Jaime and Bert organized several workdays to haul out tires. So far, they've taken out about 450 tires, and they are determined to finish the job.



Bert Slade ended up having to saw a discarded boat into pieces to be able to remove it from the creek. Photo courtesy of Jaime Dickerson.

"The Canyon Ridge area has long been a problem dumping area, and Jaime and Bert are continuing a long tradition of volunteers spurring cleanup efforts," notes Fort Worth Nature Center Manager Rob Denkhaus. "Without the support of our dedicated volunteers and members of the Friends group, projects such as the tire cleanup would continue to languish. We are very grateful for their support."

For Jaime and Bert, it's a labor of love.

"We enjoy the Nature Center so much, and

we get so much out of it," says Jaime. "Especially during this surreal and bizarre last year, it's been wonderful for our mental health to be able to get outside and just forget about the pandemic. If there's something we can do to pay back a little bit for what we get out of it, that's what we want to do."

Jaime and Bert will be organizing another workday soon, probably in the fall when it cools down a bit. In the meantime, Jaime encourages all who support having access to nature to become a member of the Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center.

"Free visitation is a great membership benefit, but there's so much more than that," Jaime says. "If you value nature, if you value the landscape that was North Texas before the city was here, and if you value having a resource for kayaking and hiking and just observing wildlife, it's an incredible investment. It's been here for generations, and if we continue to support it, it will be around for many more generations to come."

Find out how you can become a member.

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Jaime Dickerson moves tires down the creek. Bert Slade created the "troll" bridge cap, a temporary plywood cover seen under the tire, to protect the trail bridge during tire removal. Photo courtesy of Bert Slade.