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Sonia Sanchez's Deep Roots & Vision

CONNECTING SOUTHERN ARIZONA



7. Santa Cruz County Spelling Bee 2026

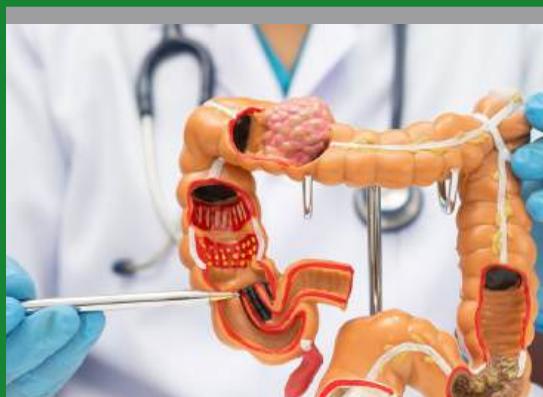
SCAN ME



National Nutrition Awareness Month!



11 Rio Rico Insights: Words that Inspire



13 Let's Talk Health-Nutrition by Addition



15 Sheriff's March Round-Up



Congratulations!

SPELLING BEE



PARTICIPANTS



Maya Donnelly
Santa Cruz County
School Superintendent
&
Staff

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Border Eco Updates

March National History Awareness Month

To our Border Eco readers, thank you for being part of a community that values connection, reflection, and the stories that bind us together. Your continued support allows us to highlight the people, places, and issues that matter most across our region.

March is National History Awareness Month, a time to celebrate the profound impact of history in shaping our present and future. This month inspires us to reflect on the events, figures, and diverse narratives that have defined our world. By deepening our understanding of historical contexts, we honor those who came before us and embrace the responsibility to learn from past lessons.

Engaging with communities, promoting educational resources, and celebrating the rich tapestry of history fuel curiosity and dialogue among individuals of all ages. As we commemorate this month, let us explore inspiring ways to appreciate and engage with the stories that have shaped our society.

National History Awareness Month, celebrated every March, invites us to pause, reflect, and immerse ourselves in the rich tapestry of history that surrounds us. It inspires us to explore our cultural roots, discover significant events, and embrace the invaluable lessons history offers. Whether through visiting a museum, delving into a book, or engaging in a passionate debate with friends about who truly invented the sandwich, this month transforms history into a vibrant and interactive experience.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

We now offer great advertising packages at Border Eco Magazine. Find out how we can help promote your business in Santa Cruz County by contacting us. Our magazine reaches a wide and diverse audience, providing excellent exposure for your brand. With our targeted distribution, your advertisements will be seen by key demographics interested in your products or services. Additionally, our team offers creative support to ensure your message resonates effectively with potential customers.

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

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From the Classroom to the County: Sonia Sanchez's Deep Roots and Vision for Santa Cruz Education

In the vibrant communities of Santa Cruz County, where binational ties create a rich cultural tapestry, Sonia Sanchez shines as both an educator and a devoted community leader. With an unwavering commitment to students and families, she embarks on her campaign for Santa Cruz County Superintendent. Sanchez embodies more than a political platform; her career is a testament to hands-on experience in the very schools and neighborhoods she aspires to uplift. Her journey, filled with practical experience and heartfelt connections, illustrates a candidate who is passionately dedicated to the holistic well-being and academic success of every child in the county.

Sanchez's professional narrative reflects her passionate commitment to the educational journey, spanning from K-12 to higher education. As an IB Psychology teacher at Nogales High School, she experiences her students' daily realities and aspirations, empowering them to reach their potential. Additionally, her role as an Adjunct Psychology Faculty member at Pima Community College offers her vital insights into the transformative transition from high school to college and careers. This dual perspective enriches her understanding of essential support systems during these pivotal moments, ensuring her vision is deeply rooted in each student's holistic educational experience.

Long before her current roles, Sanchez emerged as a key advocate for change within the Santa Cruz County Superintendent's Office. As a Lead GEAR UP Success Coach, she championed countywide initiatives to enhance college readiness and boost FAFSA completion rates. Her mission was to break down barriers that often prevent students, especially those from underserved communities, from accessing higher education. This was not just a top-down mandate; it was a collaborative effort, with Sanchez partnering closely with schools, counselors, and community allies to organize bilingual workshops and outreach events, making the process more accessible for families. The impact was profound: increased participation in college-readiness events and greater family confidence in navigating financial aid and college planning. Her hands-on experience in program leadership, community outreach, and direct family support beautifully illustrates her ability to turn vision into meaningful change.

Sanchez recognized early that student success goes beyond academic readiness; it is deeply intertwined with mental health and family engagement. She established a Drug-Free Community Coalition, developed youth prevention programs, and coordinated the statewide Strengthening Families Program. These initiatives were essential to her educational mission, embodying her belief that "education, mental health, and family engagement are deeply connected." This holistic philosophy emphasizes that a child's environment, emotional well-being, and family support are just as crucial as classroom instruction, forming the bedrock of her approach.

Sanchez's decision to run for Superintendent is driven by her belief that "our schools are at an important moment." She sees a critical opportunity to "strengthen coordination between schools, families, and community partners" as educators and students recover from recent challenges. Her top priority for her first year in office reflects this commitment: "strengthening student attendance and engagement through prevention-based strategies and early intervention." She plans to measure success through "improved attendance trends and reduced chronic absenteeism," demonstrating her data-informed approach.

Her second and third priorities embody her comprehensive vision. She is committed to expanding mental health and wellness partnerships to uplift schools and families, with success measured by increased access to services, enhanced coordination with community providers, and enriched professional development for educators. Furthermore, she seeks to strengthen college and career readiness pathways through expanded partnerships with higher education institutions and local employers, measuring success by rising FAFSA completion rates, greater dual enrollment participation, and increased student access to internships and career exploration. These goals are not just plans; they are specific, measurable initiatives that directly address the needs of our community.

Building and maintaining trust across Santa Cruz County's diverse communities is an area where Sanchez's experience truly stands out. She describes her approach as "being present, accessible, and consistent," highlighting her active involvement with schools, nonprofit organizations, and various community spaces. Her bilingual skills have been essential in enabling her to serve as a crucial bridge between schools and families, facilitating effective communication and outreach. As Superintendent, she is committed to maintaining this visibility and prioritizing "listening first, valuing local perspectives, and fostering collaboration." **Paid for by Sonia Sanchez for SCC Superintendent 2026**



The Connection Between Personal Health and Health Care Expenses

Health care spending in the U.S. has skyrocketed, surpassing \$4 trillion in 2021 and projected to reach \$6 trillion by 2028. This situation is comparable to covering the cost of a college education for everyone each year if college involved extensive paperwork and long wait times. Even more alarming, health care expenditures account for nearly 20% of the GDP. This raises the question: when did health care become so expensive, and why are we still waiting in line?

Here's a shocker: your lifestyle choices can either be your wallet's best friend or its worst nightmare. Poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, smoking, and excessive drinking not only hurt your body but also lead to skyrocketing health care costs. Making better choices can lead to healthier individuals and, in turn, lighter bills. Who knew that saying no to that third slice of cake could save you some cash in the long run? Staying healthy isn't just about fitting into that cute pair of jeans; it's a smart financial move. Lower premiums, increased productivity, and the community's support give you plenty of reasons to prioritize your well-being. Remember, investing in your health today leads to significant savings tomorrow.

Think of your health as an investment; you can either put your money into preventive measures now or face a mountain of medical expenses later. Regular check-ups, gym memberships, and healthy groceries are all small prices to pay in the grand scheme of things. Skimping on these today might mean spending thousands on health care in the future, so spend wisely and enjoy the dividends of good health.

Healthy individuals are like well-oiled machines, more productive and less likely to take sick days. An active lifestyle boosts energy levels, enhances focus, and sharpens cognitive function. If you're not constantly battling the sniffles or fatigue, you'll be much more likely to shine at work. Companies know this and may reward your vitality with bonuses for reduced absenteeism or even wellness incentives. Talk about a win-win!

Stress doesn't just mess with your mind; it can also wreak havoc on your health. Practices like mindfulness, meditation, and even a good laugh can keep your mental health in check. Consider it a non-monetary investment in your well-being, one that can keep those pesky health costs from creeping up. So go ahead, breathe deep, and let that stress roll off your back like water off a duck!

So, take charge of your health! Swap that elevator for the stairs, challenge a friend to a step contest, or cook a new healthy recipe this week. Your future self and your wallet will thank you for it. Be proactive in your health management and help keep those health care costs down for everyone! In conclusion, prioritizing personal health is a vital step not only to enhance individual quality of life but also to reduce the overall costs associated with healthcare. By embracing preventive care, making healthier lifestyle choices, and utilizing community resources, individuals can save significantly on medical expenses while fostering a healthier society. Investing in our health today paves the way for a more sustainable and economically sound future for everyone.





Young Scholars Shine at the Santa Cruz County Spelling Bee 2026



Elementary and middle school students from across Santa Cruz County took center stage at Rio Rico High School last week as they competed in the annual County Spelling Bee, hosted by the Santa Cruz County School Superintendent, Maya M. Donnelly. Before the bee began, Alexis Simon (2024 winner) captivated the audience by singing the National Anthem while Superintendent Donnelly helped the students stay calm by beginning her speech with a “BEE” joke.

Participants prepared for weeks leading up to the event, studying word lists, practicing with family members and teachers, and working on their personal spelling strategies. For many students, the experience was their first time competing beyond the school level. Students advanced through multiple rounds by correctly spelling challenging words, such as univocal and antithesis. Families, educators, and community members cheered them on as the competition highlighted critical thinking, focus, strong vocabulary skills, and resilience under pressure.

“Their curiosity, persistence, and courage to stand up here representing their school and district is more important than correct letters in the right order,” said Superintendent Donnelly. “Every speller here has already won by showing dedication and a love of learning.”

The winner of the bee, Isabella Felix is an 8th grader from Patagonia Middle School. She looks forward to competing at the state level and representing Santa Cruz County.

The runner up comes from Calabasas Middle School, 7th grader Shulamithy Battu.

Judging the event this year was Rudy Molera, District 2 Supervisor, Sandra Moraga, South 32 Community Specialist, and Jovanna Lopez, of State Farm. A special thank you to esteemed pronouncer, Larry Frederick, and Spelling Bee Coordinator Julie Ulrich and Assistant Coordinator Adrienne Villanez. All spellers received bags full of educationally inspired rewards from event sponsors, Rio Rico Rotary Club, VFW Auxiliary Santa Cruz 2066, and the South 32 Hermosa Project.

Thank you to all that made this year’s bee special. The Santa Cruz County Spelling Bee once again proved that words have the power to bring a community together and shine a spotlight on its brightest young scholars.



Young Scholars Shine at the Santa Cruz County Spelling Bee 2026





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Rio Rico Insights

HawX Take Flight: Rio Rico High School Dance Team Shines as State Runners-Up

The lights shone brightly, the music pulsed through the arena, and the energy of competition ignited the air. At the heart of it all stood the Rio Rico High School HawX Dance Team, showcasing how passion and dedication can lead to remarkable achievements. This year, the HawX soared to new heights, earning the title of Division 1-4 Varsity Hip Hop Large State Runners-Up at the Arizona State Cheerleading/Pom Tournament. For the dancers, coaches, and the entire Rio Rico community, this moment embodied months of hard work, countless rehearsals, and a shared dream brought to life on stage.

From the first beat of their routine, the HawX commanded attention with precision, power, and undeniable stage presence. Competing against the strongest teams in Arizona, they delivered a performance that radiated confidence and creativity, inspiring audiences and impressing judges alike. Finishing as state runners-up reflects not only their talent but also their resilience, marked by early mornings, late-night practices, and an unwavering commitment to excellence that defines champions.

Behind every great performance is a team of visionary leaders, and the HawX Dance Team is no exception. Choreographers Carlos Quihuiz, Celeste Martinez, and Kathya Quihuiz played pivotal roles in crafting this award-winning routine, blending innovation with heart to celebrate both artistry and athleticism. Their guidance transformed each dancer's passion into a unified expression of strength and pride, exemplifying leadership for the students they inspire.

For Rio Rico High School, this recognition is more than just a trophy; it symbolizes the power of young people empowered to pursue their passions. The HawX Dance Team's success has sparked pride throughout the community, reminding everyone that dedication, teamwork, and belief in one another can lead to extraordinary results. As the music fades and the applause echoes, one truth remains clear: the HawX are just getting started. With their talent, heart, and unstoppable spirit, they continue to represent Rio Rico with excellence, and the future of this dynamic team has never looked brighter.



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Rio Rico Insights



Words That Inspire: SCV35 Students Shine at the 2026 Santa Cruz County Spelling Bee

The 2026 Santa Cruz County Spelling Bee marked a significant milestone, uniting students, educators, and families for an evening that celebrated academic excellence and community pride. For the first time hosted at Rio Rico High School by the Santa Cruz County Superintendent's Office, the event showcased the power of perseverance, preparation, and a love for learning. Among the bright young scholars taking the stage, students from SCV35 stood out, demonstrating remarkable dedication while representing their schools with confidence and grace.

From the moment the competition began, it was evident that the evening transcended a mere contest of words; it was a celebration of the hard work behind every achievement. Calabasas School's Elementary Champion, Diego Padilla, and Middle School Champion, Santiago Limas, exuded enthusiasm and determination, embodying the strong academic culture within their school community. Mountain View Elementary School's Champion, Alexis Downie, and San Cayetano Elementary School's Champion, Paul Fontes, delivered impressive performances, inspiring their classmates and families with their poise under pressure. The spotlight shone especially bright on Coatimundi Middle School's Champion, Shulamithy Battu, who earned the titles of District Champion and County Runner-Up. Her achievements are a testament to countless hours of preparation and a passion for language that resonated with everyone in attendance.

Beyond the competition, the evening embodied the spirit of collaboration that defines Santa Cruz County schools. The Rio Rico High School Culinary Class, led by Ms. Mavis, created a welcoming atmosphere by preparing dinner and dessert for participants and guests. Their contribution transformed the event into a true community gathering, where students could relax, celebrate, and connect after an intense and rewarding competition. The warm meal and thoughtful hospitality underscored the significance of supporting students not only academically but also through meaningful acts of care and encouragement.

As the final words were spelled and applause filled the auditorium, one powerful message emerged: the future of Santa Cruz County is bright. Each SCV35 participant demonstrated resilience, discipline, and a commitment to learning that extends far beyond the stage. Their achievements remind us that education goes beyond mastering vocabulary; it's about building confidence, leadership, and a lifelong curiosity for knowledge. The 2026 Santa Cruz County Spelling Bee was more than a competition; it was a powerful example of how schools, families, and communities unite to celebrate young voices and the limitless potential they represent.



NOGALES POLICE Monthly Roll Call

Beyond the Badge: How Nogales Police Are Building a Future on High-Fives and Birthday Pizza

In law enforcement, success is often measured by statistics: response times, clearance rates, and annual crime reports. But if you walk the halls of the Nogales Police Department, you will find that its officers measure their success in a different currency one denominated in sticky high-fives from preschoolers, the squeak of sneakers on a gym court, and the sugary sweetness of birthday pizza.

In an era where the relationship between communities and police can often feel strained, the men and women of the NPD are rewriting the narrative, one personal interaction at a time. They are operating under a simple, powerful philosophy: you cannot protect a community you do not know, and you cannot know a community if you only meet it in crisis.

A Lesson in Trust at Career Day

Recently, the campus of Saint Andrew's Pre-school was buzzing with the kind of energy that only tiny humans on a sugar high can generate. But the excitement wasn't just about snack time. Sergeant Batriz had arrived for Career Day, and for a group of children whose world is usually limited to sandboxes and story time, a police officer is a giant.

Sergeant Batriz knelt at the students' eye level, demonstrating that the person behind the badge is just that, a person. Jean, a young student with wide eyes, clutched a crayon drawing she had made. In a photo that encapsulates the NPD's community focus, Batriz kneels beside her, taking the drawing as seriously as he would a formal report. In another image, a little boy beams up at the Sergeant, his small hand wrapped around Batriz's finger, looking not at an authority figure, but at a friendly giant.

The engagement didn't stop with Batriz. Detective Soto took time to explain his job to the students, showing them that police work isn't just about chasing bad guys, it's about solving puzzles and helping people. Meanwhile, Parking Control Adcock, often the target of driver frustration, was seen laughing and interacting with the kids, proving that every member of the department, regardless of their specific duty, plays a role in community care.

"If the only time a child sees a police officer is during a scary situation at home or a traffic stop with their parents, we've already lost that battle," a spokesperson for the department noted. "But if they meet us at a career day or a school event, they learn that we are their neighbors, their friends, and their protectors."

When Teachers and Cops Go Head-to-Head

The connection between NPD and the youth of Nogales isn't just about sentimentality; it's also about healthy competition. At Lincoln Elementary, the gymnasium bleachers were packed with students cheering at the top of their lungs. On the court, Corporal Duran wasn't directing traffic or investigating a scene; he was dribbling a basketball, facing off against the students' favorite teachers in the annual teacher vs. students basketball game.

In that moment, Corporal Duran wasn't an enforcer of the law. He was a teammate, an opponent, and a source of entertainment. By sweating it out on the court, he showed the students that police officers share their interests, their passions, and their competitive spirit.

The Importance of Connection

Why does this matter? Because community safety is not a product manufactured by the police and delivered to the public. It is a garden that must be tended by everyone. When a child high-fives Sergeant Batriz at a career day, they learn that the uniform means safety. When a family sees Sergeant Lechuga at their child's birthday party, they learn that the police are part of the community fabric.

The Nogales Police Department understands that trust is built not in the moments of emergency, but in the quiet, everyday moments of life. By showing up for career days, basketball games, and baby visits, they are investing in a future where the next generation doesn't see them as an occupying force, but as neighbors who just happen to carry a badge.



LET'S TALK HEALTH

Nutrition by Addition

Nutrition by Addition is a concept that focuses on adding nutrient-dense foods to the diet rather than taking food away. Instead of restricting or eliminating certain foods, this approach emphasizes incorporating foods that may be missing and that support better overall health.

By shifting the focus from restriction to addition, Nutrition by Addition encourages a balanced, flexible, and sustainable way of eating. Sustainability is often a major challenge with dieting, especially when it involves strict rules or food elimination. This approach is easier to follow and helps people avoid fixating on what they "can't" eat.

A Practical Example: Fiber

Most people do not consume enough fiber. Fiber plays an important role in:

Lowering cholesterol levels

Helping regulate blood sugar

Supporting gut health and digestion

Promoting regular bowel movements

Look at your daily intake and ask yourself if you are consistently including fiber-rich foods such as:

Whole grains

Fruits and vegetables

Legumes

Nuts and seeds

You can also add fiber easily by incorporating foods like ground flaxseed, chia seeds, and hemp seeds into meals.

Simple Ways to Add More Fiber to Your Diet

Toast topped with peanut butter, sliced banana, and a sprinkle of ground flaxseed.

Plain or Greek yogurt with mixed berries, a handful of almonds, and some chia seeds.

Oatmeal with chia seeds and ½ an apple and sprinkle some cinnamon.

Add a salad to at least one meal per day.

Include vegetables with every meal whenever possible

Aim for one to two servings of fruit daily

Eat legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas) at least once per week.

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness that colorectal cancer is preventable, treatable, and beatable with a focus on encouraging screenings, which are crucial for early detection and can start at age 45 for average-risk individuals. Increasing dietary fiber is a highly effective, evidenced-based strategy to lower the risk of colorectal cancer.



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Sheriff's Round-Up



Over the past month, members of the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office have proudly participated in several training sessions and community events, including:

- Buffalo Solider Event
- Mexican Consulate event
- AZPOST General training
- Jail & Prisoner Admin Operational training

We have also assisted Pima County with the investigation of a missing person, Nancy Guthrie and have arranged the extradition from Mexico of a locally-wanted suspect in a juvenile sexual assault case. The Sheriff's Office also provided security for the annual Tubac Festival which was a great success. Sheriff's personnel also participated in a Celebration of Life for beloved former Sheriff's lieutenant Manuel "Pops" Cota who passed away recently. The Sheriff's Office also conducted oral board interviews to select individuals to become new Corporals. Thank you to all who participated! Sheriff Hathaway and Undersheriff Castillo were also happy to receive Mexican Senator Karina Ruiz-Ruiz as a visitor. She was briefed on cooperative efforts between our office and the Republic of Mexico. Sheriff Hathaway also did several ride-along interviews with national news media including "The Daily Show" out of New York. Sheriff Hathaway also received a group of visitors from Minnesota who were briefed about our beautiful safe county.

Join Our Team

If you're interested in a rewarding career in law enforcement, we are currently accepting applications for the following positions:

- Deputy Sheriff
- Detention Officer
- Dispatcher

We are also actively recruiting Lateral Officers for Peace Officer, Detention Officer, and Dispatcher roles. Applications can be downloaded from the Santa Cruz County website and submitted to the Human Resources Office.

On behalf of myself and the entire administration, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all members of our communities that assist us to maintain public safety every day.

Sincerely,
Sheriff David Hathaway



A MESSAGE FROM THE SANTA CRUZ COUNTY ATTORNEY

Congratulations!

Spelling Bee



PARTICIPANTS



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