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MOJAVE MAXINE vs PUNXSUTAWNEY PHIL: WHO WILL "SPRING" FIRST?

Prizes To Be Awarded Students Entering Contest Guessing Date & Time Of Mojave Maxine's 2012 Emergence

Palm Desert/Indian Wells, CA - The Living Desert, in partnership with the Desert Managers Group, announce the 2012 Mojave Maxine Emergence Contest, (formerly known as the Southern California Mojave Max Emergence Contest). Southern California* students are encouraged to go online to guess the time and date when Mojave Maxine, a large female desert tortoise who lives at The Living Desert, will emerge from her burrow for the first time in 2012; thereby ushering in the new season.

Just as the East has Punxsutawney Phil, the West has Mojave Maxine. Each year, Maxine emerges from brumation (the reptilian form of hibernation), at which time, according to legend, spring is said to officially begin in the Mojave Desert.

Last year the large tortoise, native to the Mojave and Sonoran deserts, emerged on February 19th at 11:38 am. This season she has been in her den since on November 26th, waiting for the warm sun and the flowers to return.

"The Mojave Maxine Emergence Contest is a fun way to get students excited about learning about the desert tortoise." said Kyle Pong, Desert Tortoise Conservation Coordinator. "The desert tortoise is California's state reptile and is listed as Threatened on the US Endangered Species List. The contest helps to create awareness about the desert tortoise and hopefully intrigues students and teachers to learn more about this

wonderful herbivorous reptile."

The online contest, which challenges southern California school children to guess the day and time that Maxine will emerge for the first time in 2012, is one of several components of an education program developed by the Desert Managers Group (DMG). DMG is a consortium of county, state, federal and military agencies that work together to manage federal and state lands within southern California. In 2008 the DMG and the Living Desert developed a partnership to promote the California Mojave Max Emergence Contest and desert tortoise conservation.

The winning entry, announced on The Living Desert website, will be awarded with a \$50 gift certificate, a Federal Parks Lands Pass, a \$100 gift certificate for the student's teacher, and their entire class will get a visit from a desert tortoise, including Mojave Maxine t-shirts for everyone.

Eligibility for prizes is restricted to students, K-12, enrolled in public, private, and registered home schools, youth groups or library programs of less than 40 students. The contest will remain open until Maxine emerges from her burrow.

For more information or to enter the contest go to www.livingdesert.org, www.mojavedata.gov/contest, or www.mojavemax.com.

* The contest is open to students in the following southern California counties: Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego and Ventura.

About the Living Desert: The Living Desert is an accredited zoo and gardens that is dedicated conservation and education. It is a family friendly place to explore nature and create meaningful experiences for visitors that are remembered for a lifetime.

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