Humble water goddess

Lisa Shipek, executive director of Watershed Management Group in Tucson

Before enlightenment, Chop wood, carry water.

After enlightenment, Chop wood, carry water.

-Zen saying

By Tim Hull

It took a wanderer's existence to help Lisa Shipek realize she wanted roots, and now she’s putting them down deep in Tucson and soaking them with harvested rain water.

The 29-year-old executive director of the local nonprofit Watershed Management Group (WMG) has spent time in Costa Rica, South Africa, India, Japan, and a few less familiar places. She’s the kind of fun, easy for people in urban settings, "The more the collective human footprint expands, the more pertinent the questions become. Are humans capable of living in harmony with nature, with each other? Or is the aura of where we live just a tool for us to change the environment for the better?"

"When I was younger I really wanted to work abroad, and I still do want to do that, but as I worked abroad and traveled around I realized that I wanted to put down roots in my own country, be part of a community, and really make change there; it's hard to make change to other communities when you can't do it in your own home, and I think there is incredible energy here - there's a good sense of community and a real genuine interest in doing good things socially and environmentally." Shipek says the nonprofit WMG decided to concentrate on water because, especially in the arid Southwest, it's "the resource that ties all other resources together." The group has thus far concentrated on water harvesting and changing the way people think about landscaping -- into which some 40 to 60 percent of our water resources flow.

"Water harvesting has been a means for us to reach a lot of people and start an education process," she says. "It's practical and kind of fun, and easy for people in urban areas to do." Currently the bulk of the group's work is done through a series of workshops that have begun about two years ago and now consist of 4 to 6 presentations, a demonstration garden, and a workshop in which people are taught how to do the work that they learned about. Currently the bulk of the group's work is done through a series of workshops that have begun about two years ago and now consist of 4 to 6 presentations, a demonstration garden, and a workshop in which people are taught how to do the work that they learned about.

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