Meeting and Greeting Our Visitors
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Some of the many visitors to our town are just passing through. Many are here because they have been drawn to this area’s beauty and its recreational activities. Either way, they have questions... about trails, the lake, restaurants, lodging, wineries, birds...

I spent a weekend manning the new Patagonia Visitor’s Center in mid-March and I have been in and out several times a day since then. The first day I took some reading material, but there wasn’t much time to sit down because the little storefront at the corner of McKeown and Third Avenue, with its newly painted signs, was like a magnet to visitors and local people as well. I gave out many maps (up-to-date and easy to read thanks to Heather Dodge), suggested hikes and a few bike rides, pointed people towards rental possibilities, lodging, restaurants, galleries and shops.

One couple said they had been camped in their RV for a month because they were having dental work done in Nogales, Sonora. They had seen everything. They were bored. What could I recommend? I sent them on the trail to the cemetery. They were delighted.

I must have sent at least a dozen people to the newly-named Tucson Audubon Paton Center for Hummingbirds. Some of them were not even birders. One man came back later and told me that he had learned so much about birds by sitting and listening to the other visitors that he thought he might buy a pair of binoculars.

One very well-groomed woman from Green Valley got out of a sparkling white four-door sedan and asked how to get to the San Rafael Valley. When I showed it to her on the map, she hesitated and asked if the brown line we were looking at indicated a dirt road. When I said “yes” she shook her head. “No paved roads? I guess we won’t be going there.” Another man from Green Valley sat on the upholstered couch for about 20 minutes - said he was with three women and they were shopping. In the time he was there he had told me all about the winter in Minnesota and we agreed that Garrison Keillor might be losing his edge. He tottered on out into the windy afternoon, tipping his baseball hat with a thank you.

I had answers for most questions until I stopped in on the first Tuesday when Paisley McGuire was volunteering. “Maybe Ann can answer your question,” she said to a tall, bespectacled man. He wanted to know where William Wrightson was buried. Fortunately I know who Wrightson was because the PRT had just done an article about Fort Buchanan, but where the 19th century surveyor was buried? I had no idea. “If you find out, we’d like to know,” I told him—and now realize that I should have sent him to the library where there’s a whole room of reference books on the region. Ah well, this is a learning process for all of us.

And then, there was the couple (she an artist, he a photographer) who went to the "Tombstone" event on Saturday night and turned up on Sunday asking how they could find a place to rent. They said they had fallen in love with Patagonia and were thinking about moving here.

When Mariposa Books and More closed, I don’t think we realized what an important resource was disappearing. Ann Caston was a font of information and friendliness, an important link in the economy of this region where visitors spend hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. Without a visitor’s center it’s hard to know who these people are, much less encourage them to stay awhile. They aren't likely to find The Nature Conservancy or Patons, the Arizona Trail, the cemetery, or even the library without some guidance. One couple asked about "the pizza place" and I pointed across the road. "We drove right past and never saw it," they said.

If you’re interested in volunteering at the new visitor’s center, come by between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. or give Heather Dodge a call (520-732-0598). I can recommend it as entertaining and gratifying. You’ll learn a lot about the place you live and who comes for a few hours, a season or a relocation.