

SSVEC

Currents

LOCAL STORIES ABOUT LOCAL COMMUNITIES

MAY | JUNE 2025

Woman in the Mirror

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Ethos flies fearlessly
into the bush

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PHOTO BY MONIQUE VARGAS

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Flying fearlessly into the bush

Ethnos360 Aviation started in 1969 to provide aviation service for New Tribes Mission. In 1993 they relocated from Bisbee Douglas International Airport to the present site near McNeal.

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ON THE COVER

Playwright Dayna Steele's one-act play *Woman in the Mirror* comes to Huachuca City's K Palace in June based on playwright here's two-year struggle caregiving for her mother battling Alzheimer's. See the story on page 20.



Jason Bowling, CEO
Sulphur Springs Valley
Electric Cooperative

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the Chief Executive
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Springs Valley Electric
Cooperative (SSVEC).
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Staying cool and connected:

Summer readiness with SSVEC

As summer approaches, the rising temperatures remind us how essential reliable, affordable power is to our daily lives. At Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC), we're committed to helping our members stay cool and comfortable while being mindful of energy use—and that starts with awareness and proactive support.

One of the most effective tools for managing summer energy use is a **smart thermostat**. These devices are designed to automatically adjust your home's temperature based on your preferences and daily schedule. That means you can stay comfortable when you're home and save energy (and money) when you're not. If you're interested in exploring options, SSVEC is here to help with guidance and resources to find a solution that fits your needs. It's just one example of how we work to empower members to make smart energy choices.

Internally, we're doing our part to ensure that the electricity you count on remains **safe, reliable, and affordable**. That's why we invest in **proactive system maintenance** like **wildfire mitigation programs** and **drone inspections**. These efforts help us identify and address issues before they become problems—minimizing outages, enhancing safety, and protecting our communities.

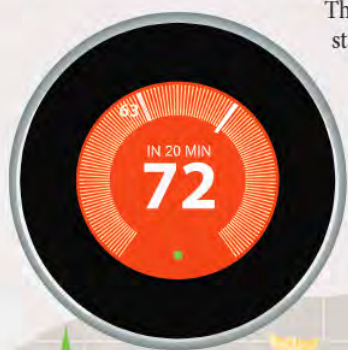
These actions reflect our deep commitment to the Cooperative Principles, especially Education, Training, and Information and Concern for Community. By educating our members on energy efficiency and investing in technology that benefits the entire system, we're not just maintaining our infrastructure—we're strengthening our shared future. And because SSVEC is member-owned and not-for-profit, every decision we make is with your best interests in mind.

Another core cooperative principle is **Democratic Member Control**—and one of the best ways to take part in that is by attending our **Annual Meeting on May 29th**. It's a chance to hear updates directly from your cooperative leadership, ask questions, and take part in the governance of SSVEC. Your voice matters, and your participation helps shape the direction of the co-op.

As we head into the hottest part of the year, remember that SSVEC is more than your electric provider, we're your energy partner. Whether it's helping you reduce your energy bills, investing in system reliability, or keeping you informed, we're here for you.

Thank you for being an engaged member of the SSVEC community. Stay cool, stay informed, and we look forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting

Sincerely,
Jason Bowling, CEO, SSVEC



Grit, grace, and glory:

SSVEC's 2025 Internal Apprentice Rodeo shines in Benson

Beneath a sky brushed in springtime blue, the SSVEC construction and maintenance yard in Benson played host to a celebration of tradition, skill, and rising talent at the 2025 Internal Apprentice Rodeo on March 26. The next generation of local linemen



representing Willcox, Benson, Sierra Vista and all parts in-between within the SSVEC service territory met the moment with courage, conviction, and quiet strength.

This year's event unfolded with precision and pride, a testament to the collaborative spirit that defines the Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative. From volunteers to judges, from seasoned instructors to cheering spectators, everyone in attendance helped elevate the day into something more than a competition — it was a tribute to craft, character, and community.

Our apprentices faced a gauntlet of challenges designed to test both mind and mettle. A rigorous written exam opened the day, followed by a climb through an obstacle course demanding strength and finesse. The hurt man rescue, a moving demonstration of readiness in crisis, served as a reminder of the life-and-death stakes these professionals often face. An arrester changeout and a surprise "mystery event" involving an ACR bypass pushed competitors to think fast and work smart.

Through it all, four stood tall:

- 1st – Kieran Maakestad
- 2nd – Sawyer McDonald
- 3rd – Austin Barney
- 4th – Joseph "Joey" Nicholas

These exceptional apprentices will carry the SSVEC banner to the International Lineman's Rodeo in Kansas City, where they'll represent not only our cooperative, but the proud legacy of linemen everywhere.

The future is bright. The line is strong. The torch is in good hands.

High-flying fun: CAS students take on the Egg Drop Challenge

On a sunny Thursday afternoon, March 30, students at the Center for Academic Success (CAS) high school turned science into a thrilling spectacle with their annual Egg Drop Challenge. With eager anticipation and creative designs in hand, students watched as their fragile cargo was launched skyward — courtesy of Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC).

Thanks to SSVEC's support, CAS was provided with a utility truck and several lineworkers, allowing eggs to be dropped from heights of 6 feet, 12 feet, 20 feet, and a jaw-dropping 30 feet. Cheers echoed as students tested the limits of physics, gravity, and ingenuity.

When the final egg hit the ground, only one team remained victorious. A hearty congratulations goes out to the Junior Cohort, whose design triumphed in the face of gravity's challenge.

Mrs. Sarah Burton, English teacher and Builders Club Advisor, directed this hands-on learning event.



Powering local prosperity:

How co-op connections benefits businesses and consumers

Imagine walking into your favorite local shop, flashing your phone, and instantly receiving a discount on your purchase. That's the power of Co-op Connections, a program that not only saves consumers money but also strengthens local businesses. Together with more than 300 electric cooperatives across the nation, Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) is making it easier than ever for members to support their communities while enjoying exclusive deals.

How It Works

Co-op Connections offers discounts across a wide range of industries, including health and wellness, travel and entertainment, safety and security, and more. Using the program is simple—just show your digital or printed card at checkout, and participating businesses will apply the discount.

Local businesses benefit by gaining free marketing exposure to SSVEC's more than 50,000 members. Participating

merchants are featured in SSVEC bill inserts, Cooperative newsletters, and Currents magazine, increasing visibility and driving customer traffic.

Why Local Businesses Love Co-op Connections

For business owners, Co-op Connections is a no-cost marketing tool that brings new and returning customers through the door. The program enhances local business visibility while creating an incentive for community members to shop locally. With no membership fees and no strings attached, it's an easy way to boost sales while contributing to the local economy.

Savings Beyond the Local Community

While Co-op Connections is a fantastic resource for supporting local businesses, it also extends benefits nationally. Planning a trip to Disney? Connections cardholders can take advantage of special ticket pricing.

Need a hotel room in Las Vegas? Enjoy up to 60% savings on accommodations at top-tier hotels. The program connects members with discounts across the country, making it a valuable tool for both daily life and travel adventures.

Join the Movement

SSVEC is part of a nationwide network of more than 700 member-owned Touchstone Energy cooperatives in 46 states. That means Co-op Connections isn't just about saving money—it's about belonging to a community dedicated to supporting one another.

Visit the Co-op Connections website to explore discounts near you or wherever your travels take you. The list of participating businesses continues to grow, so check back often to see what new deals await. Co-op Connections is just another benefit of being a member of your local electric cooperative—helping members save while strengthening local businesses.

Support local. Save money. Power your community with Co-op Connections.

Smarter hours, stronger service

A better way to serve our members

At Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC), our decisions are driven by one question: how can we better serve our members? Starting June 2, 2025, we're launching a new four-day work week aimed at boosting both service and efficiency.

Offices will open Monday through Thursday from 6:30 AM to 5:00 PM — extended hours that offer more flexibility for in-person visits, whether in the early morning, after work, or during daily errands. Offices will close on Fridays, reducing operational costs like utilities, building usage, and travel for field crews.

The shift is expected to improve cost management while maintaining the high service standards our members rely on. "It's not just about shorter weeks," says CEO Jason Bowling. "It's about smarter, more effective service with a focus on reliability and financial responsibility."

The change will begin with a six-month trial period, during which we'll closely monitor service quality, efficiency, and member feedback to determine next steps.

Importantly, service never stops. Members will continue to have 24/7 access via our phone system, website, and SmartHub — tools that many already use to manage their accounts. Aligning office hours with how members interact with us helps ensure better service all around.

This initiative also supports our employees' well-being, which ultimately enhances member service. It's all part of our ongoing mission to modernize operations and reflect our core values: integrity, service, community, and commitment.



McNeill earns Director Gold



SSVEC director Russ McNeill (left) with SSVEC board president Randy Redmond (center) and SSVEC CEO Jason Bowling.

Russ McNeill, a director on the elected board governing the Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) has earned a Director Gold Certificate from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

McNeill, who was elected to the SSVEC board in April 2022, is the district 8 representative which includes members and businesses on Sierra Vista's West End.

are required from BLC courses.

McNeill is a U.S. Army veteran with an impressive management resume. He worked as the Director of Project Management at AT&T, then as a plant manager for the Lufkin-Conroe Telephone Company, then as the General Manager for the Texas Lone Star Network, a statewide fiber optic transport company.

After 45 years of work experience,

McNeill, a Tombstone High School graduate, returned to southeast Arizona and sought election to the SSVEC board.

"I feel a responsibility to use the experience I have been blessed with, to work and try to make Cochise County a place we can all enjoy for a long time," McNeill said.

The Director Gold Certificate is the hallmark of a committed electric cooperative director. It helps drive professional self-confidence and demonstrates to SSVEC members, state regulators, and fellow elected officials that the certified director is committed to continuing education within the industry.

"Russ' commitment to our members and his continuing pursuit of education on cooperatives and the electric industry makes our entire board better," said Jason Bowling, Chief Executive Officer at SSVEC. "Earning Director Gold represents the highest standard of achievement for a director and demonstrates a sincere dedication to performing the fiduciary responsibility of the board."

Members at the heart

SSVEC's 87th annual meeting set and annual report now online

Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) will hold its 87th Annual Meeting on May 29, 2025, at the Klein Center for the Performing Arts, located within Buena High School at 5225 E. Buena Boulevard in Sierra Vista. Doors open for registration at 6 p.m., with the business meeting beginning at 7 p.m. SSVEC members are invited to a celebration of cooperative values and community progress.

Since its founding in 1938, SSVEC has operated on the enduring principle that every member — regardless of background — holds an equal voice in the decisions that shape our future. That legacy continues today through democratic governance, inclusive participation, and shared responsibility.

Attendees will hear from Board President Randy Redmond and CEO Jason Bowling, who will reflect on key milestones from 2024 and provide a financial and strategic outlook. Election results for the Board of Directors will also be announced.



SCAN QR CODE FOR ANNUAL REPORT

SSVEC's 2024 Annual Report is now available online! Members can explore highlights, achievements, and cooperative updates by scanning the QR Code.



Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.
OWNED BY THOSE WE SERVE

REMINDER:
District #6 Director Election Online
STARTING MAY 2, 2025

SSVEC has made it easier than ever for you to participate in shaping the future of your cooperative! Our user-friendly electronic voting system ensures your voice is heard without the hassle of mailing a paper ballot.



Electronic voting opens May 2, 2025.

Keep watch for an email from Yes Elections. The email will contain your voting credentials. Be certain your account holder requests your member number. You will need your member number to vote.

For online voting instructions, scan the QR Code or visit ssvec.org/about/bod/2025-info.
Voting Goes Live May 2, 2025



Your home: The hidden costs of summer



Having your air conditioning system cleaned and inspected by a qualified pro is a great way to start saving this summer, but don't overlook other potential sources of energy waste that may be costing you. Some are hard to spot, while others may be hidden in plain sight.

NEGLECTED THERMOSTAT - Adjusting the thermostat is the simplest way to save energy, but it's often overlooked. Raising the temperature when no one is home can significantly reduce your summer energy bills. Today's smart thermostats make it easy, automatically adjusting temperatures based on your habits.

UNWANTED HEAT GAIN - Unwanted heat gain through windows reduces comfort and makes your cooling system work harder. Use window treatments, such as shades or blinds, on south- and east-facing windows to block unwanted heat gain from the sun.

ATTIC AIR LEAKS - Even if your attic is fully insulated, air leaks could still cost you money while making your upstairs hotter. Potential sources of air leaks include recessed ceiling light fixtures, as well as around plumbing vents, furnace flues and ductwork. Seal leaks with caulk or expandable foam insulation.

BLOCKED VENTS - Your air conditioning system is designed for balance. Blocked vents keep conditioned air from getting where it's supposed to go, reducing overall system efficiency and performance. Ensure that all supply and return air vents are fully open and unblocked by furniture or rugs.

GET A CHECKUP - If you're looking for more ways to save this summer and all year long, consider a free energy audit. An energy auditor will inspect your home and uncover more ways to save energy and improve comfort. Schedule by calling 520-515-3497 or email energyaudit@ssvec.com.

Governor Katie Hobbs visits Sierra Vista: Governor attends Sky Island Regional Partnership Forum

On February 11, Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs visited Sierra Vista at the invitation of the Sky Island Regional Partnership (SIRP), formerly known as the Sierra Vista Chamber of Commerce. The event, held at Canyon Vista Medical Center, gathered a strong crowd of community members, public officials, and dignitaries, signaling robust regional interest in statewide priorities.

Moderated by Melany Barton, executive director of SIRP, the forum highlighted key topics relevant to southern Arizona, ranging from infrastructure and rural healthcare to workforce development. Governor Hobbs addressed these themes with a focus on collaboration and investment in rural communities.

The event was generously sponsored by Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC), a long-standing supporter of local economic development and civic engagement. SIRP's evolution from a chamber of commerce to a regional partnership underscores the area's commitment to inclusive growth and interagency cooperation.

Governor Hobbs' visit marked a significant step in strengthening ties between state leadership and the Sky Island region, setting a hopeful tone for future partnerships.



Cochise County Superintendent of Schools, Jacquie Clay (center) was joined by Olivia Melito, an eighth-grade student at the American Leadership Academy, in welcoming Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs (left) during the town hall hosted at the Canyon Vista Medical Center on Feb. 11. Miss Melito sang the National Anthem at the start of the town hall.



Members of the Buena High School Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps performed at the Feb. 11 town hall featuring Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs.

Turning nature into a passion at

Grayhawk Nature Center

By R.J. Cohn

Deep in the heart of the San Pedro Riparian Conservation Area where wild things live and die with the seasons, Sandy Anderson has watched the lives and deaths of those wild things for 30 years on her property that doubles as the Gray Hawk Nature Center, where thousands of children have embraced the natural world as completely as Anderson.

Arguably the most passionate educator, environmentalist and protector of the natural world and all of God's creatures in Cochise County, no one comes a close second to Anderson when it comes to getting children, teachers and docents to feel what she feels about nature and understanding the fragility of its existence.

"For me, the disconnect between humanity and the natural world has been getting wider, and I've dedicated my life to getting kids immersed in it so they'll really get what this is," said Anderson who started her nature center in 2000. "Wild nature is my passion, and I've been dragging kids into it for decades – up and down river banks, into mud holes, everything and anything that screams nature – so they can truly understand it and not feel so removed from it. This is a part of their world they absolutely need to know."





Sandy Anderson fearlessly wears a necklace of corn snakes. PHOTOS BY MONIQUE VARGAS

While the pulse of Gray Hawk Nature Center has always been field trips where “kids get as wet and dirty as possible and love every second of it,” it’s not just children that Anderson has reached out to. She was the first Friends of San Pedro docent coordinator, has “scholarshipped” teachers in nature programs 25 years ago, who then started bringing students that jump-started the nature center. She’s also worked with Sierra Vista and Douglas animal control officers and SEACOM personnel, teaching them how to deal with birds of prey and snakes when they encounter them.

“I receive money from the schools for field trips, but my goal is to educate more than anything,” said Anderson, who grew up on a farm north of Blythe, California on the lower Colorado River. “I’m self-educated about all this and never had any

formal college education. But I’ve had a lifetime to learn everything I can about wildlife and nature, and there’s nothing here on this land – not a twig, a leaf, a crack in a tree trunk – that I don’t know something about and can explain to kids why it’s there. I want this land to look as wild as it should without any interpretive signs.”

It’s not just a nature walk at Gray Hawk that’s been getting kids’ attention for decades. It’s Anderson’s snake house, where she currently has 16 snakes that include six species of rattlers, some which were born there. One that she raised is now 32 years old. For two decades, she has been taking them to SSVEC’s YES Fair, where they’ve been the superstars of the fair.

“If human beings could learn to behave like rattlers, there would be no wars, rapes or misogyny,” she claims. “They know how to get along with each other in the world better than us.”

Kids have been so fascinated with Anderson’s snakes that when they come to the nature center, she often places the children in a semicircle, chins on their hands, and puts a Western Diamond-back on the ground in the circle so they can study it at eye-level.

“They’re enthralled by it, and they have no fear because they trust me,” she said. “They love this. I had a girl balling her eyes out when a field trip was over, crying that she didn’t want to leave after they built a rock dam across a small

portion of the San Pedro and had piles of crawdads swishing in their hands. Once they get a taste of nature and creatures that live in it, they’re in heaven.”

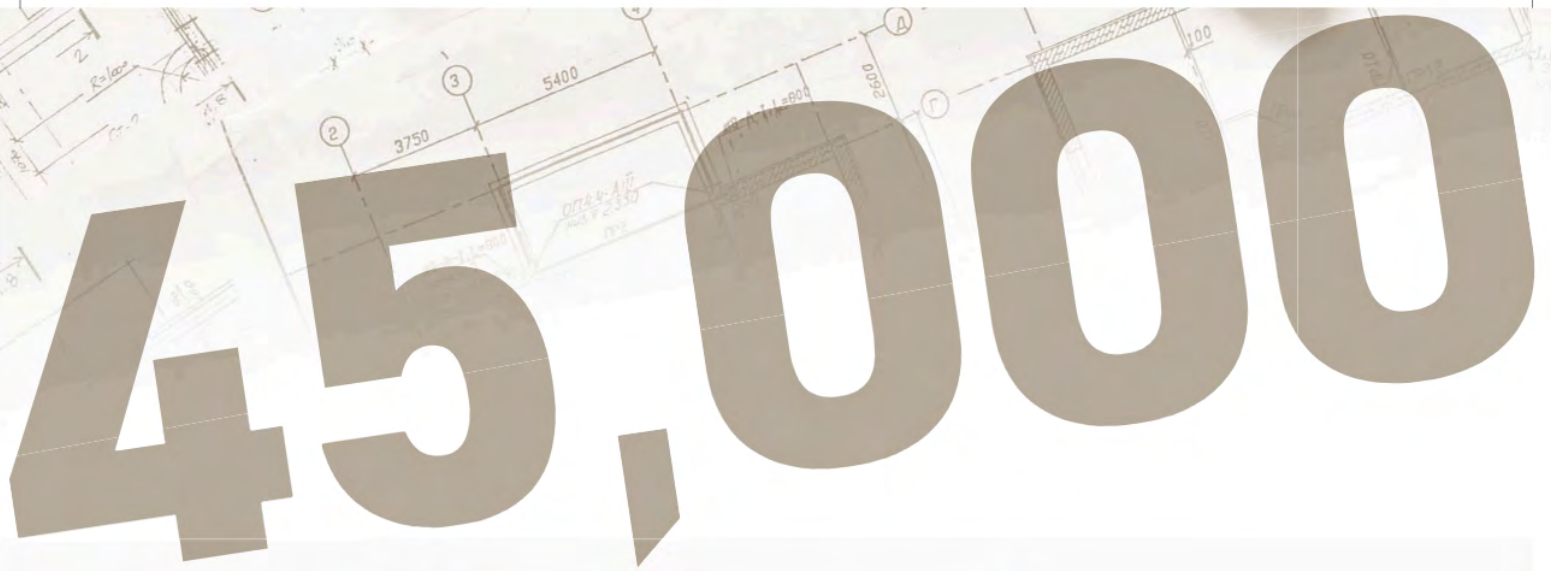
At 71, Anderson is as tireless as nature itself. She once hosted 34 consecutive field trips without even thinking about a break. Though she has two teenage volunteers who help with trail maintenance, animal husbandry, field trips and science fairs, she says she would like to find a new director of Gray Hawk to carry on her work.

“I would like to find a new me to make this a bigger, better and badder nature center,” she said. “This is a unique opportunity on a unique piece of property that’s 80% protected by the San Pedro Riparian Conservation Area. It was the homestead ranch built by James Wolf known as the Wolf House that’s 140 years old, one of the oldest in the San Pedro Valley. It doesn’t get more unique than that.”

Through all the snakes she raised and rescued, docents and animal control personnel she’s trained and taught, it’s the children that Anderson has opened the window to nature that’s been the most gratifying aspect of her work.

“I know I have deeply touched them because they’re now returning with their own kids to show them what’s here,” she said. “I’m hoping they take away an appreciation and an understanding of the natural world and know how to behave in it because this is their backyard.” ■





45,000

square-foot conference center opens in Sierra Vista

By R.J. Cohn



“Having a conference center here ... is like
having the cherry on top of the cake.”

— Mignonne Hollis, ARDEF executive director

One of the biggest frustrations for organizers wanting to hold large-scale events in a venue expansive enough for a substantial crowd in Sierra Vista is that there wasn't one.

But that's changed.

Thanks to the leveraging of the Arizona Regional Economic Development Foundation (AREDF), a portion of a massive 45,000-square-foot building the foundation owns next to the Northrop Grumman Corp. in northeast Sierra Vista is positioned to become a major business conference center with the capacity to hold close to 1,000 for multi-use conventions.

major convention in October for the Arizona Rural Transportation Summit, which is expected to exceed 400 visitors.

Last fall, Arizona Works held a job fair at the center that drew more than 300 job seekers and 55 vendors.

The Community Innovation Center couldn't come at a better time.

"There's such a huge need for a major conference center in Sierra Vista right now more than ever, especially since the one that's been used for decades on the base has been closed since February for security reasons," said Pacheco. "We're extremely excited to be able to offer something like this to the community.

focus is and has always been helping local businesses grow and become established in Sierra Vista and recruiting companies to the area for job creation," said ARDEF executive director Mignonne Hollis. "But having a conference center here as well is like having the cherry on top of the cake. It'll have its share of challenges, but we're really good at handling challenges."

Since it began in 1985, ARDEF has been responsible for bringing the global aerospace and defense technology giant Northrop Grumman to Sierra Vista, helped establish a consortium of providers for Rural Care, a behavioral health service incubator, on 7th Street, along with the creating the Bartow Business Complex.

"We'll make it as easy as we can for companies wanting to hold business conferences here as we will for business partners leasing space with us," said Hollis. "We didn't expect to have so many spaces filled up so quickly so we're really excited. This is going to have such a great impact for the community."

Both Hollis and Pacheco feel the impact from three-and-four-day conferences at the new Community Innovation Center could pack a big economic punch and revenue stream into Sierra Vista.

"The city has targeted its new sports complex for tournaments that will bring out-of-towners to Sierra Vista for several days, which means a lot of income for hotels, restaurants and stores," said Pacheco. "We're hoping to do the same type of thing by holding business conferences here. This can be a showcase for Sierra Vista, especially for people who have never been here. We have a lot to boast about, and this conference center is positioned to do just that."

The building also has a 2,000-square-foot space that once served as a data room for a call center, which Pacheco said could be leased by a company needing a data control center.

"We're excited and overwhelmed at the same time," she said. "We have a major wish list for the building which we know will eventually come to fruition. The possibilities are just beginning, and we're ready to go." ■



Mignonne Hollis (left) and Sarah Pacheco (right). PHOTOS BY MONIQUE VARGAS

The former home of the American Leadership Academy Virtual Learning Center, the new Community Innovation Center on Enterprise Way will also offer office spaces, meeting rooms, small business support counseling and entrepreneur service.

Nearly all the 18 business spaces for lease are already taken. The conference center itself will anchor a 16,000-square-foot space and is convention-ready-to-go. It has an enormous parking lot for more than 600 vehicles when the building was once a refrigeration manufacturing company and home to two call centers that had 500 employees.

AREDF assistant economic development director Sarah Pacheco said the foundation has already booked its first

We've been getting calls about the conference center since the word got out, and we're still getting them almost daily."

For decades, event planners could only rely on staging sizable events at Fort Huachuca's Thunder Mountain Activity Center (TMAC). It meant visitors had to obtain an installation access badge after being vetted at the Visitor Control Center before entering the base, sometimes causing delays depending on how many civilians were waiting for a pass.

But since 500 troops from Fort Drum's Mountain Division were deployed to the base to strengthen the southern border, Pacheco said TMAC has been shuttered and all booked events have been canceled.

"Even though we're thrilled about the ability to hold conferences here, our main

Willcox's community 'Glue Guy' brings

By R.J. Cohn

They don't make community heroes like Hunter Gahn anymore.

Maybe they never did.

The 30-year-old Willcox resident, whose love for a city founded as a railroad whistlestop in 1880, runs as deep as the Sulphur Springs Valley drainage basin.

He's arguably the most ultimate glue guy that has blessed any community with such an endearing passion of volunteerism you'll ever come across.

It might be a stretch to say Willcox wouldn't be the community it is without the contributions Gahn has provided for nearly a decade, from the Willcox Fire Department, Food Pantry and Distribution Center to the Elks Lodge.

But you wouldn't be far off saying it just the same.

Diagnosed with cerebral palsy shortly after birth, Gahn had half his brain removed at the Mayo Clinic when he was five to relieve an incredible 4,000 seizures a day. Doctors told his mother there was a chance the procedure could leave him like a vegetable, unable to recognize her.

But that didn't happen.

Twenty-five years later, Gahn is a whirlwind of community action, giving it back and paying it forward in one giant embrace that has helped make Willcox a better place to live.

In Gahn's world – one where you put your community before yourself – there is no such thing as a disability. It's about making the world a better place.

And Gahn brings with spurs on.

"If we had the kind of 'go' that he brings to our department whether it's during training or a fire, we'd have one hell of a

fire department," said Assistant Fire Chief Patti Ackerson-Rodriguez, who's been with Willcox Fire Department for 36 years. "He's willing to do everything we ask him to do and then some. He's a pretty special kid who loves to show the guys what he can do. Sometimes we literally have to tell him to stop."

But 'stop' isn't something that's part of Gahn's DNA.

He's got that fire-in-the-belly, an irrepressible drive to 'go,' as Ackerson-Rodriguez said, often training in turnout gear with an air pack weighing 60 lbs., while running three miles.

"It feels really great to be part of something that's important, something that helps and that I'm good at," said Gahn.

Gahn – who's also learning Spanish – is more than just 'good at' what he does. His volunteerism is the thrust of his life,



Hunter Gahn is an amazing volunteer in Willcox.

it with spurs n

one that has been a shot-in-the-arm for Willcox.

Along with the Willcox Fire Dept. Capt. Jake Weaver, Gahn has demonstrated home safety fire alarms and how to deal with grease fires to Benson Company's Arizona Rangers, where his step-dad is a 2nd Lieutenant.

"He's been trained on different pieces of equipment like jaws-of-life, how to roll fire hoses after an event and is CPR-certified," said his step-dad Kevin Caffal. "He makes sure there's enough air tanks and water so firefighters are hydrated during fires. Capt. Weaver said he never complains and wishes he could have 1,000 Hunter Gahns."

Nine years ago, Gahn began volunteering at the Willcox Distribution Center, which distributes food to 18 sites across Cochise, Graham and Greenlee counties,

putting in nearly 40 hours a week loading and unloading semis with a motorized pallet jack. He's also been cooking Thanksgiving and Christmas feasts at the Willcox Elks Lodge for nine years.

"I don't know if people would be having such good holiday dinners if I wasn't doing the cooking," he laughed.

support by his mother, Danell Gahn. She attended every single wrestling tournament, football practice and games when he was team manager when they lived in Iowa and made sure a bureaucratic system wasn't going to prevent him from getting a driver's license.

"She pushed him and encouraged him

“If we had the kind of 'go' that he brings to our department whether it's during training or a fire, we'd have one hell of a fire department.”

— Assistant Fire Chief Patti Ackerson-Rodriguez

Still, he wanted to contribute more. For the last six months, Gahn has been volunteering 35 hours a week at the Willcox Food Pantry and can't wait for the place to open.

"He gets up at 2 a.m. and is ready to go," said Caffal. "His enthusiasm for what he does is phenomenal."

What has been instrumental in Gahn's accomplishments while living with cerebral palsy has been the unwavering

from day one," said his step-dad. "She wasn't going to let a disability get in the way of living his life."

Danell Caffal has been through the worst of what a mother shouldn't have to go through, from a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, watching her son battle with 4,000 daily seizures to a surgery that could have left him in a vegetative state.

"I just wanted him to have a good life," she said. "What mother doesn't want that? He has that kind of aura that when he enters a room everyone just falls in love with him. We're pretty proud of who he is." ■



ABOVE: Hunter Gahn, left, with the Willcox Fire Department team. LEFT: Hunter Gahn and his best buddy, Rody the Malinois. PHOTOS BY MONIQUE VARGAS

Flying fearlessly into the bush

By Larry Scott

I'm not sure what to expect. I understand it's a bush-pilot flight school, serving the needs of Christian 'church planters' around the world. Really?

It's called Ethnos360 Aviation, and it's located on 640 acres of desert, just east of McNeal, in the valley between low mountains. The organization started in 1969 to provide aviation service for New Tribes Mission, now Ethnos360. In 1993 they relocated from Bisbee Douglas International Airport to the present site near McNeal.

I enter an attractive main headquarters building to see beautifully appointed offices with colorful framed photos of aircraft, flight crews and locals in remote locations obviously far from home. Inside, I meet Executive Director Phil Koop, who introduces me to team members Jeff and Wonita Werley. Jeff gives me a tour of the facility.

Behind the offices, we enter the hangar-and-shops facility, a beautiful, spotlessly clean, high-ceilinged structure half the size of a football field. Individual shops along the walls provide the means for maintenance and renovation.

Jeff explains the spotless environment is an ongoing reminder to the team. Pay attention to details. A minor flaw

An R66 prepares to land in a Philippine village.



Pilot Josh Verdonck fuels a Robinson R66 in a Papua.

overlooked here could develop into a major problem in a high-risk region where aircraft maintenance is far more difficult and expensive.

I see about eight aircraft, a mix of fixed-wing and helicopters. While one is obviously under renovation, most are beautiful new-looking with classy white and red paint.

These beautiful showpieces are actually older aircraft, renovated and reconstructed: 1965, 1978, 1982... The blue helicopter is 12 years old. The red and white R66 training 'copter is a year old.

The fixed-wing airplane of choice is the Kodiak, designed specifically for the challenges associated with mission aviation. One room houses a Kodiak flight simulator, where upcoming pilots can undergo intensive training without burning fuel, and without the need for an expensive Kodiak airplane on-site.

I'm curious as to why aircraft service is needed by 'church planters.' I learn that Ethnos360 Aviation supports Ethnos360 church planting teams working among extremely remote people groups. These communities are often located in rough mountainous terrain, without road access. The hike to the nearest town can take days, or weeks. While a team lives there, they need a way to get food and supplies, since the people group — subsistence farmers and hunter/gatherers — cannot support them.

Imagine hiking from the Ethnos site in Sulphur Springs Valley to Sierra Vista, Willcox or Douglas for groceries. While we rely on cars and trucks, church planters in remote areas rely on Ethnos360 Aviation to bring supplies. They also serve as ambulance or school bus when needed. They're there to help when natural disasters hit and may even take villagers' cash crops to town.

I'm fascinated by the idea of people groups who have almost no connection with the outside world. But they know they're missing out. And when they invite a team of missionaries to live among them, Ethnos360 Aviation is there from day one.

In Papua, New Guinea, for example, pilot John Meerstra started serving the Malamumanda church planting team by flying in the first missionaries. Twenty-one years — and countless supporting flights later — he had the privilege of flying in a freshly-printed New Testament translation to a thriving body of believers and participating in the dedication ceremony.

At this point, you might wonder — as I did: Why does it take so long? Often, the language of the people group has never been written. I begin to see the process: learn the language and culture (which takes about four years) and develop it in written form. Then teach people who've never even held a pencil and paper to read and write! And then, translate



Students and instructors work on an R66 trainer in McNeal.

scripture. The team then presents culturally relevant Bible lessons; who God is, how He created the world, how sin entered the world, and God's promise of a Savior.

As villagers come to believe the message, a 'church' forms. Not a building, a liturgy to follow, or a set of rules. Just believers — quite different from our ordinary concept of 'church.' The team continues to support the believers, spending additional years translating the entire New Testament, and additional significant parts of the Old Testament.

Here at McNeal, the focus is on the aircraft and the people who provide the service. Aircraft type is specific to local needs. Because many missionary teams serve in rugged terrain where conventional airstrips are not practical, helicopters provide a perfect fit. For that reason, helicopters out-number fixed-wing aircraft.

Clearly, safety is always high priority. It starts with an operations manual, with detailed procedures for every aspect of flight and mechanics. And then, regular safety/training articles, from pilots and team members worldwide, based on ongoing personal experience. Ongoing training and safety checks at regular intervals keep skills up to date.

Although this is a training facility, I learn new personnel arrive in McNeal with a fistful of licenses to fly or maintain aircraft. But more is required for mission work. For example, helicopter pilots must be able to carry external 'sling-loads' safely. Time after time, taking off with different load types and weights. How do you 'rig' and pick up a load of building materials - or a refrigerator?

The pilots and mechanics are not 'hotshots' or 'lone cowboys.' Everyone works as a team, whether at McNeal or overseas. The mechanics master the meticulous process of rebuilding a Robinson R66 helicopter; their choice because they're comparatively simple, efficient, and seldom down for

maintenance. And they're easier to maintain than most other helicopters in the countries they serve: Currently Brazil, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. Incidentally, nine nationalities are represented among the 130 personnel at the aviation organization.

There are obviously huge costs incurred in keeping a flight program operational. The cost of buying and maintaining aircraft. Fuel is expensive. But airplanes and helicopters have value only if people can afford to use them. That is especially true for the

native missionaries who need it most but can afford it least.

With the help of generous donations to the flight sponsorship fund, Ethnos360 Aviation has developed an affordability-based flight program. The missionary pays what he or she can afford — if only the price of a chicken. Which means westerners, nationals and ethnic believers have access to needed aviation services to carry out their church planting strategy.

After finishing training in McNeal, young pilots, mechanics and their families go overseas to serve. So, most of the people I meet on my tour of the facilities are older, having already been there - on the field - for much of their lives.

As one explained to me, "Right now, quite a few of us are 65 and above - some in our 70s. We have one incredible guy who is 83 or so. Younger folks are in the works to come on-board in the next couple years, but that's a process. Most of us would go overseas again in a heartbeat, but various needs keep us here. Those needs may be as mundane as health or elder care. And there's the need for strong, capable leaders with field experience to run the organization."

Volunteer contributions are amazing. The facilities here in McNeal were built by a host of volunteers, investing countless hours for a worldwide aviation organization with the purpose of sharing a message of good news to people in remote isolation.

I came to this facility not knowing what to expect, and I leave impressed with the whole operation. In a time where change is everywhere, it appears the people at Ethnos360 Aviation remain steadfastly on track, decade-after-decade following the vision. Their 'North Star' is still there, bright and clear.

I found plenty of great documentary stories on YouTube. And for more information, check out their website, ethnos360aviation.org. If you would like to volunteer, contact Dwight Brown at personnel-aviation@ntm.org. ■



Kiwanis gambles for kids

Kiwanis Club's 'High Stakes' Casino Night to benefit Just Kids, Inc.

By R.J. Cohn

High rollers, hustlers, wannabe gamblers and card sharks will be converging on Doc's Watering Hole from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. June 22 at one of the largest fundraising events of the year for the second annual San Pedro Kiwanis Club Casino Night, earmarked to benefit Cochise County's needy children.

Hosted by Just Kids, Inc.— a non-profit charity established in 1993 that enhances the lives of needy and at-risk children in the greater Sierra Vista area — the gala event will feature 18 roulette, craps, poker and blackjack tables along with 18 professional dealers from Tombstone outfitted in 1880's style western wear.

Event organizers are hoping the proceeds from Casino Night tops the inaugural event, which raised approximately \$8,500 for Just Kids, Inc. Those funds went toward the Christmas stocking stuffer and clothing programs, along with scholarships, most improved student and other programs for the area's underprivileged children. Last year, 700 kids were provided with clothing during Christmas, which consisted of two full outfits and shoes.

"Everything we do at Kiwanis focuses on children, and we are excited about giving back to our community's kids in a big way," said co-organizer Donna Hilton. "Last year's event was a huge success, and we were still ironing out the kinks since it was our first time around the block with this. That's why we're really gearing up for a very successful and wonderful Casino Night at Doc's. We've gone out of way to make the event feel like it's a real professional gambling casino, with top-notch dealers, tables and fantastic raffle prizes."

While last year's event drew 115 people, Hilton is expecting next month's gala to quickly reach its 150-person capacity, thanks to an early promotion blitz by Doc's Watering Hole.

"Doc's has been such a great partner in all of this," said Kiwanis co-organizer Shellie Cerecke. "They've already started

advertising it on their TV screens throughout the restaurant and bar."

Admission to Casino Night is \$50 in advance, or \$60 at the door, which includes \$500 in chips and hors d'oeuvres catered by Doc's. There will also be a cash bar with drinks served at the gambling tables. Each player's winnings can be cashed in for raffle tickets toward four gift baskets, gift cards, cash prizes, among others, with door prizes being called out every 30 minutes.

There will also be several grand raffles at \$20 per ticket or three for \$50 that will include three nights in a one-bedroom condo at the Carlsbad, CA Inn Beach Resort, plus \$400 cash; a \$5,000 gift certificate for laser cosmetic surgery; and a two-night stay in a Las Vegas Strip hotel, two tickets to Treasure Island's Cirque du Soleil and two VIP tickets to Gilley's.

San Pedro Kiwanis is also looking for Casino Night sponsors, from \$100 to \$3,000 sponsorships, which include slides on Doc's in-house TV, business information on event brochures and tickets to Casino Night.

Advance tickets can be purchased at San Pedro Kiwanis Club's website, <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/casino-night-presented-by-just-kids-inc> along with sponsorship information. ■



ADOBE STOCK PHOTOS BY RORQZOA, TIGERDUDE

Heaven for dogs

By R.J. Cohn

If this wasn't dog heaven, then the second annual dog fair hosted by 4-EVR Ranch in January was as close to the kingdom of canine paradise as it gets.

More than 200 dogs and their owners filled the venue that was highlighted with prizes for the winners of dog races, best trick performances and cleverest costumes. While some doggie racers didn't quite get the concept of bolting toward the finish line – many trotted back to their owners instead – others delighted with woofs and wags, socializing with Great Danes, Dachshunds, and the tiniest of Chihuahuas.

4-EVR Ranch owners Shannon and Del Thola, who purchased the property two years ago, were also trying to raise money through the fair to support nonprofit Serving Smiles, which provides dental care for veterans and first responders, along with scholarships for veterans wanting to start their own business. Last year, they provided four scholarships from the fair's proceeds.

The Tholas aren't strangers when it comes to hosting top-shelf events at 4-EVR Ranch.

"This is just what we were hoping for," said Shannon Thola. "We wanted to add another event to our event calendar, tried to get the word out about the dog fair, and it looks like people are coming in from everywhere. Last year, we had 100 dogs, so we've already doubled that amount."

For a relatively new venue, the fair was filled with four adoption agencies and 17 vendors selling dog-related items from dog houses to personalized collars and leashes. There was even a Yappy Hour, where dogs could sip non-alcoholic craft beer like chicken porter beer and beefy brown ale. Most, however, stayed with water from pet water dispensers.

"I've been to a lot of these dog fests where there really isn't a whole lot going on," said Adrienne O'Malley, who was driving back to Tucson when she spotted signs for the dog fair in Benson and decided to visit. "But this one is well done in such a wide-open area. Someone put a lot of thought into making this a nice, mellow event."

That someone was Shannon Thola, who began hosting Benson PTA fundraisers, book fairs and church events when her children were in school. She became so

good at it that she started hosting Benson Chamber of Commerce events, including the annual Christmas on Main Street.

After the Tholas purchased 4-EVR Ranch – which is one of only two horse auctions sites in all of Arizona held on the second Saturday each month – the couple put their event-hosting expertise for creating quality venues into high gear. Currently, 4-EVR Ranch holds a three-day Cochise County Country Music Festival in March, billed as the biggest country music festival in Southeast Arizona.

Along with the dog fair, the ranch hosts a Beer, Brats & Battle of the Band Festival in September and a November Spirits Festival. They've also created outdoor venues with idyllic settings for weddings complete with a lighted bridge and pond, reunions, graduation parties and baby showers. They hope to come up with a couple more soon.

"We're very busy, and we're doing quite well with all that we have going," said Shannon. "I know how to put on one heck of an event. That's why we're excited that the dog fair has taken off the way it has. It's only going to get bigger and better." ■



Two dogs battling for first place at the 4Ever Ranch Dog Fair as their owner cheers them on! PHOTOS BY MONIQUE VARGAS



Baron flies high as he and his owner, Makenna Smith of Makenna's K-9 Training, perform a trick dog demonstration at the 4Ever Ranch annual Dog Fair held on January 4, 2025.

Is there a doctor in the house?

Part I: Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, Gastroenterology, and OB/Gyn



Dr. Adrienne Banks, OB/GYN



Anne Murray, Nurse Practitioner



Dr. Dorlyne Brchan, Pediatrics

Internal Medicine Dr. Roberto Molina, who speaks English and Spanish fluently, and Physician's Assistant Alyssa Knapp welcomed Nurse Practitioner Anne Murray in 2024. Together, they handle a wide range of conditions for adult patients, from common ailments to diagnosing more complex diseases.



Dr. Jessica Calvo, Pediatrics



Dr. Vandana Vedula, Gastroenterology

Pediatrics: Children are once again being cared for at SVMG with the addition of Dr. Jessica Calvo and Dr. Dorlyne Brchan. Fluent in Spanish and English, Dr. Calvo treats common childhood illnesses and injuries, provides preventative care, check-ups, and vaccinations for infants, children, adolescents, and young adults. Dr. Brchan (pronounced "ber-kahn") specializes in pediatric neurology.

Gastroenterology: In August of 2024, SVMG welcomed Vandana Vedula, MD, a Gastroenterologist with over 30 years of experience, to its medical group. Dr. Vedula can provide routine colonoscopies and endoscopies or manage more complex gastrointestinal diseases.

Obstetrics and Gynecology: SVMG employs four Obstetrician-gynecologists. Dr. Sidney Semrad, Dr. Eric Njiforut (or "Dr. N"), and Dr. Adrienne Banks are full time OB/GYNs, while Dr. Paige Brainard divides her time between Sierra Vista and Tucson. They are complemented by a team of midwives: Dana Albalate, Kendra Bowles, and Misty Lucero, along with Nurse Practitioner Rise Gold. This is an award-winning team - You cannot receive better maternity care. Anywhere.

To learn more about these and other providers at SVMG, check out their website at: <https://www.svmedicalgroup.org/>. To schedule an appointment with any of them, call the Sierra Vista Medical Group at (520) 263-3620. And here's a tip: If you are trying to reach a specific provider and their name is not listed in the phone tree when you call, try the scheduler for any other provider in that department and ask for the provider you want. It is not unusual for the phone tree updates to take longer than the contracting process! ■



By Ruth Quinn, CVMC Board of Trustees

At Sierra Vista Medical Group (SVMG), the answer is increasingly, "Yes!"

SVMG has been expanding the number and types of physicians, the scopes of practice, and the specialties offered. Here is Part One of the latest news from Sierra Vista Medical Group.

Primary care providers are the first line of defense in keeping our community healthy. They provide vaccinations and screenings, annual check-ups, and referrals to specialty care. At SVMG, both Family Medicine and Internal Medicine clinicians provide this vital service.

Family Medicine specialists Dr. Blair Goodsell and Nurse Practitioner Alli Skeehean care for family members across all ages. In 2024, the Family Medicine team moved their services to the Lenio Building at 210 El Camino Real to offer primary care closer to where people live. Joe Clifton, Practice Manager for SVMG, wants people to know that the Family Medicine group takes walk-ins at the Lenio office.

Ruth Quinn has been on the CVMC Board of Trustees for 10 years (and counting), having served as Board Chair for the past six years. She is committed to helping CVMC's mission of "Making Communities Healthier" by sharing the knowledge and experiences gained in that role with others in Cochise County.

Exposing the pain

Acclaimed *Woman in the Mirror*

By R.J.Cohn

Hailed as a theatrical triumph, the one-act play *The Woman in the Mirror* booked at Huachuca City's K Palace in June based on playwright Dayna Steele's two-year struggle caregiving for her mother battling Alzheimer's will rock you to the core for 90 minutes.

But you'll most likely carry this moving, tour de force performance with you well after the final curtain; it's a performance that will grab you from the get-go, a searing mother-daughter journey where Steele reels in the pain and loss as Alzheimer's slowly chips away at her mother before your eyes while she tries to navigate her way in an emotionally-fraught landscape, struggling to hold onto her own sanity as both caregiver and daughter.

Adapted from her critically-acclaimed book *Surviving Alzheimer's With Friends, Facebook, and a Really Big Glass of Wine*, Steele – one of the top rock DJs in the country who was inducted into the Texas Radio Hall of Fame – delivers a two-woman play with laughter, wit and a lot of wine on a debilitating disease that eventually took her mother's life 10 years ago.

Aside from its powerful delivery on an incurable illness that the Associated Press says four out of 10 Americans will most

likely endure, Steele's extraordinary storytelling ability subtly turns the play into something more: A manual for caregivers on a stage.

After 111 rewrites following a director's preliminary draft in 2019, *The Woman in the Mirror* premiered two years later to rave reviews at Houston's Midtown Arts & Center Theater. Steele has been on a roll with it ever since.

The play won best production drama, best director and best props in southern California's Desert Theater League while Steele and Rebecca McWilliams, who plays Steele's mother, both received nominations for best actress.

"It was received extremely well in Houston and also when it was staged in Palm Springs," said Steele, a motivational speaker and author of self-promotional books. "So many people came up to me after the play to talk about their dad with Alzheimer's, how much the play meant to them, how hard they coped caring for a parent with Alzheimer's. I've touched a great deal of people with this because Alzheimer's is a roller coaster ride that will hit you hard like you've never been hit before – emotionally and financially – and I want people to know through the play that they're not alone."

The Woman in the Mirror packs such an emotional punch



Dayna Steele, left, and Tommy Kelly discuss setting up the stage for Dayna's upcoming play *"The Woman in the Mirror."*

of Alzheimer's: Mirror to play at K Palace

through mother-and-daughter reenactments in a riveting and unforgettable slice-of-life performance that began when Steele started posting online about her daily struggle as a caregiver for her mother. That quickly snowballed into a community of support that encompassed thousands of followers going through similar circumstances with an aging parent fighting Alzheimer's.

"There's a line toward the end of the play where I look in the mirror and say I've never felt so alone in my life," said Steele. "One of the loneliest things in the world is to be a principal caregiver because something like this is so overwhelming."

The *Woman in the Mirror* has sparked interest nationally as well as in England. Steele has been in talks with producers in New York and from London's renown West End Theater.

"The majority of them wanted to change it into a darker play, but that's not what this is about," she said. "It's a love letter to caregivers going through something that's both terrifying and overwhelming."

The *Woman in the Mirror* will have an eight-show run at K Palace, which has seating for 110, from June 12-22. Steele is thrilled to showcase the play on Tommy Kelley's spacious 32'-by-21' stage.

"I'm bringing theater to an area that normally doesn't get this kind of a show so people will not only have an opportunity to see a play of this magnitude," said Steele. "It's also something I feel will be able to help them navigate their way through something like this and more importantly, that they're not alone." ■

COMING TO THE K PALACE THEATER:

The Woman in the Mirror.

Don't miss the award-winning dark comedy *The Woman in the Mirror*. This love letter to caregivers is based on Dayna Steele's best-selling book, *Surviving Alzheimer's With Friends, Facebook, and a Really Big Glass of Wine*. *The Woman in the Mirror* is based on a true story of a daughter who spends four years taking care of her mother who has Alzheimer's. Award winning playwright Dayna Steele wrote and stars in this poignant story of her trials and tribulations. If you don't laugh, you'll cry...

This is a must see production. It is both informative and entertaining, and will leave you with a feeling of hope surrounding this tragic disease.



PHOTOS BY MONIQUE VARGAS

SHOW TIMES:

June 12-13, 19-20 – show start 7 pm

June 14-15, 21-22 – show start 3 pm

LOCATION: The K Palace Theater in Huachuca City, AZ

TICKETS: \$35. online at www.thekpalacetheater.com or at the door.

Dayna will be selling her book at the show, *Surviving Alzheimer's With Friends, Facebook, and a Really Big Glass of Wine*.

Inside the walls of

Forever Home Donkey Rescue & Sanctuary creates a

By R.J.Cohn

If I were a donkey and no one wanted me, I'd be kicking up my donkey hooves and braying to the moon with happiness to have been taken to the 30-acre Forever Home Donkey Rescue & Sanctuary north of Benson to live the rest of my donkey days surrounded by love and affection.

I'd also give a big donkey kiss — daily, if I could — to Tish and John Hiestand, who founded the sanctuary in 1998, as a way of thanking them for creating a place as close to donkey heaven as it gets for all my donkey brothers and sisters who have been abused and abandoned like me.

The Hiestands did what many people wouldn't do — establishing the gold standard of an animal sanctuary for one

of mankind's most reliable beasts of burden.

They gave them the life they deserve.

That's why on March 22, Forever Home held a Spring Fling, an open house and fundraiser to help offset food and supplement costs — close to \$15,000 per year — for 34 donkeys and one mule living at the sanctuary.

And boy oh boy, did the public turn out for these rescued domesticated equines, many of whom were severely abused and traumatized when they first set foot at Forever Home.

People reached down in their pockets for donations, bought hot dogs, merchandise, Forever Home T-shirts, and raffle tickets to help the sanctuary keep on going and giving.

"This is a huge day for us financially," said sanctuary director Suzanne Velasquez, who started as a volunteer and never left. "It's also a good education day for the public. We want people to understand how to take care of these sweet, loving animals."

Velasquez, who lives on the property unsalaried, said she expects the day's take will run between \$1,000 to \$2,500.

Forever Home depends solely on donations to survive. A salsa contest fundraiser at Sierra Vista's Mountain View Gardens Gracious Retirement Living Center recently netted \$1,006 for the sanctuary. Other donations come from the annual pack burro races in Tombstone, while the bulk are from personal donations and monthly sponsorships.



Sanctuary Director Suzanne Velasquez offers a carrot to one of the sanctuary's resident Donkeys. PHOTOS BY MONIQUE VARGAS

donkey heaven

s a haven for the unwanted

"Once people see these donkeys, they fall in love with them and send us \$5 to hundreds a month as sponsors," said Velasquez. "Every dollar helps."

For 27 years, Forever Home has been caring for donkeys that have been left in poor physical and emotional shape.

"While some are abandoned and neglected, many come to us traumatized from a lifetime of abuse," said Velasquez. "We had an 18-year-old who reacted violently to anyone coming near her wearing a cowboy hat, carrying a cane or walking stick and trying to feed her with their hand. They still remember their past and carry emotional scars."

If John Hiestand hadn't purchased a 10-year-old donkey named Black Jack as a birthday gift for his wife in 1998,

the Forever Home sanctuary might never have been established. Even after a companion donkey for Black Jack was purchased, the idea of a donkey rescue didn't materialize.

But after Black Jack's buddy was euthanized because of health problems, the Hiestands purchased two more donkeys, then added more, realizing there was an abundance of unwanted donkeys who needed a home.

And that home evolved into Forever Home Donkey Rescue as a private sanctuary before it became a nonprofit in 2020. Since it began, Velasquez said 78 donkeys have been given new homes. Thirty-eight are buried on the property with their names on markers.

But on March 22, it was the day to

celebrate the donkeys. They got petted by adults, hugged by children and posed for photos.

More importantly, they received much-needed donations for the care they receive to keep their lives at the Forever Home secure for the remainder of their days.

Velasquez, who moved to Arizona six years ago after her 31-year marriage ended, said she moved out West to find a new beginning and unexpectedly found it at a donkey sanctuary in the high desert.

"I found a purpose," she said. "I guess you could say they rescued me."

To make a donation, go to <https://foreverhomedonkeyrescue.com> and click the Donate Today button. ■



Toasting the Toast

A club that takes the fear

By R.J.Cohn

Whether it's the fear of flying or the fear of heights, nothing can be more emotionally frightening than public speaking, which the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) ranks just ahead of the fear of spiders and death, affecting 40% of the American population.

The thought of standing in front of a roomful of people can be so absolutely terrifying that NIMH considers public speaking a social anxiety disorder.

But when there's nonprofit organization like the Toastmasters Club operating in Cochise County for 60 years dedicated to helping people become more confident speakers, you don't have to sweat bullets or feel almost nauseous when you have to give a business presentation in front of a 100 people or delivering a speech at your daughter's wedding.

Toastmasters Club 3198 – which is part of Toastmasters International that operates 14,000 clubs in 150 countries – makes it so comfortable and supportive to stand up and talk in

front of strangers that it almost feels as though you're speaking in front of family.

And in a way, you are.

"For most of us, speaking in front of a lot of people with all eyes on us is not a natural thing," said club member Kari Pelton. "You've stepped out of your comfort zone, your palms are sweaty, and you have fear in your belly. We've all been there. But when you speak in front of a live audience here, everyone is engaged, and you're encouraged every step of the way."

Thanks to the support of a compassionate group of members, the club — which is one of the oldest Toastmasters clubs in Arizona — makes public speaking easy, and more importantly, fun.

Whether it's a quick, impromptu speech or a eight-minute presentation on any topic, speakers – especially those who were once terrified of public speaking – learn to develop communication skills they thought they never had.

It's an empowering feeling, especially for first-time speakers.

"It not only helps me think on my feet better," said Pelton.



Toastmaster International Club treasurer Paul Lewis addresses the Cochise chapter during a recent club meeting. PHOTOS BY MONIQUE VARGAS

Toastmasters: out of public speaking

"It's given me a stronger sense of self-confidence, improves your cognitive skills along with affecting every aspect of my personal and professional growth. Plus, the camaraderie among our members is so genuine and supportive. We're here to make public speaking something people don't have to fear."

Just ask club president Richard Krug why Toastmasters tries to take the elephant out of the room for guests unaccustomed to public speaking.

"What makes this club work is that we're all volunteers who put a lot of effort into making talking in front of an audience not such a scary thing," he said. "It's what makes this club special."

What also makes it special and such a positive experience is

the applause each speaker receives from the club.

Not being someone who has spent much time speaking in front of audiences, I found that the positive affirmation for standing in front of strangers and talking was absolutely huge.

Perhaps it was club vice president of membership Mila West who summed it up best after several members gave short presentations, each one receiving a ringing endorsement of applause.

"It makes you feel good for what you have just done in front of a crowd and who you are for getting up and speaking," she said.

Toastmasters meet every Tuesday from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the SSVEC conference room, 311 E. Wilcox Dr., Sierra Vista. For more information: 520-678-5143. ■



Toastmasters vice president of public relations Kari Pelton gives a 2-minute, impromptu speech at a club meeting designed to improve public speaking.



President Richard Krug gives a lively presentation to members at a Tuesday meeting.

When numbers can be your friends

She was standing in a bookstore in Albuquerque, New Mexico — looking at a clock on the wall — when she figured out how to make math interesting.

At the time Debbie Hickman, now of Sierra Vista, was teaching and doing curriculum for elementary school students in Ganado, which is on the Navajo Nation in Arizona. She was supposed to select the best of three math books from different companies' samples to be purchased. It was impossible for her to tell the difference.

She wondered what a professional mathematician would say about this.

Albuquerque was the closest "big city," to Ganado with a bookstore, and Hickman decided she needed to read the thoughts of mathematicians. The first mathematician said, "I see numbers as my friends." Then another mathematician said, "I see numbers as my family".

From that inspiration, Hickman crafted the idea of each of the numbers on the clock owning a distinct personality.





The numbers were having a good time on the clock. Some were racing around, doing somersaults, playing cards, but definitely not staying in their proper places. The clock finally tossed them all off. After that, they were on their own and each number needed to find a suitable job.

By converting numbers to personalities, Hickman quickly determined that her students were excited about learning math, and they were innovative in their perceptions of numbers. Classmates worked together to find all sorts of ways to demonstrate the importance of a number.

Each of Hickman's books is dedicated to a number, which each interacting with other numbers. The message in the books often goes beyond its application to an academic discipline. It also provides kids with answers to bullying, shyness, the importance of friends, and other life challenges.

For example, the book titled "What's up Seven?" starts with Seven sitting outside in the rain. He is feeling sorry for himself after he lost the job of working for Snow White. The prince came along, and Snow White went all gaga over him. So, she didn't care how many dwarfs she had. Then he got a job with the days of the week and got fired because he kept falling asleep.

“By converting numbers to personalities, Hickman quickly determined that her students were excited about learning math.”

Consequently, the days of the week were in the wrong order. While he was sitting in the rain Eight appears and tells Seven that maybe he just hasn't found the right job. So, he listened to Eight's wisdom and the adventure begins!

Talking to a mental health professional, Hickman learned that depression in children ages 5 to 11 has been accelerating. She couldn't help thinking that these books might help those children. All of her books have numbers that have trials and tribulations, and all the characters find ways to a better state of mind.

Hickman and her husband, Dennis, have lived a life dedicated to improving the world community. In addition to teaching at Navajo schools, the couple has served in the Peace Corp, and traveled and lived in Kazakhstan, Turkey, Kuwait, Malaysia, Thailand and India.

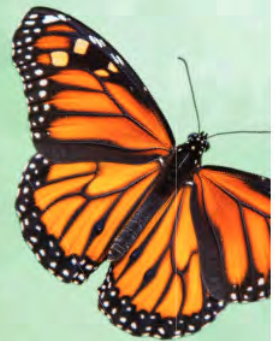
Her latest efforts — to help kids learn about numbers through her book series — has caught the attention of several

renowned book reviewers, including:

The U.S. Review of Books: "...This fully illustrated tale of playful numbers has several refreshing twists that make for a fun read. Young children are sure to connect with the antics of the numbers, their interest in having a good time, and having difficulties sitting still."

Hollywood Book Reviews had this to say: "...The educational piece of this read is incredibly well-thought-out and put together, as well with numerology and mathematical language helping to bring a better understanding and appreciation of math for young children."

All of Debbie Hickman's books are available on Amazon, in the books section, by searching for the author's name. Debbie Hickman, author. ■



ADOBE STOCK PHOTOS BY GOMEZ, BARETH

Huachuca's **important birds**



An Elf Owl
PHOTO
COURTESY OF
TONY BATTISTE



Lucy's Warbler. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTIE VAN CLEVE



A pair of Spotted Owls. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS HUBBARD

By Chris Harbard, President, Southwest Wings

One of the best ways to look after wildlife is to protect the areas where it lives. To do this effectively, we need to know where the most important areas are. Birds are a great indicator of areas which need protection and the Important Bird Area (IBA) program, which was founded by Birdlife International in the 1980s, identifies these areas. The Arizona IBA program was established in 2001 and is managed by Tucson Bird Alliance (formerly Tucson Audubon Society) and Audubon Arizona. So far, a total of 48 IBAs have been identified across Arizona and one of the most important is the Huachuca Mountains IBA. As one of the 'Sky Islands' the Huachuca Mountains are an extension of the Sierra Madre Mountains to the south, in Mexico. The IBA covers more than 100,000 acres and a large part falls within Fort Huachuca with much of the southern portion being the Coronado National Monument, sloping southward into Mexico.

The Huachuca Mountains have more perennial streams than any of the other Madrean mountains in Arizona, making their canyons some of the best for wildlife. Together with the Chiricahua Mountains, they host the greatest range of Madrean neo-tropical birds in the United States

with 15 species of hummingbirds (making Sierra Vista the Hummingbird Capital of the United States) and nine owl species. One of the most threatened bird species in the Huachuca IBA is the Mexican Spotted Owl. In the US it occurs mainly in Arizona and New Mexico, in mixed conifer and pine-oak habitats, both of which are found in Huachuca Mountain canyons. The Mexican Spotted Owl is one of North America's largest owls and is nocturnal, roosting during the day. It feeds on small mammals but will also eat birds, bats, and reptiles. Courtship begins in March, the eggs hatch in early May and the young depend on their parents until fall. Another smaller owl species, the Whiskered Screech Owl, is only found in the Sky Islands in the US, with probably more breeding in the Huachucas than anywhere else. Species of Conservation Concern found within the Huachuca Mountains IBA include the iconic Elegant Trogon, and traditionally the Huachucas support the largest number (45-65) in the United States, plus Montezuma Quail, Arizona Woodpecker, Elf Owl, Blue-throated Hummingbird, Lucy's, Grace's and Red-faced Warblers.

Southwest Wings Birding and Nature festivals, based in Sierra Vista since 1991, are held twice a year in spring and summer. They run expert-led field trips

to many of the special locations in the Huachucas IBA such as Ramsey, Carr and Miller Canyons, the Fort Huachuca canyons, Coronado National Memorial and Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary. Anyone wishing to visit Garden and Huachuca Canyons, on Fort Huachuca army base, must obtain a visitor's pass. Other nearby IBAs include Chiricahua and Santa Rita Mountains, Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, Santa Cruz Valley and San Pedro River Riparian NCA – all area visited during the festivals. The 34th annual Southwest Wings Summer Festival will be held from Tuesday July 29 to August 2, 2025 and is Southwest Wings' main festival with all of the field trips plus a fabulous indoor Nature Expo with lots of free talks and a wide selection of specialty vendors and exhibitors, all held at the Mall at Sierra Vista. This year the festival will be celebrating the Huachuca Mountains IBA with a dedication, to be held on Friday August 1 – on the stage in the Mall. There is also a Keynote Dinner on Thursday July 31 with special speaker British author, birder and TV producer Stephen Moss. Registration for the field trips is open until July 15, 2025 and full details of the Summer festival activities can be found on the Southwest Wings website www.swwings.org/summer-festival-2025. ■

A quick smile a mischievous

By Dana Cole



Margarita Flores

When meeting Margarita Flores for the first time, one is immediately drawn to her quick smile and mischievous sparkle.

A Boys & Girls Club alum and kid at heart, Margarita is passionate about children. She is the Lead Youth Development Specialist for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sierra Vista (BGCSV) where she works with kids at all three of the organization's branches. Her days are shared between the BGCSV's Main Branch on Paseo San Luis, the Carmichael School site and the Valley View campus in Palominas, where she is responsible for delivering quality program activities to Club members at all three locations.

Youth development programs touch on a range of activities that include academics, character building, health education and recreation. In addition to overseeing program implementation, Margarita mentors other staff members who are involved in youth development. She also

serves as the BGCSV Torch Club leader, a community service and leadership program for kids 10 to 13 years old.

"I love working with the kids, seeing their progression and watching how I've had an impact on their lives," Margarita said. "A lot of these kids just really need someone to listen to them. Some of them come from families that are affected by difficult socioeconomic circumstances. Their parents are doing their best, working extra hours just to put food on the table, and the Boys & Girls Club has become a place for these kids to turn to for socialization, fun activities and mentoring."

Born in Fort Irwin, California in 1999, Margarita was raised in Sierra Vista when her father's military career brought him to Fort Huachuca. She attended kindergarten through eighth grade on Fort Huachuca

where her father, Arnold Flores, was stationed while serving in the U.S. Army. Following middle school, she attended Buena High School and is a 2018 Buena graduate. Margarita and her two older sisters were raised by their father after her mother died in 2003, when Margarita was three years old.

"From the time I was six years old, through fifth grade, I was a member of Fort Huachuca's School Age Center and was then enrolled in the Middle School and Teen Center, which are affiliated with the Boys & Girls Club," Margarita said. "So, my involvement with the Boys & Girls Club started at a young age."

During her four years at Buena High School, Margarita was active in several extra-curricular activities, including swimming, JROTC and the school's debate team.



and sparkle



She also served as a tutor for struggling students and was a member of Buena's honors and Advanced Placement classes.

"I stayed so busy with all my extra-curricular activities, I didn't have time for the Boys & Girls Club during high school," recalls Margarita. With aspirations of becoming an elementary school teacher, Margarita enrolled in courses at Cochise College while working full-time as a waitress. But her plans of pursuing a degree in education were put on hold when she gave birth to her baby girl, Selena-Monroe.

"Selena is my five-year-old, sassy social butterfly," Margarita laughed. "She's a Club Kid, loves the different activities here and has a lot of friends."

Margarita started working at the Club two years ago, as a part-time Youth

Development Specialist at the Carmichael branch. After one year, she was promoted to her current position as a full-time Lead Youth Development Specialist.

"I really enjoy working at all three branches," she said. "I love all the kids and seeing the different personalities. Each child is so different, you learn to accommodate every one of them. Planning activities and learning what kids enjoy most are rewarding parts of my job."

Margarita wanted to extend a "big shout

out" to BGCSV staff member Liz Cruz, someone she can always lean on with questions and guidance.

"If there's anything I need to know, I go to Miss Liz for help," she said. "She's been with the Club for a long time, is a wealth of information and has always been there for me. She's been a great mentor."

She also speaks fondly of her grandmother Bertha Flores, a retired kindergarten teacher who taught for the Eloy school district for several years.

"I was raised in Sierra Vista, but was able to spend time in Eloy with my grandmother on my father's side of the family, and the two of us became very close," Margarita said. "She stands out as a role model, mother figure and mentor. She's the one who inspired me to work with kids and become a teacher, which is a goal I still plan to pursue."

Whether keeping score at a flag football game, decorating a Christmas parade float, or donning a Halloween costume, Margarita delves into her Club leadership role with the joyful abandonment of the youngsters she serves. ■



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF SIERRA VISTA**

THE REALM OF THE GALAXIES

By Ted Forte

When looking south into the evening sky in late spring, our gaze is directed out of the plane of our home galaxy and into the great expanse of intergalactic space. Our view of distant galaxies in that direction is mostly unimpeded by the stars, gas, and dust of the Milky Way.

Giant telescopes can see galaxies in countless numbers extending out to the edge of the visible universe in this direction. Our backyard telescopes are somewhat more limited, but there are more than enough extra-galactic targets bright enough to enjoy with them. Prominently placed in the spring sky is a region known as the Realm of the Galaxies where a typical amateur's telescope can track down about 100 galaxies in an area no larger than your fist held at arms-length. There are 38 galaxies here that are brighter than 12th magnitude - visible in a 4-inch telescope.

This rich galaxy hunting ground straddles the boundary of the Virgo and Coma Berenices constellations and is located mid-way between the bright stars Denebola (the "tail" of Leo the Lion) and Vindemiatrix, which is the next bright

star seen to the east-southeast. Aiming your scope to a spot exactly equidistant from these two stars will land you in the densest part of the Virgo-Coma Galaxy Cluster. Amateur astronomers playfully call this spot "downtown Virgo".

You'll find a fairly recognizable group of galaxies here. Two large bright, oval-shaped Messier galaxies, M86 and M84, dominate the group. They are magnitude 9.8 and 10.1 respectively. About 14 arc

minutes south is an elongated, 11.9 magnitude streak of light that is the spiral galaxy NGC 4388. Centered in the triangle formed by these three Island Universes is the smaller and fainter (13.0 magnitude) NGC 4387. The four make a distinct grouping that you should take the time to memorize as it's a convenient "home base" for your exploration of the area.

Giant telescopes can see galaxies in countless numbers extending out to the edge of the visible universe in this direction.

You'll notice that M86 is more elongated than M84 and it's this long axis

that can be an indicator of the long string of galaxies that will tend off of the pair in that direction. With an eyepiece that gives you about a 1-degree field of view (about a 35mm in a typical 8-inch scope), it's an easy matter to "galaxy-hop" along a string of six more galaxies known as Markarian's Chain. By moving your scope so that M86 is at the edge of your field of view, another pair of galaxies will materialize at the other edge. NGC 4438 (magnitude

10.9) and NGC 4435 (magnitude 11.5) are known as "The Eyes" - they appear as a spooky pair of objects that seem to be looking back at you. Moving a little northeast, before The Eyes leave your eyepiece, NGC 4461 (magnitude 11.9) and NGC 4458 (magnitude 12.9) will appear. Another nudge northeast and they will share the view with 11.1 magnitude NGC 4473. One more step puts 13.5 magnitude NGC 4479

THE ASTRONOMER'S CORNER

and 11.3 magnitude NGC 4477 into your eyepiece. The string continues, but you'll have to venture out in slightly longer jumps. If you get lost, just find your way back to "Home Base" and start again.

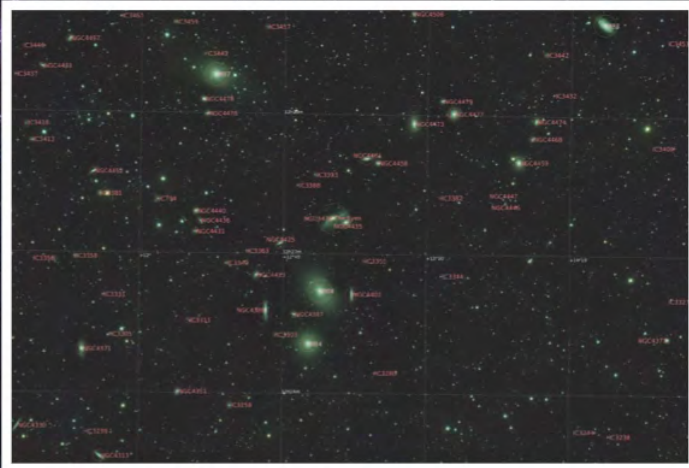
Randomly scanning this small area, you will encounter many more galaxies. To identify their names and to navigate to them more efficiently you'll need a decent map. The freeware program Stellarium will do nicely. Just type Stellarium into your search engine to download the program.

The center of the Virgo Galaxy Cluster is about 58 million light years away. A light year is the distance that

light travels in one Earth year: about 6 trillion miles. While this is an incredible distance, this grouping is actually the closest galaxy cluster to us. Our Milky Way, and its family of galaxies known as The Local Group, is actually an outlying member of the Virgo Cluster. The Virgo cluster is itself an outlying member of the far larger Virgo Supercluster.

Each of the faint blobs of light you encounter in the Realm of the Galaxies is an Island Universe all its own consisting of hundreds of billions of individual stars and, presumably, many billions of planets. Some are far larger than the Milky Way.

The galaxies we see with our small backyard scopes are only the brightest and closest of the innumerable ones that populate the observable universe. The larger your scope (the bigger its aperture), the fainter you can see. In general, the fainter a galaxy appears, the more distant it is from us. It's remarkable to contemplate that looking out to great distances is also looking back into the past. When we look at a galaxy 50 million light years away, we see it as it was 50 million years ago. Your telescope is a sort of time machine! How cool is that? ■



Markarian's Chain (annotated) by Glen Sanner.



Markarian's Chain by Michael Borland.



M84/M86 Group by David Roemer.



Markarian's Chain by Glen Sanner.

It was Baseball

By Kathy Klump

SEASON in Cochise County



Fort Huachuca Nine of 1884. Standing, rear left, is Sergeant "Diamond" Emil H. Pauly, first base, Troop I, 4th Cavalry. Rear, third from left, Burlingame, rear right, Collins, center field. Kneeling on right, Johnson, third base. (Fort Huachuca Museum)

1. The Fort Huachuca Nine is the first known baseball team in Arizona to be photographed in their uniforms and equipment of the day. Taken in 1884, only a few players are identified. Standing in the rear, third from left, was a soldier named Burlingame; in the left rear corner stands Sergeant "Diamond" Emil H. Pauly of Troop I, 4th Cavalry, who played "first sack" in the far right stands Collins, "center gardener." Kneeling in front on the right, is Edward Johnson, listed as a civilian employee of the Fort contracted as blacksmith at \$100 monthly salary. He played "third sack."

2. Warren Ball Park in Bisbee was built in 1909, five years before Wrigley Field in Chicago. It is considered the oldest continuously used professional baseball park in the country. Nationally famous teams played November 7, 1913, when the New York Giants met the Chicago White Sox. During the game, the legendary Jim Thorpe hit the ball out of the park for a memorable home run. Hal Chase played that day, too. He was one of the players who would be axed in 1920 for fixing games in the "Black Sox" scandal. He later became manager for the Douglas Blues. Several players



banned during the scandal played “outlaw baseball” in Warren for the Frontier and Copper Leagues during the 1920s.

3. Central Copper Company built a baseball diamond at Dos Cabezas near the Mascot Mine about 1920. Teams would ride the Mascot & Western Railroad down the mountain to compete against the Willcox team or up the mountain to play at Dos Cabezas. The teams joined forces in 1922. By the opening game of the season in 1924, they each had enough players to have separate teams again.

4. Bowie’s softball team was pictured in the 1939 school yearbook. Team members were Hampton Eaton, Beto Guzman, Jack Edwards, Leo Mendez, Eddie LaFoe, Jack Spikes, Paul Gonzales, Junior Tuttle, Eldon Harmon, Bennie Saner, Luis Castaneda, Delbert Fousel, Harold Goodman, and Dick Pride. From the very first inning, Bowie boys romped Willcox in the last game of the season. By the fifth inning, the score was 19 to zero in favor of Bowie. Willcox, following the rule book, quit because Bowie had a lead of more than ten runs.

5. Ten years later, in 1948, the Willcox baseball team had greatly improved and won the Triple S Championship. Players standing are: John Kimzey, Harold George, Melvin Shilling, Don Bethel, Keith Seiler, Ben Meyers, Kenneth Wilson, Richard Cox, and Berl Byrd. Kneeling in front are Nasario Bedolla, Coach Frank Jordan, and Albert Ward.

6. Beatrice Ethel Schuller graduated from Bisbee High School in 1949. She was recruited to play in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League the next year. During the 1950 season, she played for the Grand Rapid Chicks, the Springfield Sallies and the Chicago Colleens. In 1951, she decided to stay in Arizona and play fast pitch softball for the Bisbee

Copper Queens. In 2012, she was honored post-humously when the Bisbee High School Board named the high school softball field after her and her sister, Bisbee All-American Anne Mihelich Henry.

7. Baseball legend, “Cy” Williams was welcomed to Willcox by Rex Emrick, manager of the Chamber of Commerce in February 1967. He was honored as special guest at the Willcox Rotary Club dinner. “Cy” Williams was a former National League outfielder and home-run king. He played ball with the Chicago Cubs from 1912 to 1916, and the Philadelphia Phillies from 1916 to 1930. He was the first player ever to hit 200 home runs in the National League, tying Babe Ruth in 1923. He and his wife stayed part of the time in Willcox as guests of Ernest and Polly Browning. They traveled to Arizona each year from their home in Three Lakes, Wisconsin, where a park was dedicated to him as “Cy” Williams Park and where he was active in his second career as an architect. ■





Turning kids into kings of the kitchen

Chef Captain Heather Baze mixes spices and herb into a skillet while preparing Shepherd's Pie which is being filmed on Zoom.

By R.J. Cohn

Toss in 80 kids from a Zoom-call cooking class, add a start-up \$65,000 Legacy Foundation of Southeast Arizona grant, a spoonful of encouragement, easy-to-follow recipes and ingredients from the Salvation Army Sierra Vista Corps, stir well and voila: You have a recipe for one of the most successful children's culinary programs in all of Arizona.

A novel idea that began during the peak of Covid for about 20 children to learn how to prepare and cook a meal has more than quadrupled in seven years since its inception. It has not only given kids from 5 to 17 years of age basic cooking skills; it also has given them confidence in a kitchen and self-esteem by providing them with the ability to cook for themselves and their families.

Thanks to Salvation Army Capt. Heather Baze and a host of volunteers, the kids have whipped up everything from egg

casseroles and garlic-parmesan-broccoli entrees to tuna burgers, ham-and-cheese hot pockets, a St. Patrick's Day Shepherd's Pie, along with Thousand Island and honey mustard dressings from scratch.

"They absolutely love this," said Baze. "We didn't know what to expect when we started, but the program has exceeded our expectations. These kids are cooking a whole meal on their own. How cool is that?"

When then-lieutenants Ty and Heather Baze assumed their new leadership roles with the Sierra Vista Corps several years ago, the Legacy Foundation grant was already in place.

But so was Covid, which meant the majority of activities were shuttered, including gathering more than 20 children together in the Salvation Army's kitchen to learn how to cook.

But that didn't stop Baze from getting the culinary program off the ground. She and her volunteers turned to Zoom, a communications platform used for virtual video that allows

screen-sharing, live chats and other collaborative options.

"Each child who wanted to participate was given a tote of their own kitchen utensils and a tablet that invited them to join Zoom," said Baze. "We used our own recipes, showed them how to prep and cook every step of the way at home while cameras videotaped us, which they watched on Zoom."

It not only worked out well; it became a hit, and the word began to spread.

"Without the Legacy grant, this program wouldn't have been possible," said Baze. "There was about \$55,000 still left in the grant, and we were able to purchase food for children participating in the program. It became a very positive and successful experience for everyone."

When social distancing was finally relaxed, Baze said it made more sense to continue the culinary program through Zoom than in-person.

"It would have been way too crowded in here with over 80 children prepping and then cooking on a stove," she said. "We would have had to have had groups of 10 kids at a time, which would have been difficult to coordinate. Zoom has made this really easy for everyone. The kids get to cook in their own homes twice a month, and their meals are ready for their families to eat. It's absolutely great."

Though the food costs are on the rise, the Sierra Vista Corps still purchases all the food supplies for the kids as well as receiving various Legacy Foundation grants it applies for. Baze said it costs between \$300-\$500 for food to supply each class two times per month. Every meal the kids make is enough to feed a family of five.

"Zoom has been a great learning tool for the kids," said Baze. "They get to watch us go through a recipe in their own kitchens and also get to see how they cook on YouTube. They're really an amazing group of kids. Many who started with the program say they now want to become chefs. That's a gratifying thing to hear when you start something like this from scratch." ■



Salvation Army Corps' Kids Culinary Program Coordinator Sheryl Umphrey and volunteer Tonie Estehan communicate through Zoom to kids participating in the Salvation Army's online program.



Salvation Army Sierra Vista Corps Captain Heather Baze explains how Shepherd's Pie will be made to kids in the corps' culinary program through Zoom. PHOTOS BY MONIQUE VARGAS



Kids participating in Salvation Army Sierra Vista Corps' culinary program watch on a screen via Zoom how to prep and cook family meals.

Benson's Endeavor anchors San

By R.J. Cohn

If there is an art gallery that is more like an anchor to its community, as well as to the entire region, you would be hard-pressed to find one as unassuming as Benson's Endeavor Gallery.

With more than 200 members, two major shows a year, programs and events supporting local artists — plus scholarships for graduating high school seniors continuing their art studies — Endeavor Gallery is the little engine-that-could, and a gallery you wish you had in your community.

What began as the Benson Arts Commission in 2007 has since evolved into the nonprofit San Pedro River Arts Council (SPRAC) run by a 13-member board of directors with Endeavor serving as SPRAC's art gallery.

"We love our gallery," said SPRAC's new president Veda Moline. "It's our happy place, and this community really supports it in a big way. We feel blessed to have the kind of support we have, not



Endeavor Gallery is easily recognizable by its large western-themed mural encompassing the front entrance.



Veda Moline works patiently on one of her Paintings at Endeavor Art Gallery on January 13, 2025. PHOTOS BY MONIQUE VARGAS

Endeavor Gallery

in San Pedro Valley's art community



Past Endeavor Gallery President Linda Stacy (featured on the left) poses for a photo while visiting the gallery with current Gallery President Veda Moline (Featured on the right)

just from the San Pedro Valley, but all from all over southeastern Arizona.”

Endeavor is more than just a happy place.

It's one of the most engaging galleries in the region that has not only supported art education in the Benson schools; it has sparked a celebration of the arts in the heart of the San Pedro Valley, fostering the growth and development of local artists while engaging the community in art shows and its gallery.

The non-juried gallery on 4th Street, which features a 40-foot-long painted mural of a cattle roundup fronting the building, has become the centerpiece of art in Benson. It might not boast bragging rights as an art mecca, but for a city founded as a rail terminal in the 1880s, SPRAC is pushing the envelope toward developing a vibrant, flourishing arts community.

“We try to get the community

involved in art, letting them know that Endeavor is here,” said SPRAC membership chair and former president Linda Stacey. “Cochise County has so many talented artists and photographers, something we weren't aware of until we opened the gallery.”

And now they're coming to Endeavor to showcase their work in multiple mediums like painting, photography, gourd and jewelry-making, woodworking and just about anything that has an artistic bent.

Because of Endeavor's policy of artists rotating three pieces of art every four months, the gallery always has a fresh display of art every quarter. That policy — along with the quality of the art itself — has paid off dividends and sales for Endeavor.

“Sales-wise, we're doing really well,” said Moline. “People come in, like what they see, and leave with at least one piece of art from our members. Visiting snowbirds have been a great support to the gallery as well as our locals.”

While SPRAC's judged Fine Arts Show and Sale in March at the Cochise College Benson Center is its biggest annual event that last year drew about 200 entries — including 80 student entries from primary, middle and high school students — the three-week exhibit with entry fees going to student art scholarships, is just one of many that keep the organization and Endeavor in the community spotlight.

Along with the gallery's 'No Fear Painting Workshops' and an 'Artists Share Program' — where member artists demonstrate their artistic process and materials in their work — SPRAC also

hosts a judged November photography exhibit that last year displayed about 80 entries. It's what drew Mescal photographer Monique Vargas to join SPRAC. Vargas said she overcame 'imposter syndrome,' a condition of perceived self-doubt in one's abilities, after joining the organization.

“I didn't think my work was good enough compared to other photographers, and I felt this might be a positive outlet,” she said.

Shortly after she joined, she entered the photography exhibit and won two ribbons.

“I'm way over that syndrome now,” she said.

Members don't have to be accomplished artists to join, said Moline, who only drew in pencil before she retired, then began painting and has sold several pieces after joining SPRAC.

“A few members do make a living from their art, but most are dedicated to it,” she said. “We're a diverse group of artists. It's what makes SPRAC and Endeavor click.”

What also makes SPRAC click is its dedication to providing scholarships to any graduating Cochise County high school student planning to study an art program in college. Now in its third year, a \$2,000 scholarship was awarded to a graduating student in 2024.

“We have an abundance of scholarship funds at the moment so we're able to provide several scholarships this year instead of just one,” said Stacey. “We're hoping deserving students will take advantage of this opportunity.”

Applications can be accessed by going to <https://sprarts.org/>. ■

Cochise College

opens a pathway toward new careers

By R.J. Cohn

Stepping on a college campus with a total enrollment of 9,400 students like Cochise College can be an intimidating experience, especially for those fresh out of high school.

But the community college that started in 1964 has found a way to take the scariness out of that big academic step for first-time and nontraditional students, thanks to its fourth annual Cochise College Expo held March 11.

It not only made the process a softer landing; it gave those in the workforce wanting to explore other educational opportunities to see just what the college had to offer.

And what they saw at this year's Expo was more than 50 academic and certificate programs available for different skill sets from nursing, law enforcement, and the automotive industry to computer technology and biology.

"It's a way to get the community to come on campus to experience everything Cochise College has available," said Robyn Martin, assistant dean of marketing, communications and advancement. "Before Expo, people came mainly just for an event. But something like this gives them a chance to see the range of programs at their fingertips and talk one-on-one with instructors to see if it's a good fit for them."

Over the years, the college has always targeted non-traditional students — those already working — who are thinking about learning new or additional skills leading to a certificated degree.

Close to 400 students who are considering Cochise College attended this year's Expo.

"What makes it special is that it's not just an event where you grab a flyer and read about the college," said Martin. "It's more of an interactive open house with faculty present to answer questions people might have."

Tables representing more than 50 academic courses and programs filled up the college's community room, while counselors and staff held min-sessions on admissions, financial aid, scholarships, campus housing and dual-enrollment credits.

There was also a panel of current students that interacted face-to-face with prospective students on everything from curriculum to campus life.

"This really opened my eyes to what Cochise College is all about," said Lena Dahlquist, who is considering a nursing career after working in the restaurant industry for two years. "It made the whole process from enrollment to course of study understandable instead of confusing as I thought it might be."

Registration for summer and fall semesters started April 14, and many were applying for open enrollment during the Expo while others left with sheaths of information and application forms.

"This is a big event for us," said Martin. "We have the majority of our academic courses — Allied Health from the Downtown Campus and our Fort Huachuca Center — on display for people to learn about programs that can steer them toward careers, along with new course offerings people aren't aware of like viticulture, digital marketing certificates and bachelor degrees." ■



College Expo

“This is a big event for us, we have the majority of our academic courses on display for people to learn about programs that can steer them toward careers.”



PHOTOS BY MONIQUE VARGAS



**COCHISE
COLLEGE**

SULPHUR SPRINGS

CALENDAR *of* EVENTS

Visit the many festivals, historical sites, deserts, national parks, and mountains of southeastern Arizona on a scenic hike, a road trip, or a mountain climbing expedition to test your endurance.

MAY 15

Jeffrey Campbell Concert

St. Andrew Concert Series presents Jeffery Campbell, organist in a program of music by J.S. Bach, Louis Vierne, Whitlock and Susato on Friday, May 16, 2025, at 7 p.m. Jeffery Campbell is the Associate Music Director and Principal Organist of Saint Philip's in the Hills Episcopal Church in Tucson. The organ was built by the M.P. Möller Company of Hangers, MD in 1949 as their Opus 7867 for the First Baptist Church of Racine, WI and later moved to St. Andrew in 2008. The three manual and pedal instrument contains 30 ranks of over 1,750 speaking pipes making it the largest pipe organ in Cochise County. St. Andrew the Apostle Church is located at 800 Taylor Drive, Sierra Vista. There is no charge to attend this concert, a freewill offering will be accepted for the ongoing restoration of this historic instrument.

SIERRA VISTA

MAY 29

ReadAround

Beginning at 11 a.m. Avast ye Mateys! Join the Sierra Vista Woman's Club reading "On A Pirate Ship" and have yo-ho-ho time as pirates. Attending families attending this PreK event receive a free "The Slide" book, pirate hat, sash, & a bit of booty. Arr! Meet us at the Mall of Sierra Vista near Playland. Visit us on Facebook.

SIERRA VISTA

MAY 31

Scholarship Application

Are you a Cochise County resident currently pursuing or interested in pursuing higher education and seeking financial assistance? The University South Foundation 2025 scholarship application is currently open! These scholarships support students seeking advanced learning opportunities, including upper-division undergraduate, graduate, and

certificate programs. Various awards are available, including merit-based, need-based, military-affiliated, and field-specific scholarships. To be eligible, applicants must be residents of Cochise County, currently enrolled or planning to enroll in a higher education program and taking six or more units. The application deadline is May 31st at 4 p.m. Don't miss out on this opportunity to invest in your future. Apply today at www.usfaz.org/scholarships.

MAY 31

Mosaic 101

Cochise College, Downtown Campus

Step into a new art craft with a stained-glass mosaic steppingstone! You will create your own custom garden steppingstone in this all-day class. Basic mosaics will be discussed as well how to add ceramic pieces, beads, baubles, and personal findings to a project that will start the student on their path of mosaic creations. At the end of the class, you will go home with your own custom created garden stone! No supplies required. On

THE K PALACE THEATER provides traditional plays, murder mysteries, musicals and original plays as well as guest entertainers. We perform five shows per year with one all-children's production. The theater can seat 110 folks comfortably and a large stage with sophisticated audio-visual equipment. We have elegant and spacious restrooms, and offer select beers and wines, Pepsi products, water and popcorn before and during the show.

We extend an open invitation to all who are interested in performing on stage or working behind the scenes in costumes, props, sets, sound, video and lights, regardless of experience level. The cast and crew of our shows are very talented and work hard to make each show entertaining. It's fun. Come see us! www.thekpalacetheater.com 520-222-8711



BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

All children's show performing that classic tale of a man turned Beast who must win the love of a village girl with a heart as big as the sky.



A MUSICAL

SHOW DATES
June 5, 2025 @ 7pm
June 6, 2025 @ 7pm
June 7, 2025 @ 3pm

Doors open one hour before show time

TICKETS \$15
Purchase tickets at the door or online at www.thekpalacetheater.com



The K Palace
THEATER
290 S. Huachuca Blvd
Huachuca City, Az



Beauty And The Beast
June 5, 25
Director: Chris Forrest





520-222-8711 / totmarizona@gmail.com / www.thekpalacetheater.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

the easy to hard scale: easy. <https://registration.xendirect.com/cochise/search.cfm>. For more information call (520) 515-5492.

SIERRA VISTA

JUNE 2 to JUNE 6

Vacation Bible School

Village Meadows Church's 2025 Vacation Bible School (VBS) will take place at 1407 El Camino Real in Sierra Vista. VBS runs daily from 9 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.. All children ages 4 years old through 6th grade are invited! Our Magnified VBS will encourage kids to look closely at the details of God's amazing world and magnify — or proclaim — the greatness of God. They will learn that God made us, cares for us, loves us, forgives us, and is faithful to keep all His promises. Free snacks will be provided for every child who attends! To pre-register your kids online and access our 2025 parent packet, visit villagemeadowchurch.com.

SIERRA VISTA

JUNE 22

Casino Night

Just Kids, Inc. presents Casino Night! Whether a seasoned pro or a beginner, this event is perfect for everyone. Casino Night will be held from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Doc's Watering Hole, 1959 Frontage Road, Sierra Vista, Arizona. Participants will experience the exciting atmosphere, friendly competition, and the chance to win big while testing their luck at Blackjack, Poker, Craps and Roulette. Each guest will receive \$500 in chips to kick off their night of high-rolling fun. At the end of the evening, chips will be exchanged for raffle tickets for a chance to take home some fantastic prizes. Hors D'oeuvres are included with admission, and a cash bar will be available with table-side service. Admission cost is \$50 in advance, \$90 if you bring a friend; and \$60 per person at the event if tickets are still available. If you cannot attend, you can still buy tickets for three amazing Grand Raffles: \$5,000 gift certificate from Laser Cosmetic Services, Carlsbad Inn Beach Resort Grand Getaway, and a 50/50 Split the Jackpot! Just Kids, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit whose goal is to enrich the lives of children in Cochise County. For tickets, go to: <https://tinyurl.com/JKcasino2025>

SIERRA VISTA

JUNE 26

ReadAround

Beginning at 11 a.m. What does a caterpillar metamorph into? We will learn when we read "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" and make caterpillar headbands. Attending families receive a free "Beyond Bugs" book. Sponsored by the Sierra Vista Woman's Club. Get to know us on Facebook.

SIERRA VISTA

JUNE 28 to JUNE 29

Advanced Mosaics: Tree Earrings

Cochise College, Downtown Campus

Tree Earrings!? T'ings? Think of our mosaic steppingstones as stud earring for our house; then these are the dangly earrings for the yard! Advanced mosaic participants will get an 18-inch by 4-inch Go Board substrate prepped and ready to go to create beautiful garden art. No patterns required but will be offered if desired. Otherwise, bring your: precuts, opaque, painted-back, small tile, doodads, charms, mirror pieces and all the solid things that sparkle. You will receive mirror tile strips that are cut ready to go for your edges, the hardest part. This is great use of the opaque glass scraps we have. The second day you will grout



SOUTHWEST WINGS
BIRDING & NATURE
SUMMER FESTIVAL

34th Summer Festival
July 30-August 2, 2025
Our Main Event is ideal for seeing the iconic Elegant Trogon, local Chihuahuan Meadowlark & up to 12 hummingbird species!
Registration is OPEN!
SWINGS.ORG

SOUTHWEST WINGS
SAVE THE DATES!
Spring Fling Festival
May 6-9, 2026
The perfect time to enjoy more than 30 full-day or half-day field trips

Sierra Vista, Arizona... where the birds are!
The Hummingbird Capital of US
Photos by T. Branson

Keynote: Dr. Stephen Moss | Expertly-Guided Field Trips | Nature Expo | FREE Seminars

and create beaded tails from supplies provided. Wheeled nippers and regular glass tools. Prerequisite: Stained Glass Mosaics 101 and practice at home. <https://registration.xendirect.com/cochise/search.cfm>. For more information call (520) 515-5492.

SIERRA VISTA

JULY 11

Patriotic Pipes Concert

St. Andrew's Concert Series presents "Patriotic Pipes 3 - AMERICANA" on Friday, July 11, at 7 p.m. This program features the talents of several local Sierra Vista and Tucson musicians playing the historic 1949 M.P. Möller pipe organ, the largest pipe organ in Cochise County, and accompanied by piano, trumpets, saxophones, flute, strings and guitar. Featuring an audience Sing-A-Long and special musical recognition of our veterans and active-duty military. St. Andrew the Apostle Church is located at 800 Taylor Drive, Sierra Vista. There is no charge to attend this concert, a freewill offering will be accepted for the ongoing restoration of this historic instrument.

SIERRA VISTA

EVERY THURSDAY

Unity of the Huachucas

Meditation classes occur every Thursday from 1 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Unity of the Huachucas, 7487 Larkspur Lane, in Hereford. For more information anyone can go to www.unityofthehuachucas.org.

HEREFORD

UPCOMING EVENTS



MAY 10, JUNE 14, JULY 12

Paint Night

Every second Saturday at 6pm you can amaze yourself by painting your own masterpiece at Paint Night.

MAY 31

WAMM Festival

A Free family summer event! Enjoy live music, fun activities for kids, a free movie at the Ant Hill Drive-In Theater, and so much more! From 4pm to 7pm.

MAY 9, JUNE 13

Retro Rewind

Watch classic movies on the big screen. See if you can beat our trivia expert and win the month's prize. \$6 for admission and fresh popcorn. Second Friday of every month. Tarzan's Greatest Adventure (1959) shows May 9, 1pm. A Girl of the Limberlost (1934), shows June 13, 1pm.



JUNE 2 - JULY 11

Summer Programs

7 weeks of programs your child can attend all summer! We will have something every single day and offer classes for all ages! Our programs cover art, crafts, technology, engineering, and science topics to give your child a full STEAM experience.

JUNE 2 - 13

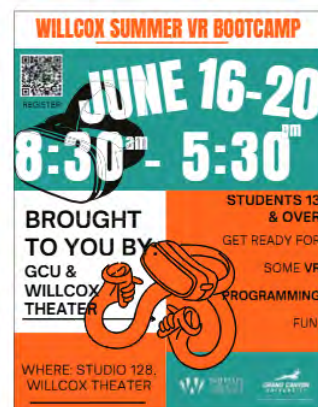
Engineering and Technology Institute

Students will experience nine different disciplines, jobs and companies, complete with site visits, projects, and challenges. They learn about the careers and opportunities available in engineering and technology in Cochise County.

JUNE 16 - 20

Willcox Summer VR Bootcamp

Brought to you by Grand Canyon University and Willcox Theater and Arts. Students ages 13 and over, get ready for some VR programming fun! Program your own game in just one week!



ARIZONA SCIENCE CENTER PROGRAMS



JUNE 23 - 27

Wicked Wilderness

Embark on a venomous adventure! Wicked Wilderness camp will allow future scientists to uncover how poison works, where it can be found in nature, how to detect it, and more!



JULY 7 - 11

Sky-High Science

Future aviators will discover what it takes to soar across the sky. From planes and helicopters to hot air balloons and blimps, campers will explore the engineering behind these flying wonders.

For a complete schedule of upcoming shows, events, workshops, art classes, and programs, and for tickets and registration, check willcoxtheater.com, 520-766-3335 or follow us at WillcoxTheaterandArts on Facebook.

Symphony celebrates season 31

AMERICAN ADVENTURES

The Sierra Vista Symphony introduces its 31st Season – American Adventures – with three concerts: October 18, 2025, Mysterious Mountain featuring Alexander Lipay on flute, and other pieces to include Mussorgsky/Rimsky-Korsakov's Night on Bald Mountain and Hovhannes' Symphony No. 2, Mysterious Mountain.; January 10, 2026, Go West! featuring Concerto Competition winner and the Cochise County Youth Orchestra. Other pieces to include Wagner's Tannhauser Overture and John Williams' the Cowboy Overture; and April 11, 2026, Canyon Reflections featuring Kiril Laskarov performing the Tchaikovsky violin concerto, and other pieces to include Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C minor

and Flurry's Canyon Reflections.

All performances will be held at Klein Center for the Performing Arts (Buena High School) beginning at 7 p.m. A pre-concert lecture will be held at 6 p.m. We welcome the direction of Artistic Director and Conductor Maestro Toru Tagawa.

Please also join us for the annual Concert in the Park on June 12 at 6:30 p.m. This is a wonderful opportunity for community members to gather and enjoy a free concert at the Veterans' Memorial Park band shell. Bring your lawn chair and enjoy the beautiful sounds performed.

Keep watching for all the events offered by the Sierra Vista Symphony

Orchestra and enjoy wonderful music. Maestro Tagawa incorporates a variety of music styles with the goal of pleasing everyone. Your support in person and financially is greatly appreciated. For Membership information and other ways to support, contact the office or visit our website.

Tickets for these outstanding concerts and events are available at Eventbrite.com and at Ace Hardware, Safeway, Dillard's, Sky Islands Regional Partnership (formerly Chamber of Commerce), and the Sierra Vista Symphony Association office at 21 E. Wilcox Dr., Sierra Vista. For more information look for us on Facebook, call (520) 458-5189 or visit sierravistasymphony.org. ■

ADOBE STOCK PHOTOS BY ELIJAH



The pan's the

By Chef Chris
ClownChef@Yahoo.com

thing

Often when I travel to visit friends they hope that I will cook something for them. I am more than happy to oblige, of course, but what I make depends greatly on the contents of their kitchen. Some friends are susceptible to every food trend and run out to get the latest darling of the food fad world. Others do so little cooking that I'm lucky to pull off a decent pasta dish.

As a recovering New Yorker (minuscule kitchens), and one who moves with some regularity, I don't have quite as much kitchen gear as you might think. There are certain things that have many uses and are definitely worth the space and weight. Others, when the time comes to move I take a hard look and have to accept that I haven't made, say, zoodles (a.k.a. used the spiralizer) in ages and off it goes to the thrift store — a great place to shop for kitchen items for this very reason!

While it's possible to live without a bundt pan, I love the ease of baking a

cake, making a simple drizzle and filling the middle with fruit. It's both special and simple, which is a great combo. But! They have lots more uses than you might realize, and I'm not just talking jello mold! Check out my suggestions and definitely make the spaghetti bundt. I promise you'll thank me.

The pan I go to most often is my half and quarter "sheet" pans. I use them as baking sheets for cookies, for roasting veggies, and for free-form loaves, as well as ye olde sheet cake. The quarter sized pans work in my toaster oven, which has an "air roast" feature that mimics convection, and turns out beautifully cooked broccoli with just the right amount of char.

Then we have the muffin tin. I love them for making mini-individual versions of favorites, which are great for meal-prepping, as well as potlucks and party snacks. In particular, I like to make mini quiches to keep in the freezer. And although there is no such thing as

leftover mac 'n cheese, you could theoretically divide it among muffin cups and top with some Parmesan and heat up for another night.

Although cornbread tastes best when made in a cast iron skillet, I am ever happy to have a few frozen cornbread muffins on hand for a soup or chili night, which can also come right out of the freezer when busier than usual.

I suppose we might say that these are my "desert island" pans of choice, but of course we know that's just a notion. Who could cook on a desert island...unless we take our solar oven with us as well.

OTHER USES FOR BUNDT PAN

Scallion & Fontina Pull-Apart

Use crescent dough in a tube and intersperse with chopped scallions and shredded Fontina cheese.

Mediterranean Monkey Bread with Marinara Sauce

Use biscuit dough in a tube with fresh Italian herbs. Serve warm with a nice marinara sauce in the middle.

Cheese Log Bundt

For a big gathering you can make an extra fancy cheese log.

Party Time Meatloaf

Make a double recipe of meatloaf. The decorative shape makes it special and there's extra surface space for ketchup or your secret meatloaf sauce.

Decorative Ice Ring for Punch

Use edible flowers, mint, cucumber, and ginger in warmer months. During the holidays you can add citrus slices and cranberries.

Small Drink Cooler

Fill your bundt with a few cans of bottles and some ice for a small outdoor gathering.



SPAGHETTI PIE BUNDT

If you're feeling unloved or in need of some attention, make this! Everybody loves it, and it's as much fun to make as it is to present and eat. If cooking for 1 or 2 just halve the ingredients and make in a small baking dish - you'll still gobble it all up in a couple of days. Pop into the microwave until just warm again.

I used "mozzarella pearls" for mine, but you can simply dice up any fresh mozzarella you find. In place of pesto you can use fresh basil if you have a bumper crop. Be sure to add a salad so you don't feel guilty for eating 3 slices.

1 pound spaghetti	1½ cups milk
2 links Italian sausage	2 eggs
¼ cup pesto	8 oz. fresh mozzarella
½ cup Parmesan	4 scallions, chopped

Cook the spaghetti al dente - do not over cook!

Cook the sausage, letting it brown well and breaking into a crumble.

Butter a nonstick bundt pan well and preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Place the cooked spaghetti in a mixing bowl and toss with the pesto and Parmesan, letting cool slightly. Add the sausage and toss again. Lightly beat the eggs with the milk, then add to spaghetti and toss well to coat well.

Using tongs, grab some spaghetti and place in the bottom of the pan, twirling into little curling clumps that will look nice when inverted for serving. Fill pan half way, then dot with mozzarella evenly. Add remaining spaghetti mixture and bake for about 25 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool 10 minutes, then invert onto a cutting board, garnish with scallions, and serve.

MUFFIN CUP SHEPHERD'S PIE

Sometimes a fresh twist on an old favorite brightens up the weekly line-up. These also make dinner fun for the little ones, and they can help fill the cups. I made mine with lentils, but you could use ½ pound ground meat if you like. About 4 servings

1 pound Idaho potatoes
3 cloves garlic, chopped
2 Tbsp. butter
3 Tbsp. milk
¼ cup sour cream
1 Tbsp. oil
1 onion, chopped
½ cup lentils, cooked
3 Tbsp. tomato paste
Paprika for sprinkling

Bring a pot of salted water to boil with the potatoes. When potatoes are tender, drain and mash them with the butter, milk, and sour cream. Season with salt and taste. Mixture will be a little looser than regular mashed potatoes.

While the potatoes are cooking, preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Heat a large skillet and add the oil. Add the onions and sauté until golden, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic and cook another 30 seconds. Add the lentils, tomato paste, and a splash of water and stir together. Season with salt and pepper, then taste and adjust seasoning. Add ½ tsp. sugar if too "tomato-y" for you.

Place liners in 6 muffin cups. Divide lentil mixture between the cups, then top with the potatoes. Sprinkle lightly with paprika and bake for 15-20 minutes.



CINNAMON PECAN QUARTER SHEET CAKE

I love this little cake. It has a lovely lightness and tastes so much better than anything you pick up at the grocery store. It also freezes well. 8-12 servings

TOPPING:

½ cup sugar
½ cup brown sugar
1 cup flour
1 Tbsp. cinnamon
1 tsp baking powder
½ cup butter melted
1 tsp. vanilla
½ cup chopped pecans

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Prepare small sheet pan with oil or spray.

Mix together dry ingredients in a mixing bowl, then add butter and vanilla, and work together with a fork. Set aside.

CAKE:

½ cup butter, softened
¾ cup sugar
1 egg
1 tsp vanilla
1½ cups flour
2 tsp baking powder
Pinch salt
½ cup milk

In a mixing bowl, beat the butter, egg and vanilla until creamy and light. Add the dry ingredients and mix, then add milk and mix well. Pour into prepared pan, evening out batter with a spatula. Sprinkle the topping evenly over the top, then strew with pecans.

Bake about 30 minutes or until a toothpick comes out cleanly.

welcome

...TO THE NEW
SSVEC SOCIAL
MEDIA PAGES!

Our social media has moved!

That's right! In order to provide you with a more integrated experience, SSVEC Facebook and Instagram have relocated!

From energy tips and community events to youth programs and local stories, this is where we'll keep you plugged in to what matters most. Help us spread the word by sharing this ad with your friends, family, and neighbors.

Join us on   **@TheSSVEC**

**The power of community
starts with a connection.**

 **Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.**
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