



# Inner City Outings

*Providing outdoor opportunities for urban youth and adults*



ABOVE: Participants from Tucson ICO enjoy hiking, come across cactus, and befriend butterflies on recent outings during the fall of 2010.

## 2010 Highlights: A Note from ICO Administrator, Debra Asher

Happy New Year, Everyone! I hope that 2011 is off to a great start for you.

Throughout 2010, the Inner City Outings program continued to involve youth in teamwork, teach self-reliance outside an urban setting, and encourage youth to take an active role in protecting the environment. By helping young people discover the beauty and importance of wild lands, ICO also aids the Club in building support for environmental protection in urban communities across the country, proving the truth of John Muir's assertion that those who experience wilderness firsthand are much more likely to preserve it for future generations. In addition to nourishing young, growing minds, and getting young people physically active in nature, ICO also provides important leadership training and resources for the volunteers who keep the program alive.

ICO Orange County youth leaders Giao Tran and Lucy Lang put it this way: *"Each stewardship and volunteer project is one step closer to bringing individual Americans together as an entire nation to ensure that future generations will be allowed to enjoy the beauty and opportunity of our country."*

As I write this, complete 2010 statistics are being compiled, but here's a bit of what we know so far.

*(continued on page 2)*



**TOP:** Dallas ICO waves from the ferry on a recent outing on Galveston Bay. **MIDDLE:** Participants from Interfaith Hospitality House joined Birmingham ICO and looked for creatures in the marsh at Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve. **BOTTOM:** Sacramento ICO take quick dip in Flora Lake during a weekend at Sierra Club's Clair Tappaan Lodge.

(continued from page 1)

### **In 2010, the Inner City Outings program:**

- Led outings for 9,063 youth participants; recording 11,268 youth participant days in the wilderness, ranging from day hikes to weekend backpacking trips;
- Conducted 19 local service projects, including seed plantings, river cleanups, and the removal of invasive non-native plants; and participated in Sierra Club's Serve Outdoors National Day of Service on September 11<sup>th</sup>, with 13 ICO groups conducting service/educational outings;
- Trained 22 young outings leaders (ages 17-30) and 13 new ICO chairs;
- Conducted strategic planning workshops for four ICO groups, plus ICO Outings Leader 101 (basic) and 201 (advanced) workshops, as well as Child Abuse Recognition and Prevention trainings for approximately 40 volunteers.
- Raised \$104,527 and distributed it to ICO groups, ensuring fun and inspirational outdoor experiences led by well-equipped volunteers;
- Improved resources for ICO groups, including the development of online donation capability (16 donation pages set up to date) and a revised best practices toolkit.

Last year we bid a fond farewell to ICO Organizer, Myla Marks. During her time with us, Myla made great strides towards our goal of increasing the number of outings, participants, and trained leaders in the program. She worked directly with local ICOs to strengthen fledgling groups, develop existing group capacity, and provide the impetus and structure to kick-start stagnant groups.

One of her recommendations for the future was to make it a priority of the National Steering Committee to support ICO groups in their regions through regular contact with volunteers in the field. Based on funding, we will determine where we target our resources throughout the year. Also in 2011, thanks to a generous bequest, we're able to continue offering National Service Trip scholarships to ICO participants, and are considering the possibility of an all-ICO service trip. We will also refine and expand our program evaluation tools (read more about this on page 4).

As always, thank you to our amazing volunteers, leaders, teachers, and most of all youth, who made 2010's ICO experiences enriching, enlightening, and worthwhile.

My best to you for a wonderful new year,

Debra Asher  
ICO National Administrator  
[debra.asher@sierraclub.org](mailto:debra.asher@sierraclub.org)

# Trip Highlights

## Birmingham ICO

This special outing began as an idea from a parent whose children had gone on outings with the group several years ago when his family found themselves in the Interfaith Hospitality House – a temporary homeless shelter and ICO’s partner agency. Garry had since found work and moved his family into nearby sponsored housing, but still maintained a relationship with the staff at the shelter. With unbridled enthusiasm, he coordinated with ICO leaders to take children currently at the homeless shelter on a birding expedition. In spite of the threat of rain, the youth sighted, identified, and counted local birds for the annual winter Audubon Society survey. Each participant was equipped with a pair of binoculars and bird guide book. Youth quickly demonstrated their “eagle eyes” in finding hidden birds, and, with a little guidance, identifying them. Thanks to the passion of a parent touched by ICO, this new expedition provided the youth with an educational and exciting experience.

## Dallas ICO

This adventure of the Dallas ICO and Pegasus School of Liberal Arts and Sciences included a lot of firsts: a ferry ride across Galveston Bay, complete with a dolphin sighting; exploration of Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary; an excursion to the Texas Sea Center including a behind-the-scenes tour of fish research tanks; and a viewing of Saturn’s rings with a 36 foot telescope. The oldest participant said this had been the best weekend of his life. A few weeks later as his school’s valedictorian, he mentioned the positive influence of his ICO experiences in his graduation speech.

*“I saw amazing things all the way from down in the ocean to up in the sky.”*

–12<sup>th</sup> grade student,  
Pegasus School, Dallas

## Sacramento ICO

Sixteen boys and girls from Sacramento ICO’s Connections for Youth, spent a weekend at Sierra Club’s Clair Tappaan Lodge under the auspices of Gateway Mountain Center. Activities included hiking to Flora Lake, learning about native plants and geology, swimming, and reflecting on the hike through journal writing. A campfire and s’mores ended the evening as a light rain began to fall. The rain never let up the next day, but the kids seemed to enjoy the time inside, socializing and bonding, very important skills for foster children to acquire.

## ICO AT A GLANCE

Begun in 1971 by the Sierra Club’s San Francisco Bay chapter, ICO promotes appreciation and protection of the natural environment through wilderness adventures and environmental education.

Today, 49 groups nationwide serve more than 11,000 young people on approximately 845 outings and service trips each year. Participants include low-income inner city youth and adults, as well as the physically challenged; people who would not otherwise have access to safe, enjoyable outdoor experiences.

Three part-time staff and approximately 400 volunteers run the program.

## ICO LOCAL GROUPS

**Alabama:**  
Birmingham

**Arizona:**  
Phoenix, Tucson

**California:**  
Eastern Sierra, Los Angeles, Orange County, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Francisco Rafting, San Jose

**Colorado:**  
Boulder, Denver

**Connecticut:**  
Hartford, New Haven

**DC:**  
Washington

**Florida:**  
Gainesville, Jacksonville, Manatee-Sarasota, Miami, Orlando, Tampa Bay, West Palm Beach

**Georgia:**  
Atlanta

**Illinois:**  
Chicago

**Kentucky:**  
Lexington, Louisville

**Maryland:**  
Baltimore

**Massachusetts:**  
Boston

**Michigan:**  
Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti (Washentaw), Grand Rapids

**Minnesota:**  
Minneapolis/St. Paul

**Missouri:**  
St. Louis

**New Jersey:**  
North Central

**New York:**  
New York City

**North Carolina:**  
Triangle - Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill

**Ohio:**  
Cincinnati, Cleveland

**Oregon:**  
Portland

**Pennsylvania:**  
Harrisburg, Philadelphia

**Tennessee:**  
Nashville

**Texas:**  
Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Houston

**Washington:**  
Seattle, Spokane

**Wisconsin:**  
Madison

## Program Evaluation: A Pilot Study

To be as effective as possible in our work with ICO participants, we want to quantitatively understand our influence on them. Our ultimate goal is to provide a standard, user-friendly survey for ICO volunteers to administer annually to their regular participants and agency partners so we can better assess: 1) how well participants demonstrate an awareness of the value of the outdoors and knowledge of their local environment; 2) how well they have acquired the skills they need to enjoy the outdoors; and 3) any notable changes in themselves in relation to personality, interests, and future endeavors.

With the volunteer assistance of Valerie McKay, statistics professor at California State University, Long Beach and spouse of Orange County ICO leader, Dave Fujiyama, we launched a pilot study. Valerie crafted a simple survey for us to use with Baltimore ICO's Digital Harbor High School group under the leadership of teacher Nicole Veltre. Over one month, we collected 18 surveys from students who had participated in ICO trips from one to three years.

Preliminary results have been encouraging and indicate a) participants' awareness and knowledge of the environment was significantly different before and after ICO involvement and b) responses to the open-ended questions consistently reflect the positive effect ICO has had on these youth. The next phase of this project is a web-based survey for all ICO groups to administer, using questions that have proved "positive reliability." We hope to then have data to prove what we inherently know – that ICO has a positive effect on its participants and the environment.

## ICO Youth Become Model Citizens

A gratifying part of ICO is hearing about participants who stay involved in our program into young adulthood. Arturo Cervantes of San Francisco Bay ICO and Lilia Salas of San Jose ICO are such examples. With young leaders like them, we are building the next generation of environmentalists.

**Arturo Cervantes**, 20, of East Palo Alto grew up in a violent neighborhood that led him to gang involvement and jail. Not wanting to go further down this destructive path, Arturo joined his local ICO, a choice with life-changing results. "If the outdoors hadn't been there for me, I'd probably still be in jail. Now I'm a whitewater rafting guide, outings leader, youth mentor, and full-time college student," he explains. Arturo tries to help other students from his high school realize that life is all about making smart choices.

**Lilia Salas** participated in many ICO adventures as a kid and as she grew older, helped younger kids get the most out of their experiences. Lilia is now in college, works full time and still helps out on outings and in the classroom. One teacher comments, "When Lilia comes on trips she is planting ideas in the heads of these at-risk kids that goes well beyond the influence of their parents or teachers." Coming from and working in a neighborhood where only 15 percent of Latinos attend college, Lilia shows the young people like her that anything is possible.



*"If the outdoors hadn't been there for me, I'd probably still be in jail."*

Arturo Cervantes,  
San Francisco Bay ICO



**TOP:** Arturo Cervantes, San Francisco Bay ICO Leader, takes local participants whitewater rafting. **BOTTOM:** Lilia Salas shows off a new friend on a recent Inner City Outing she helped lead.