

# BORDER eeco 10 Years



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FREE ISSUE!

## CONNECTING SOUTHERN ARIZONA



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**"Education must not simply teach work-it must teach life." W.E.B. Du Bois**

HAPPY  
**Valentines**  
DAY



**Alfredo I. Velásquez**  
**Santa Cruz County**  
**School Superintendent**  
**&**  
**Staff**

21 E. Court St.  
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# Border Eco Updates

This year marks a monumental milestone for Border Eco as we celebrate over 10 years of connecting Santa Cruz County! Over the past decade, we've had the honor of shining a light on the people, events, and organizations that make our bordertown truly special. From celebrating our vibrant cultural heritage to addressing the challenges that shape our community, Border Eco has been proud to serve as a platform for meaningful dialogue and connection.

None of this would have been possible without the unwavering support of our readers, sponsors, and supporters. Your dedication has fueled our mission to tell the stories that matter most. As we reflect on the past 10 years, we're filled with gratitude for the incredible journey we've shared and the impact we've made together.

Now, we're looking ahead to the next decade with excitement and determination. Border Eco remains committed to fostering unity, celebrating the unique spirit of our community, and continuing to be a voice for Santa Cruz County.

**This is Your Moment to Shine!**

**Join our Border Eco Community Facebook Campaign and be part of the celebration!**



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Please send us information on any upcoming events, meetings, or programs to share with our readers.

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# Judge Emilio Velasquez: A Life Dedicated to Justice, Compassion, and Community Transformation

It is in the quiet moments of reflection that Judge Emilio Velasquez often returns to the one guiding principle that has shaped his career and life: "What we do for marginalized and broken people determines our own humanity." A lifetime of dedication to justice and compassion that has left a permanent mark on the community is not simply a statement; it is the foundation for a lifelong commitment to justice and compassion.

This month, Border Eco proudly features Judge Velasquez in its "People Who Echo" series, celebrating individuals who create lasting impacts in our community. His story resonates deeply, reminding us all of the power of dedication, visionary leadership, and a belief in the transformative potential of humanity.

## A Legacy of Service

Born into a family whose roots were deeply rooted in community service, Judge Velasquez grew up with a profound sense of responsibility to give back. His early exposure to the struggles and triumphs of others ignited his passion for justice, ultimately leading him to pursue a career in law. But for Velasquez, justice was never merely about legal principles or courtroom victories; it was about empowering people, especially those most vulnerable and overlooked. As an attorney and later as a judge, Velasquez's vision was clear: true justice is not punitive but restorative. His approach sought to address crime's root causes, offering individuals a chance to rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose.

## Beyond the Bench: A Lifelong Advocate

Judge Velasquez's influence extends far beyond his time on the bench. Even after his tenure, he remains a tireless advocate for mental health and substance abuse initiatives. From organizing the Mental Health Summit to creating awareness about the importance of mental health resources, he has continued to shine a light on critical issues that affect the community. His efforts have not only addressed immediate challenges but have also fostered a culture of empathy and understanding. By promoting collaboration between local organizations, healthcare providers, and community leaders, Velasquez has created a ripple effect of change that continues to grow.

## Innovative Programs That Change Lives

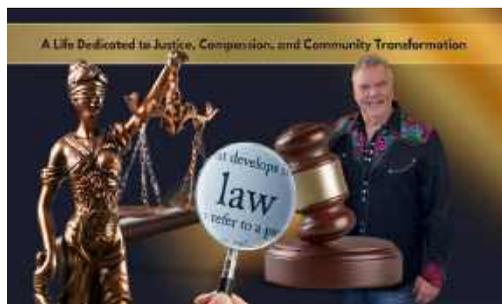
Judge Velasquez's legacy is a testament to the power of innovative thinking and compassion in the justice system. During his tenure, he championed several groundbreaking programs that challenged traditional punitive approaches, instead offering practical and humane solutions to systemic issues.

One of his most notable initiatives is the License Compliance Program, which addressed the crippling effects of unpaid fines and suspended licenses. By providing individuals with a pathway to resolve outstanding fines and regain their driver's licenses, Velasquez's program restored not only their ability to drive but also their economic independence and sense of dignity.

Velasquez also tackled the devastating issue of addiction head-on with his Recovery Court program. By offering treatment pathways instead of incarceration, he gave individuals struggling with substance abuse a second chance at life. This program became a lifeline for many, providing a supportive and non-punitive environment for recovery.

Furthermore, Velasquez's Behavioral Empowerment Court demonstrated his commitment to addressing mental health challenges with compassion and accountability. This court provided tailored interventions and connected participants with critical mental health resources, addressing their needs in a way that traditional sentencing often cannot. Through these innovative programs, Judge Velasquez has left an indelible mark on the justice system. He prioritized rehabilitation, empathy, and human dignity.

The programs Velasquez developed reflected his unwavering belief in personal transformation. People often make mistakes because of circumstances beyond their control, such as poverty, addiction, mental health problems, etc. Rather than condemn individuals, he provided them with support so that they could break free from cycles of despair and build a brighter future instead.



## Leading with Compassion and Humanity

As Justice of the Peace, Judge Velasquez embodied a judicial philosophy that was both innovative and deeply humane. He believed that respect and dignity should be extended to everyone who entered his courtroom, regardless of their circumstances. "Judge

Velasquez didn't just handle cases—he listened to people," recalls a local attorney who worked alongside him. "He understood that every person who stood before him had a story, and he treated them with the humanity they deserved." His approach set a powerful example, challenging traditional notions of justice as solely punitive.

Velasquez's courtroom became a place where solutions were prioritized over punishments, and where individuals were given the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

## A Legacy That Inspires

Judge Velasquez's journey is one of transformation not just for the individuals he has helped but also for the community he has served so faithfully. His work is a testament to the idea that one person, armed with compassion and determination, can create lasting change. "Justice isn't just about laws," Velasquez once said. "It's about people. It's about understanding their struggles and helping them find a way forward. That's how we build stronger, more empathetic communities." His legacy challenges us all to reflect on our role in creating a better, more just society.

Through his innovative programs, his compassionate leadership, and his unwavering commitment to the well-being of others, Judge Velasquez has shown us what is possible when we choose to lead with humanity. Border Eco honors Judge Emilio Velasquez in this month's "People Who Echo" series. His story reminds us that the true measure of justice lies in how we care for those who are most in need. His life's work is a powerful example of how compassion, when combined with action, can transform not only individual lives but entire communities.



# SOSA Summit Makes Debut in Nogales, Arizona

The first annual S.O.S.A Summit, which stands for Santa Cruz County Overcoming Substance Abuse, took place on January 14, bringing together community leaders, educators, law enforcement agencies, government officials, and advocates. Ms. Yara Castro, Director of Rural Health Strategies at Mariposa Community Health Center, coordinated the event with the help of SEAHEC and the Santa Cruz County School Superintendent's Office. This collaborative event aimed to foster a common vision to combat substance abuse and build a stronger, healthier community through prevention, treatment, and recovery.

This year's keynote speakers, Ari Sloane, and Jason Bentley, delivered a compelling presentation on the Struggle Well Program, an initiative focused on helping individuals and communities turn adversity into post-traumatic growth. Their message inspired participants to approach challenges with adaptability and strength. The summit also featured ten breakout sessions covering topics ranging from building resilience to analyzing local substance abuse statistics. The day included testimonials from individuals in recovery as well as a drumming session led by Mr. Gustavo Lozano of BorderBeatz.

Over eighty attendees left the summit equipped with new tools, connections, and a shared commitment to overcoming substance abuse in Santa Cruz County.

For more information about the S.O.S.A. Consortium visit [sosaheal.org](http://sosaheal.org).





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# “A celebration of brilliance: 2025 District Spelling Bee Champions”

This year's District Spelling Bee was held on January 14th, bringing together the brightest minds in the district to compete. As we honor the accomplishments of our top winners, we also acknowledge the efforts of every participant who dared to take the stage. The event was a testament to the power of dedication, perseverance, and a passion for learning.

## Values on Full Display

District Spelling Bee 2025 was more than just a competition it was an opportunity to demonstrate values that would serve students well beyond the classroom. The bee provided students with a chance to show their intelligence, critical thinking, sportsmanship, determination, and dedication.

A remarkable amount of poise and resilience were displayed by competitors during the competition, with many of them bouncing back from difficult words easily. Students supported and encouraged each other enthusiastically, and the camaraderie among contestants was palpable. Instilling these values in our young scholars will undoubtedly contribute to their success in the future.

## Meet Our Champions

**First Place:** Shulamithy Battu, Coatimundi Middle School

This year's competition was won by Shulamithy thanks to her exceptional spelling abilities. Shulamithy attributed her success to relentless practice and a deep understanding of word patterns. She credited her family and teachers for their unwavering support when asked about her experience. Our hope is that she will continue to succeed and grow.

**Second Place:** Kevin Duran, Mountain View Elementary

Runner-up in the competition, Kevin scored well on his performance. As evidenced by his confidence on stage and lightning-fast responses, Kevin's dedication to spelling is evident. We congratulate him on his outstanding achievement and his dedication to spelling.

**Third Place:** Danielle Inda Romo, Calabasas School

The outstanding spelling skills of Danielle earned her a well-deserved podium spot. Danielle showed a strong passion for language and learning throughout the competition and demonstrated the value of embracing challenges and striving to excel. Her achievement is celebrated and we look forward to what she will accomplish in the future.

## A Lasting Impact

The 2025 District Spelling Bee has left an indelible mark on our community. It has inspired the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and achievers by fostering a love of learning and fostering healthy competition. It is our pleasure to congratulate our winners and participants, as well as to thank all of the educators, families, and community members who helped support these students throughout their journey.

There is no doubt that our young scholars' values and skills will serve them well in their future endeavors. As we look towards the future, our excitement is heightened for the great accomplishments ahead.



Find us on YouTube!  
Scan the barcode





# Artistic Exploration: Open House Studio at the Historic Courthouse

In the heart of Nogales, within the historic walls of the old courthouse, a vibrant art studio buzzes with creativity. This is where Armando Moreno, a talented local artist, shares his passion for painting with the community. Born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, Armando has called Santa Cruz County home for 37 years. His artistic journey began with a fascination for nature's colors and the desire to capture emotions on canvas.

As an instructor, Armando's approach emphasizes the importance of drawing and classical painting techniques. He encourages his students to connect with their passions, stimulate their minds, and freely develop their art. Armando's ultimate goal is for his students to transmit their emotions through their paintings and enjoy the creative process.

The old courthouse, with its rich history, provides a unique backdrop for Armando's open art studio. This cultural hub has become a symbol of community engagement, where art enthusiasts gather to learn and grow. Superintendent Alfredo Velasquez has been instrumental in supporting Armando's arts program, recognizing the vital role art education plays in preserving cultural heritage and inspiring future generations.

"Art discovers it," Armando says, reflecting on the transformative power of creativity. His collaboration with Superintendent Velasquez has brought the arts program to the forefront of Nogales' community initiatives. As a result, local residents have benefited from free art classes, fostering a sense of community and cultural pride.



One student, who wishes to remain anonymous, shared, "Armando's classes have given me a new perspective on life. I've learned to express myself in ways I never thought possible." Such testimonials demonstrate the profound impact of Armando's arts program on individuals and the community as a whole.

As Nogales continues to evolve, the open art studio will be a beacon of creativity, inspiring residents to reflect on their cultural heritage and the importance of art education. With Superintendent Velasquez's ongoing support, this vibrant arts program will undoubtedly continue to flourish, leaving a lasting legacy in the heart of Nogales.

The success of the open arts program will largely be attributed to the strong community partnerships established over the years. Local businesses and organizations have joined forces to provide resources and funding, ensuring that art education remains accessible to all. These collaborations have not only enhanced the program's offerings but also strengthened the community's commitment to preserving and celebrating their cultural heritage.

The opportunity to take arts classes is open to both youth and adults, including instruction in sketching, watercolor, acrylic, and oil painting. Classes are offered from January to July with open art studio hours on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Historic Courthouse .on 21 E. Court St. Nogales, Arizona.

For more information contact Terri at: (520)375-7952



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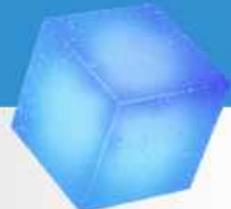
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# LET'S TALK HEALTH

## Are you considering weight loss drugs?



*Did you know? According to the International Food Information Council (IFIC)*

*1. 4 in 10 Americans are currently trying to lose weight.*

*More Americans believe that what and how much they eat, and drink has the biggest impact on their body weight compared to when, why, and where they eat and drink.*

*2. 3 in 10 Americans say they have heard "a lot" about prescription drugs for weight loss.*

*3. More than 4 in 10 Americans are interested in taking a prescription drug for weight loss; among those who have heard about prescription drugs for weight loss, most report hearing an equal amount of positive and negative information.*

*4. Nearly half of Americans think that taking a prescription drug for weight loss would increase their water intake, healthfulness of food choices, as well as their fruit and vegetable consumption.*

### *What can you do?*

*1. First and foremost: Talk to your primary health care physician (PCP) about weight loss options for YOU. It is important to consider your entire health profile, including your medical history, current medications & their potential side effects, your mental health and lifestyle factors.*

*2. Medication is just another tool in the toolbox not the solution. Weight loss medications are most effective when combined with making healthy lifestyle changes.*

*3. Consider changing your eating to a healthier, affordable and sustainable diet for you.*

*4. Be active: Remember when you start eating less than you used to this can cause your metabolism to slow down. To increase our metabolism exercise is the key.*

*5. Serving sizes: Consider watching your serving sizes. Portion and serving sometimes are used interchangeably. Your serving sizes are within your hand size to make things easier. Your portion size is what you would like to serve yourself.*

*6. Choose water as your main drink. Skip all the sugary drinks.*

*7. Add more fiber to your diet. Having more veggies with your meals, have a fruit as a snack, go for whole grains, add nuts and seeds to your diet. And, add more fiber: Choose one of these to have daily, flax seeds meal, chia seeds, hemp seeds and Metamucil no sugar added.*

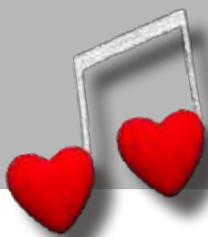
*8. Have a protein food with each of your meals. Add a protein food examples like nuts and seeds or nut butters added to your snack option. Protein tends to add fullness and satiety.*

*9. Mind State: How are you with flexibility, resilience, addressing problems as they come and solving them, dealing with food noise during your weight loss journey? Find a therapist to help you.*

*10. Do you have a goal?*

*Have a wonderful 2025!*

*Badria Bedri, nutritionist at Mariposa Community Health Center.*





# Sheriff's Round-Up



The Sheriff's Office recently held its annual holiday luncheon combined with the awards ceremony, celebrating the dedication and achievements of its exceptional team. While several employees were formally recognized, it's important to acknowledge that every man and woman within the Sheriff's Office plays a vital role in ensuring the success and professionalism of the agency.

This year's award recipients are as follows:

- Outstanding Leadership Award:** Sergeant Omar Rodriguez
- Appreciation Award:** Corporal Pete Felix
- Excellence Award:** Corporal Ron Davis
- Deputy of the Year:** Deputy Andres Estrella
- Deputy Sheriff Rookie of the Year:** Joel Bustamante
- Instructor of the Year:** Detective Mario Barba
- Civilian of the Year:** Luis Gonzalez
- Public Safety Telecommunicator of the Year:** Miguel Heath
- Public Safety Telecommunicator Rookie of the Year:** David Perez
- Detention Leadership Award:** Corporal Javier Jimenez
- Detention Officer of the Year:** Angeline Astorga
- Detention Officer Rookie of the Year:** Raul Rodriguez
- Detention Civilian of the Year:** Carey Aguilar

Additionally, the Sheriff's Office is currently seeking qualified individuals to join our team.

Current vacancies include:

- Deputy Sheriff - Patrol Division
- Telecommunicator - Support Division
- Detention Officer - Detention Division
- Booking/Central Control Operator - Detention Division
- Accounting Specialist - Administration Division

As of January 1, 2025, the Sheriff's Office has implemented the use of body-worn cameras (BWC). Commissioned personnel and detention officers are now required to utilize BWCs as part of their standard on-duty equipment.

Sheriff Hathaway and his administration proudly honor every division and salute all employees for their dedication and unwavering support of the Sheriff's Office mission.

Thank you for your service and commitment to excellence!

Your Sheriff  
David Hathaway



# A Message from the Santa Cruz County Attorney



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