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CONNECTING SOUTHERN ARIZONA

Event of the Year



EVENT OF THE YEAR



ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR



RIISING STAR OF THE YEAR



PERSON OF THE YEAR

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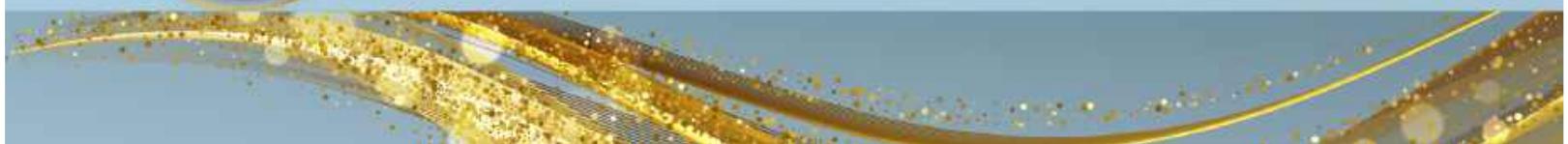
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Happy New Year

"A New Year brings new grace for new accomplishments." – Lailah Gifty Akita



Alfredo I. Velásquez
Santa Cruz County School Superintendent
&
Staff



Border Eco Updates

Warmest Wishes from Our Team

As the holiday season unfolds, we extend heartfelt gratitude to our valued readers and customers. Your unwavering support enables us to share uplifting stories, highlight extraordinary events and showcase organizations making a difference in our community. May this special time bring joy and togetherness with loved ones. We wish you a peaceful holiday season and a prosperous New Year!

Reflecting on the past year, we're thankful for the trust and loyalty you've placed in us. Your continued support fuels our passion to deliver exceptional content that resonates with our audience. Looking ahead, we're excited to bring you more inspiring narratives, captivating events and impactful initiatives in the coming year. Thank you again for your loyalty. May the New Year bring you joy, success and fulfillment.

Best regards,

HAPPY NEW YEAR



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Rio Rico Insights: Rio Rico Rotary's "Bikes for Tykes" Spreads Holiday Cheer

The Rio Rico Rotary Club brought joy to 60 deserving first-grade students this holiday season. Their annual "Bikes for Tykes" event, held December 14, gifted bicycles to winners from Santa Cruz Valley Unified School District's three elementary schools.

The Rotary's efforts were made possible by generous contributions from:

South32, Nickel's Diner, Tubac Rotary Club, Rio Rico Fire District, SCVUSD35 elementary school Parent Liaisons, Rio Rico Property Owners Association and Pete Ashcraft.

Additionally, the Rio Rico community's support of the Rotary's monthly 50/50 raffle significantly contributed to the event's success.

"Bikes for Tykes" embodies the Rotary's commitment to enriching local children's lives. This heartwarming initiative has become a cherished holiday tradition.



Rio Rico Insights: Community Rallies Behind SCVUSD35's "Stuff the Bus" Event

Santa Cruz Valley Unified School District 35 (SCVUSD35) expressed heartfelt gratitude to the community for making their recent "Stuff the Bus" event a resounding success. Held last weekend, the event collected over 350 toys for deserving students.

Key contributors included:

Rio Rico High School's JROTC, HAWX Dance Team, Mt. View Cheer Team, CTMS Jazz Band, SC Stuco, RRHS Jazz Band and Parent Liaisons, who selflessly donated time and effort.

Wal-Mart's partnership played a vital role in the event's achievement.

SCVUSD35 praised the community's generosity, emphasizing that events like "Stuff the Bus" demonstrate the power of collaboration and compassion. This initiative brings joy and support to local students, fostering a brighter holiday season.



Cindy Matus: A Legacy of Dedication to Patagonia Education

After decades of tireless advocacy for public education, Cindy Matus is retiring from the Patagonia School Board, leaving behind a legacy of commitment and progress. Her journey began as a parent volunteer, reading to students and participating in school activities. Matus's impact expanded when she joined the Santa Cruz County Young Audiences board, bringing arts programs to local schools. Her dedication caught the attention of then-Superintendent Lito Gallindo, leading to her appointment to the Patagonia Elementary School District (PESD) board in 1988. Matus's leadership led to numerous milestones, including serving on the Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA) board of directors for seven years and receiving the "All Arizona School Board Member Award" in 1995. She made history as ASBA's first Latina President in 2003.

Matus's influence extended nationally, serving as National School Boards Association (NSBA) Pacific Region President and chairing the NSBA National Hispanic Caucus of School Board Members. Locally, she played a pivotal role in unifying Patagonia Elementary and Union High School districts under one superintendent and securing funds for the new high school and elementary campus. The implementation of a four-day school week was another significant achievement.

"Communication and transparency were key," Matus emphasized. "We engaged the community through surveys and public meetings." She worked with ten superintendents, fostering professional relationships. Her advocacy focused on affordable housing for school staff, equitable funding for school districts, competitive salaries for teachers and fully funded Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Challenges included addressing fund theft by former Santa Cruz County Treasurer Elizabeth Guthfur. Despite obstacles, Matus remained committed. Her advice to aspiring board members: establish strong relationships with fellow members and superintendents, attend educational training and prioritize student achievement and safety.

As Matus passes the torch, her legacy inspires future generations. "Cindy Matus has been an extraordinary advocate for Patagonia's students," said Superintendent. "Her dedication will be deeply missed."



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Year in Review

Person of the Year

Maricruz Ruiz: Empowering Education in Santa Cruz County

Selecting the Person of the Year for 2024 proved challenging for Border Eco, as numerous individuals demonstrated remarkable impact throughout Santa Cruz County. However, Maricruz Ruiz's transformative leadership at Pima Community College's Santa Cruz Center stood out.

Ruiz's personal journey resonates deeply. A first-generation graduate, she navigated the college system without parental guidance. This experience fuels her passion for helping students overcome similar obstacles.

"I faced the same challenges our students do," Ruiz reflects. "Overcoming these hurdles empowers me to guide students toward thriving futures."

With impressive academic credentials and extensive experience at Pima College, Ruiz effectively addresses diverse student needs. As manager, she oversees programs serving over 300 students.

Her strategic focus encompasses enrollment growth, persistence and retention. "My vision is for the Santa Cruz Center to become a vibrant educational hub," Ruiz says.

To gauge success, Ruiz tracks key performance indicators and assesses community impact. Her pursuit of professional development ensures programs align with emerging needs.



Organization of the Year

Pinal Hispanic Council and Intermountain: Empowering Santa Cruz County

Selecting the Organization of the Year proved daunting for Border Eco, as numerous entities demonstrated exceptional impact throughout Santa Cruz County. However, Pinal Hispanic Council (PHC) and Intermountain stood out for their vital services and dedication to community well-being.

PHC and Intermountain provide exceptional behavioral health, wellness and support services, empowering individuals to lead healthier lives. With culturally competent care and personalized plans, they cater to diverse populations. Collaborations with community partners and resource leveraging enable comprehensive support. Intermountain's expansion includes new facilities and enhanced programs.

As Arizona's largest nonprofit behavioral health organization, Intermountain operates 31 locations, offering accessible primary care and behavioral services. Their innovative outreach programs focus on mental health, wellness and community involvement. Since 1973, Intermountain has innovated and advanced primary care and behavioral health programs, serving diverse individuals.

Through their tireless efforts, PHC and Intermountain have improved countless lives, fostering resilience and hope. Their commitment inspires others to champion community well-being. To support their mission, contact Pinal Hispanic Council at (520) 287-0015 or Intermountain Health Center at (520) 281-0678, or donate at <https://www.intermountaincenters.org/support-us>.



Year in Review

Event of the Year

Vibrant Vibes Spring Fling: A Celebration of Community

Selecting the Event of the Year proved challenging for Border Eco, as numerous gatherings showcased Santa Cruz County's vibrant spirit. However, the Vibrant Vibes Spring Fling stood out for its infectious energy and community unity.

On April 20th, Pierson Field transformed into a vibrant hub, featuring food trucks, local bands and activities for all ages. City of Nogales Parks & Recreation Director Renee Travers and Santa Cruz County School Superintendent Alfredo I. Velásquez collaborated to bring this vision to life.

The event's diverse offerings included handcrafted vendors, art activities and performances by local bands Springs of Iris, Distorted and Venetian Blinds. Attendees enjoyed delicious food, music and entertainment. The success of the inaugural Vibrant Vibes Spring Fling has paved the way for an annual celebration. Organizers thank sponsors, including the City of Nogales, Rotary Club of Nogales and local businesses, for making this event possible.

The community's enthusiasm was palpable, with attendees of all ages embracing the festive atmosphere. Children's laughter filled the air as they enjoyed silly string, obstacle courses and light-up gadgets. The Vibrant Vibes Spring Fling's impact extends beyond a single day, fostering community spirit and connection. Border Eco recognizes this exceptional event, inspiring others to champion community well-being.



Rising Star of the Year

Margarita Elias: A Shining Star in Santa Cruz County

Selecting the Rising Star of the Year proved challenging for Border Eco, as numerous individuals demonstrated exceptional impact. However, Margarita Elias's dedication and compassion stood out.

Born and raised in Nogales, Arizona, Elias earned degrees from the University of Arizona and Arizona State University. She became a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, dedicating her life to helping others.

Elias's impressive career spans over 30 years in behavioral health. Her achievements include membership in the Santa Cruz County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team and Child Abuse Multidisciplinary Team. Her passion for social justice and equality drives her advocacy. Inspired by supervisors, colleagues, family and friends, Elias tirelessly provides support and resources.

Elias's selfless nature and commitment make her an invaluable community asset. Her contributions improve lives and inspire others.

Border Eco recognizes Margarita Elias as the Rising Star of the Year, celebrating her remarkable impact and unwavering dedication to Santa Cruz County's well-being.



Why is it important to fill out the FAFSA form?

According to the student aid website, you need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) form to be eligible for federal student aid such as federal grants, work-study funds, and loans. In addition, many states and colleges use your FAFSA information to determine your eligibility for state and school aid. Some private aid providers may use your FAFSA information to determine whether you qualify for their aid as well.

The C-CREO HUB serves as a College Access Center that provides support to students and families from all over the county in filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The services are provided by the trained Santa Cruz County GEAR UP team. The HUB offers a range of services, including:

- One-on-one assistance from creating an FSA ID to completing the FAFSA form and reviewing information with families after forms have been completed.
- Workshops and presentations on financial aid and FAFSA completion
- Special events, such as FAFSA completion days, incentives and FAFSA completion contests

The center also provides outreach services known as the "HUB Mobile" to high schools in the county that help support students and families to complete their FAFSA at the students' school.

The C-CREO HUB is funded through the office of Mr. Alfredo I. Velásquez, the Santa Cruz County School Superintendent by a federal grant from the Department of Education. The HUB plays a vital role in helping students and families access financial aid for college. The center's services and incentives help students overcome the barriers to FAFSA completion and ensure that they have the resources they need to pay for college.

For more information, or to schedule an appointment please contact:

Lisa Monge, C-CREO Hub Coordinator @ (520)394-7707 or lmonge@santacruzcountyaz.gov

Hours: Mon. – Fri. 8:00am – 5:00pm

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"May the New Year bring you peace, joy, and happiness".

Community Unites for Swearing-In Ceremony of Santa Cruz County Superintendent

A heartwarming display of community support greeted Alfredo I. Velásquez's swearing in ceremony at the historic 1904 Courthouse in Santa Cruz County, Arizona on December 19, 2024.

A warm and caring atmosphere filled the courthouse at 12 p.m., during the ceremony. In addition to County Manager Jesus Valdez, the Honorable Justice of the Peace Emilio G. Velasquez, the brother of Superintendent Velásquez, who retired in 2023, attended as distinguished guests.

Justice of the Peace Miguel Lopez officiated the oath of office, formally commencing Superintendent Velásquez's term. Upon announcing his commitment to serving the community, Velásquez received an enthusiastic response.

During his emotional speech, Velásquez expressed gratitude to the City of Nogales, the Board of Supervisors, schools, teachers and administrators, friends and organizations across the county. "Today marks a new chapter," Velásquez said. "I pledge to continue serving our community with dedication and integrity."

The reception that followed showcased the community's appreciation for Velásquez's commitment. Guests mingled, sharing stories and well-wishes.

"This ceremony demonstrates the community's trust and support," said Sandra Moraga of South 32. "Superintendent Velásquez's dedication inspires us all."

The event highlighted Santa Cruz County's strong spirit of collaboration and mutual support.

Alfredo's leadership has made a positive impact, said Honorable Justice of the Peace Emilio G. Velasquez. "I am proud to be his brother."

In addition to family members, friends, and elected officials, Velásquez and his guests celebrated with a reception after the ceremony. The ceremony was broadcast live on the internet.

Velásquez's new term begins with the community supporting him. Effective leadership relies on community support, as it fosters trust and collaboration between leaders and the people they serve. Leadership empowers a community to make impactful decisions and implement meaningful changes when it rallies behind it. Velásquez's swearing-in ceremony illustrates the power of such support, as it underscores the shared commitment to progress.



Let's Talk Health

January: A Month for Raising Awareness

January shines a spotlight on two critical issues: Stalking Awareness Month and Human Trafficking Awareness Month. These issues are closely linked to dating and domestic violence, making this an important time to educate, empower, and prevent harm in our communities.

Stalking Awareness Month

Stalking is often a red flag for dating and domestic violence. It involves a pattern of unwanted behaviors, like following someone, sending repeated messages, monitoring social media, or showing up uninvited, that makes a person feel scared or unsafe. Many stalking victims know their stalker, who may be a current or former partner.

Preventing stalking starts with awareness. Talk about healthy boundaries, respect, and the warning signs of abusive behavior, such as excessive jealousy or constant monitoring. Encourage open conversations with teens and adults about what makes a relationship safe and supportive.

Human Trafficking Awareness Month

Human trafficking, especially sex trafficking, is often linked to unhealthy and abusive relationships. Traffickers frequently use manipulation, threats, or false promises of love and security to gain control over their victims. Young people are particularly vulnerable when traffickers pose as romantic partners or friends.

Prevention starts with understanding the connection between trafficking and dating violence. Teach teens and young adults about the warning signs of control, such as isolation from family and friends, sudden financial dependence, or a partner who monitors their every move. Empower them to recognize unhealthy behaviors and to seek help if they feel unsafe.

If you or someone you know feels unsafe, seek help from trusted adults, law enforcement, or call 520-375-6050 to speak to an advocate at Mariposa Community Health Center.



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Caring for Our Elderly Community This Holiday Season

The holiday season is a time for kindness, generosity and community spirit. In Santa Cruz County, a heartwarming initiative brought joy to our elderly population, showcasing the power of collaboration and compassion.

On Thursday, December 19th, local organizations joined forces to distribute "care boxes" filled with essential items and treats to those in need. South 32, Croppers, CSL Plasma, City of Nogales, NHS Community Club, NCD, Borderlands Food Bank, Nogales Housing Authority and Making Connections 4U contributed generously.

The donated items included warm gloves and scarves, cozy blankets, delicious treats, beanies and nutritious food and beverages. These organizations worked tirelessly to create memorable experiences for the elderly community. Volunteers assembled care boxes, prepared nutritious meals and spent quality time with seniors.

Distribution took place across the Nogales Housing Authority and Bowman Senior Center. Maritza Cervantes and her staff facilitated logistics, while Sonia Ramirez's NHS Community Club assisted in spreading cheer.

We extend special thanks to Sandra Moraga from South 32, Kalani and Carl Krause from Croppers, Judith Armendariz and Mayor Jorge Maldonado from City of Nogales, Clariza Gastelum from NCD, Zaida Bustamante from Arizona@Work and Yolanda Soto from Borderlands Food Bank. Their dedication embodies the true spirit of community service.

This initiative demonstrates the impact of collective efforts in enriching the lives of our elderly neighbors. As we celebrate the holiday season, let us remember the importance of caring for those who have shaped our community.

Kudos to the unsung heroes making a difference in Santa Cruz County!

For more information on how to participate contact us at director@makingconnections4u.org or call (520)461-4880.



"Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right."

The Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office wishes everyone

*Happy
New Year*

2025



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Sheriff's Round-Up



This month, we are proud to welcome Deputy Sheriff Jose Ramirez and Deputy Sheriff Francisco Navarro to our team. Both deputies successfully completed a rigorous 20-week certification academy in Cochise County. They now enter a 12-week Field Training Program where they will continue to hone their skills and serve our community with excellence. Congratulations, Deputies Ramirez and Navarro!

The Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office was honored to participate in the annual "Fiestas De Tumacacori." Our beloved Daren the DARE lion posed for photos alongside our Commanders and none other than "Smokey the Bear." This event provided a wonderful opportunity to connect with the community and promote safety and awareness.

Sheriff's Office personnel displayed their generosity by donating to the annual "Giving Turtle Program." Our team also set up an information table to engage with the community, share resources, and support this meaningful cause. We are proud to give back and stand in solidarity with those in need.

The Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office was well represented in this year's Christmas Day Parade. Employees and volunteers from all divisions proudly convoyed together, showcasing the unity and spirit that define our office. Thank you to everyone who participated and helped spread holiday cheer throughout our community.

Sheriff Hathaway and his administration extend heartfelt gratitude to every employee, volunteer, and community partner. Each division plays a vital role in fulfilling the mission of the Sheriff's Office, and your dedication does not go unnoticed. Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to service.

Your Sheriff
David Hathaway



A message from the Santa Cruz County Attorney

"A New Year is a fresh canvas. Paint your own masterpiece."

HAPPY 2025

New Year

Be Safe!



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