

SSVEC

Currents

LOCAL STORIES ABOUT LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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Sandhill cranes return
to loaf after foraging

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SSVEC Currents

JANUARY | FEBRUARY 2026

Volume 5, No. 1

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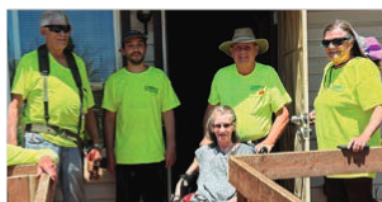
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ON THE COVER

Sandhill Cranes are the highlight of the Wings Over Willcox festival, set to take place January 15 to January 18. Find out more on Page 16 of this edition!

COVER PHOTO BY HOMER HANSEN



Jason Bowling, CEO
Sulphur Springs Valley
Electric Cooperative

A bright start to

2026

New year, new goals, same commitment to you

As we turn the page to a brand-new year, many of us are dusting off our New Year's resolutions. Maybe you're aiming to spend more time outdoors, pick up a new hobby, or finally tackle that project you've been putting off. At Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative, we're right there with you, energized, optimistic, and ready to make 2026 our best year yet.

But unlike that treadmill so many of us optimistically buy in January, our commitment never gathers dust. Your co-op begins this year the same way we begin every year: focused on providing safe, reliable, and affordable energy to the communities we proudly serve.

A FRESH START (WITH SOME FAMILIAR VALUES)

Every new year brings an opportunity to reaffirm what matters most. For SSVEC, that's always been our members. Whether the calendar reads January 1 or July 31, our mission doesn't change. And in 2026, we're doubling down on reliability, strengthening our systems, supporting our workforce, and continuing to invest in a resilient electric grid that meets the needs of today and tomorrow.

That might not sound as glamorous as learning to salsa dance or climb a mountain, but trust us, it takes stamina too.

WRAPPING UP A BIG MILESTONE

This past year, we also reached a major conclusion: our rate case is complete, and new rates are now in effect. Rate cases aren't exactly the most exciting topic at the dinner, but they're critically important for ensuring we can continue delivering the reliable service our communities count on.

We approached this process with the same principles we bring to everything we do, fairness, transparency, and a deep respect for the members we serve. The new rates help ensure that SSVEC can keep pace with rising costs, maintain essential infrastructure, and prepare for the growing energy needs of our region.

Most importantly, they help us uphold our longstanding commitment to affordability. We remain one of the lowest-cost electric providers in Arizona, a point of pride we carry into 2026.

LOOKING AHEAD: A YEAR FULL OF PROMISE

If you're a resolution-maker, we're cheering you on. And if you're not, that's fine too, you're already part of a cooperative that's working every day to make life a little easier, a little brighter, and a lot more reliable.

This year, you'll see SSVEC continuing to:

- Strengthen electric reliability across our system
- Support local schools, nonprofits, and community programs
- Invest in technology and infrastructure that keeps power flowing
- Put members first, no matter what challenges come our way

We may not be able to help you drink more water or finally organize the garage, but we can promise that your co-op will continue working hard to serve you, and to make 2026 a shining year for all the communities we call home.

From all of us at SSVEC: Happy New Year! Here's to fresh starts, renewed energy, and another great year of powering the places where life happens.

Sincerely,
Jason Bowling, CEO, SSVEC

*Jason Bowling is
the Chief Executive
Officer at Sulphur
Springs Valley Electric
Cooperative (SSVEC).
He can be reached at
jbowling@ssvec.com.*

SSVEC Foundation taps 14 for Washington Youth Tour

Students representing nine high schools in the Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) service territory were awarded all-expense paid trips to the nation's capital at a banquet Nov. 5 in Benson. The 43rd annual Washington Youth Tour, sponsored by the SSVEC Foundation, is scheduled for June 2026. Pictured, seated, from the left are, Brycen Thompson, San Simon High School; Sophia Wilhelmsen, Buena High school; Maria Higginbotham, St. David High School; Sariah Davis, St. David High School; Savannah Medlock, Berean Academy; Emily Perez, Buena High School. Standing, from the left, SSVEC Board Director John Shaver; Jimmy Arellano, Tombstone High School; Tyler Kuchar, Tombstone High School; Jennifer Trujillo, Willcox High School; Isabell Gavin, Veritas Christian Academy; Rori Prentice, Benson High School; Danielle VandeWeg, Veritas Christian Academy; Jolene Larson, Valley Union High School; Carlos Aponte Narteni, Berean Academy; and SSVEC Board President Randy Redmond.



Fourteen area high school students were awarded all-expense-paid trips to the nation's capital at the 43rd annual Washington Youth Tour dinner and awards ceremony, sponsored by Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) Foundation on Wednesday, Nov. 5th, in Benson.

Students from throughout the SSVEC service territory participated in the competition which began in August with presentations about the program at local high schools. Finalists and their family-members gathered in the multi-purpose building on the Benson unified school campus for the dinner and awards ceremony.

"The Foundation is a catalyst for growth and innovation, and it is rooted in our purpose of 'relationships,'" said Daniel Wilson, Senior Vice President of Member and Corporate Services and Executive Director of the SSVEC Foundation and Trust. "The character of the students participating this year was again impressive, and the Foundation is proud to provide this experience for all of those who qualified as finalists."

Students and parents erupted with cheers when Kristin Gray, SSVEC Community Relations Manager, announced that, for the second consecutive year, the Foundation will fund the six-day tour of the nation's capital for all the qualifiers. In previous years, between six and nine finalists were awarded the all-expense paid trip, with the remaining finalists offered the opportunity to take the tour at significantly lower cost.

"It's wonderful that this year the SSVEC Foundation was able to provide this opportunity for all of the finalists," Gray said. "Investing in area youth for this educational experience is completely consistent with the mission of the SSVEC Foundation."

Qualifying students entering their junior year registered top scores on a written test, followed by an essay, at the outset of the competition to earn distinction as a finalist. Students representing nine high schools across the SSVEC service territory were invited to the final day of the competition.

Beginning in the early afternoon on Nov. 5th, the qualifiers had the opportunity to meet with past Tour chaperones to learn more about the trip. Students also completed a second test, prepared an

essay and participated in an interview with the 2026 chaperones and a panel of judges, prior to dinner and the awards ceremony.

Eleven of the 14 students also participated in an extemporaneous speech competition to seek nomination for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) Youth Leadership Council (YLC). The speeches were scored by another panel of judges, and three finalists were chosen to be considered for selection as the Arizona YLC Delegate during the upcoming tour.

The Washington Youth Tour is funded by the SSVEC Foundation. As a cooperative, SSVEC periodically returns money earned in excess of expenses to its members. When members move out of the area and leave no forwarding address, SSVEC transfers the unclaimed membership equity funds to the SSVEC Foundation.

"Unclaimed membership equity forms the lifeblood of the SSVEC Foundation and helps fuel the dreams of our youth by funding scholarships, the Youth Engineering and Science Fair, and what we are here for tonight, the Washington Youth Tour," Wilson said.

Students representing electric cooperatives from across the nation, including five other utilities in Arizona, will participate in the annual tour at the nation's capital in June 2026.

Past youth tour participant and Arizona Youth Leadership Council member, Elizabeth Frederick, spoke briefly at the ceremony. She will be representing the state as the YLC delegate at the NRECA national conference in Nashville, Tenn., in May 2026.

"Participating in the Washington Youth Tour and serving as the state delegate has had a profound impact on my life," Ms. Fredrick said.

Kate Cox, Media Coordinator at SSVEC, called forth each student to receive a certificate and Gray announced at the conclusion of the dinner that all 14 students had qualified for the all-expense paid trip.

SSVEC board President, Randy Redmond, and Director John Shaver also attended the event.

Meet Elizabeth Fredrick

A resilient leader on the rise

As a senior at Veritas Christian Community School, Elizabeth Fredrick embodies adaptability and enthusiasm. Daughter of Heidi and Brady Fredrick — a military chaplain — Elizabeth has navigated frequent moves across Indiana, Washington, Cuba, Texas, South Carolina, Germany, and Georgia, embracing the challenge of making new friends along the way.

With siblings Elias (15) and Elim (12), Elizabeth's journey reflects resilience and ambition.

"I love meeting new people," she says, turning relocations into opportunities for growth.

Her leadership shines through her role as the Arizona representative for the National Rural Electric Cooperative (NRECA) Youth Leadership Council.

She earned that distinction while taking part in the 2024 SSVEC Washington Youth Tour (WYT). While in Washington, D.C., Elizabeth was selected after delivering a standout extemporaneous speech; she was selected as the state delegate by

chaperones representing the six Arizona electric cooperatives participating in WYT.

Elizabeth recently returned to Washington D.C. and anticipates attending the NRECA conference in Nashville this May — where she will compete for the honor of presenting her speech at to the entire assembly numbering more than 1,000 cooperative representatives. The contest includes presenting a five- to seven-minute prepared speech about her WYT experience to a panel of judges.

Beyond academics, where she excels in debate and logic, Elizabeth aspires to become a physician assistant. A passionate volleyball court captain, she's not yet committed to a college but and remains open to possibilities.



Foundation awards first "jumbo" grant



Kristin Gray (left), Community Relations Manager at SSVEC, and Gail Farmer, president of the CANTER board of directors, celebrate a \$150,000 grant award from the SSVEC Foundation.

The Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) Foundation awarded 13 education grants totaling over \$450,000 during Phase 2 of its program, including a first-ever \$150,000 "jumbo" grant to CANTER (Cochise Area Network of Therapeutic Equestrian Resources). This funding will help CANTER build an indoor arena at its Sierra Vista facility, improving access for riders with disabilities during inclement weather.

Founded in 1993, CANTER uses PATH-certified instructors to provide therapeutic equestrian programs that build confidence, decision-making, and problem-solving skills.

"Wind can be a serious distraction for riders and horses," said Gail Farmer, CANTER board president. "An indoor arena will greatly enhance our ability to serve students."

SSVEC Foundation funds come primarily from unclaimed member equity payments and community donations.

"Consistent with cooperative principles, these funds are reinvested in education opportunities," said Randy Redmond, SSVEC Board President.

This is the second year the Foundation has allocated funds for education grants, which also support programs like the Youth Engineering and Science Fair, Washington Youth Tour, and scholarships.

Other recipients include Tombstone School District (\$8,349 for printing equipment), Willcox Theater and Arts (\$39,993 for technology and makerspace kits), Buena High School (\$10,000 for chemistry lab upgrades), Sonoita Elementary (\$40,000 for classroom furniture and technology), and several others for projects ranging from outdoor science centers to curriculum development.

"Supporting youth education is fundamental to improving quality of life," said Daniel Wilson, Executive Director of the SSVEC Foundation. "These investments will make a significant difference in opportunities for local students."

42nd annual Youth Engineering and Science (YES) Fair



educators from throughout the region will participate in this year's fair, continuing a long tradition of volunteer support. The SSVEC Foundation funds the event through unclaimed member equity and community donations, with additional contributions from local and national organizations that help encourage future scientists and engineers.

The YES Fair consistently draws entries from more than a dozen schools across the cooperative's service territory, and organizers expect another strong field in 2026. Students will compete in earth and space, plants and animals, human biology and health, technology and engineering, chemistry, and energy, with awards presented in each division.

The 2026 YES Fair promises another inspiring showcase of student talent, demonstrating how innovation continues to thrive in Southeast Arizona's classrooms—and how community support helps young people turn their ideas into achievement.

For more information about YES Fair, visit www.yesfair.com or contact yesfair@ssvec.com.

The 42nd annual Youth Engineering and Science (YES) Fair will return this spring, bringing together young innovators from across Cochise County and Santa Cruz County for a week celebrating creativity, curiosity, and hands-on discovery.

Sponsored by the Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) Foundation, the 2026 Fair will once again award \$30,000 to \$50,000 in prizes and scholarships to outstanding student scientists and the teachers who guide them.

Students in grades five through twelve will showcase their projects at a new location in Sierra Vista — 4251 Enterprise Way, February 23 to February 27, 2026. Exhibits will be placed early in the week, with judges interviewing students midweek about their research, projects, and scientific interests.

The Fair will then open to the public on Thursday, offering families and community members an opportunity to see the work of the region's young STEM leaders.

This year's competitors will vie for grand prizes that include all expense-paid trips to the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF), scheduled for May 2026 in Phoenix.

Category awards, division honors, and significant scholarship opportunities will also be presented at Friday evening's awards ceremony.

SSVEC representatives, community judges, and



Support Our Youth!
**JUDGE THE 2026 SSVEC FOUNDATION
YOUTH ENGINEERING & SCIENCE FAIR!**

Interested in positively impacting the youth in your community?
You can volunteer to judge the 2026 YES Fair!

Judging takes place February 25, 2026. We are looking for a variety of judges to review projects for 5th - 8th grade and 9th - 12th grade.

Visit YESFAIR.COM to learn more and register today!
ALL NEW VENUE! YES FAIR WILL BE HELD AT 4251 ENTERPRISE WAY, 85635.

No College Degree Needed!



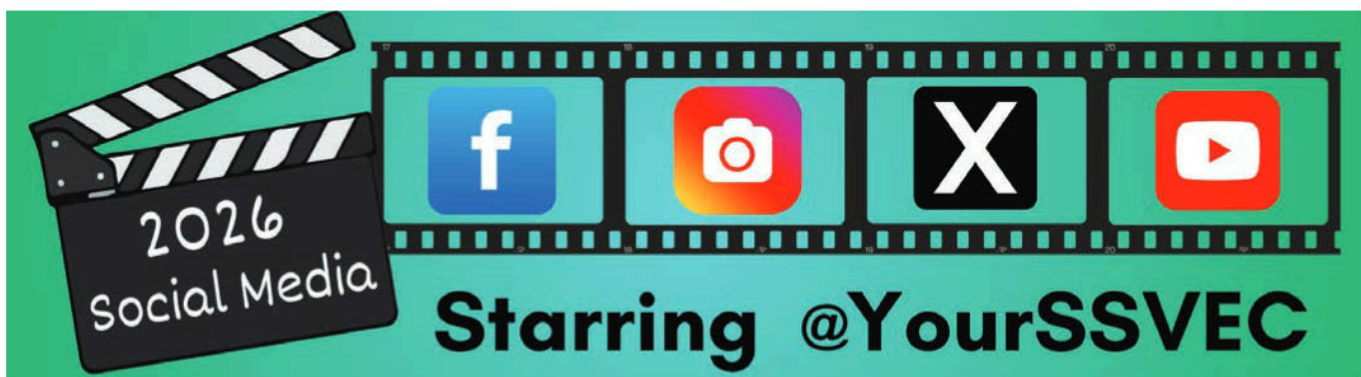
Honoring 25 years

Kathy Thatcher was honored at the October 15 meeting of the Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) directors meeting. Jason Bowling, Chief Executive Officer at SSVEC, presented Ms. Thatcher with a plaque recognizing her 25 years of membership in the America's Electric Cooperatives political action committee. Founded in 1966, America's Electric Cooperatives PAC (formerly ACRE®) is the federal political action committee of the nation's more than 900 electric co-ops. NRECA's PAC supports political candidates who will speak for and protect the interests of electric co-ops and their consumer-owners.

Irrigators' Luncheon

Irrigators, ranchers, and farmers gathered December 2, 2025 at the Elks Lodge in Willcox for a lunch celebrating their 87 years of support for the Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC).

In 1938, agriculture leaders in the McNeal area organized the effort to form the Cooperative. By 1940, electricity was flowing across 138 miles of line serving 266 homes and businesses. Today, the SSVEC service territory serves more than 65,000 meters throughout a service territory measuring more than 4,700 square miles.



Co-op CONNECTION

Notice of Rate Update

Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative
Docket: E-01575A-24-0246 | Decision No. 81586

On November 08, 2024, Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative ("SSVEC") filed a Rate Application with the Arizona Corporation Commission ("Commission"). At the Open Meeting held December 03, 2025, the Commission approved new rates and charges for SSVEC.

Per Decision No. 81586, SSVEC was authorized to implement the new rates beginning on January 1st, 2026. Residential members with average monthly energy consumption of 752 kWh will see an increase in their bill of \$10.15 per month from (\$114.90 to \$125.05), or 8.83%. The updated rates and charges will be effective for all services beginning January 1, 2026.

Certain charges and fees were increased, some of which are identified on page 2, in Section A. If members have questions about the new rates and charges, including those not referenced in Section A, they should be directed to SSVEC – during normal business hours (Monday-Thursday, 7 AM to 5 PM) – to one of SSVEC's office locations or by calling (520) 458-4691.

New rates applicable to Street Lights and Security Lights are not listed below. A full listing of the updated rates can be viewed at www.ssvec.org.

Updated Rates and Charges (Effective January 1, 2026)

RESIDENTIAL - STANDARD

Base Charge	\$ 30.00	Residential – Distributed Generation		Large Power—Standard	
All kWh	\$ 0.126300	Base Charge	\$ 35.00	Base Charge	\$ 55.00
Residential Auxiliary Service		All kWh	\$ 0.100900	Demand Charge, per kW	\$ 10.00
Base Charge	\$ 30.00	Exported kWh (Years 2026, 2027 & 2028)	\$ 0.030700	Energy Charge, per kWh	\$ 0.093810
First 3 Billing kW (3 kW minimum)	\$ 3.50	General Service		Large Power—Industrial	
Over 3 Billing kW	\$ 11.00	Base Charge	\$ 30.00	Base Charge	\$ 400.00
Energy Charge, per kWh	\$ 0.118300	First 3 Billing kW (3 kW minimum)	\$ 3.50	Demand Charge, per kW	\$ 8.00
Residential – Prepaid		Over 3 Billing kW	\$ 11.00	First 400 kWh/kW per Month	\$ 0.099100
Base Charge (per day)	\$ 0.986300	Energy Charge, per kWh	\$ 0.118300	Over 400 kWh/kW per Month	\$ 0.069100
Energy Charge, per kWh	\$ 0.126300	General Service—Time of Use			
Residential—Time of Use		Base Charge	\$ 32.00		
Base Charge	\$ 31.50	Metered kW	\$ 4.50		
On-Peak Energy Charge, Per kWh	\$ 0.229510	Billed On-Peak kW	\$ 18.50		
Off-Peak Energy Charge, per kWh	\$ 0.092880	Energy Charge, per kWh	\$ 0.059392		

IRRIGATION - STANDARD

Base Charge	\$ 35.00	Irrigation—2X Weekly Control		Unmetered	
April – October		Base Charge	\$ 35.00	Base Charge	\$ 35.50
Demand Charge, per kW	\$ 9.00	Override kW	\$ 20.00	Energy Charge, per kWh	\$ 0.102200
Energy Charge, per kWh	\$ 0.096700	First 300 kWh/kW per Month	\$ 0.120300		
November – March		Over 300 kWh/kW per Month	\$ 0.090300		
First 300 kWh/kW per Month	\$ 0.122700	kWh Discount for Reaching Top Block	8.00 %		
Over 300 kWh/kW per Month	\$ 0.091700	Irrigation—1X Weekly Control			
Irrigation—Daily Control		Base Charge	\$ 35.00		
Base Charge	\$ 35.00	Override kW	\$ 20.00		
Override kW	\$ 20.00	First 300 kWh/kW per Month	\$ 0.120300		
First 300 kWh/kW per Month	\$ 0.120300	Over 300 kWh/kW per Month	\$ 0.090300		
Over 300 kWh/kW per Month	\$ 0.090300	kWh Discount for Reaching Top Block	5.00 %		
kWh Discount for Reaching Top Block	18.00 %				



A) Tariff Approvals

SSVEC's fully updated Standard Offer Tariff can be found at ssvec.org. Revisions to the Standard Offer Tariff include, but are not limited to, the following:

- 1) New Time of Use hours of 2 PM to 8 PM.
- 2) New energy-only street lighting service rates (Schedule S).
- 3) Increase in the demand charge for Residential Auxiliary Service from \$10.00 to \$11.00 for members using more than 3kW.
- 4) Modification to the discount applied to eligible accounts under Rate CBW and Rate CD.
- 5) Discontinuation of the following rate schedules: Optional Irrigation Load Factor (Standard Rate I-L), Interruptible Service (Schedule CD Large) and Large Power Service-Time of Use (Schedule PT).
- 6) Increase the Field Visit Fee from \$50 to \$75.
- 7) Increase the Service Connection Callback Fee from \$50 to \$75.
- 8) Increase the Service Call After Regular Business Hours Fee from \$100 to \$150.
- 9) Increase the Meter Reread Fee from \$50 to \$75.
- 10) Increase the Non-Payment Collection Fee-Regular Business Hours from \$60 to \$75.

C) Distributed Generation Energy Export Rate

1) The Distributed Generation Export Energy ("DGEE") Rate is set at \$0.0307000 per kWh from the date of the decision in this docket until the third anniversary of the decision in this docket. Thereafter, the DGEE Rate will be established annually by order of the Commission. Ninety days prior to the third anniversary of the effective date of the decision in this docket, SSVEC will file an application with the Commission to establish an updated DGEE Rate using the Resource Comparison Proxy ("RCP") methodology; provided, however, in no event will the DGEE Rate be less than the Annual Average Avoided Cost calculated in accordance with SSVEC's frozen NM-1 Tariff.

2) The DGEE Rate applies to all classes of Distributed Generation ("DG") members. A DG member that connects to SSVEC's system prior to the effective date of a decision in this docket will receive a 10-year lock period on the DGEE Rate in effect at the time the member completes interconnection with SSVEC's system. A DG member that connects to SSVEC's system after the effective date of a decision in this docket shall receive the DGEE Rate in effect at the time of interconnection with no 10-year lock period.

3) SSVEC is eliminating the existing \$2.70 meter fee for members on Schedule DG.

B) Net Metering

1) Net Metering for all non-residential members has been frozen as of the date of the Commission's decision (12-10-2025).

2) For non-residential members with an accepted SunWatts Incentive/Interconnection application prior to the effective date of a decision, Net Metering will be available until the earlier of (i) 20 years from the system installation date of the Net Metering facility; or (ii) November 17, 2037 (the "Grandfathering Period"). The Grandfathering Period is limited to the original installation site and original equipment. Once the Grandfathering Period ends, the member will be transferred to the appropriate tariff.

3) Members that interconnect after the effective date of a decision, or for which the Net Metering tariff has automatically rescinded, will receive the DGEE Rate (as hereinafter defined) going forward with no lock period.

D) Interconnection Requirements

SSVEC's updated Interconnection Requirements include updated requirements and fees.

1) 20kW or Less - Prior to installation of member generating facilities, customers shall submit a DG interconnection application to SSVEC along with a \$150.00 Processing Fee. SSVEC will review and provide written approval. Application forms may be found on SSVEC's website: www.ssvec.org. Pre-application reports are not necessary for systems 20kW and smaller if the system meets the screen requirements per AAC R14-2-2615.

2) 20kW to 2MW - Prior to installation of member generating facilities, members shall submit a DG interconnection application to SSVEC along with a \$250.00 Processing Fee. SSVEC will review and provide written approval. Application forms may be found on SSVEC's website: www.ssvec.org. Applicants requesting a pre-application report must submit the DG interconnection application along with a \$125.00 Data Review Fee. This fee is in addition to the Design Review Fee.



Chiricahua secures grant to ensure **Health for All**

The Chiricahua Health Foundation recently announced receipt of a \$250,000 award from the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), a general agency of the United Methodist Church. This new funding will support Chiricahua Community Health Centers as they continue to deliver on their vision of "Health for All" in the borderlands of southern Arizona.

A commitment to Health for All creates financial stress as the burden of uncompensated care increases. Between 2019 and 2024 the number of Chiricahua patients that had no insurance increased 208 percent, including children, up 219 percent.

In 2024, Chiricahua cared for 35,829 individuals including 8,582 without health insurance. Funding from this new grant will be used to care for those without insurance or the ability to pay, as well as for program support lost due to federal funding changes.

As the largest provider of primary care in Cochise County, with a mandate to see anyone regardless of ability to pay,

Chiricahua maintains a culturally inclusive and diverse workforce that is already positioned through the catchment area and is ready to take on new and existing patients.

"At Chiricahua, Health for All is more than a slogan, it's a promise," said Chiricahua Health Foundation executive director Dennis Walto. "This support from UMCOR enables Chiricahua to say, 'You are welcome here...' to those who may have lost insurance coverage or find themselves unable to afford insurance due to the changes in the Affordable Care Act.

"We are honored and humbled to receive this generous grant and look forward to maintaining an open-door policy where all are welcome."

Roland Ferenandes, GBGM's General Secretary added, "We are proud to support Chiricahua and look forward to having a continued, positive impact in this under-resourced, rural, and border community for years to come." ■



“We are honored and humbled to receive this generous grant and look forward to maintaining an open-door policy where all are welcome.”



Pearce teacher honored

as Arizona Rural Teacher of the Year

By Shar Porier

Patricia Messner, Language Arts teacher at Pearce Elementary School, was stunned to learn she'd been nominated for Arizona Rural Teacher of the Year. "I thought it was a joke," she said. After submitting essays on her teaching philosophy, Messner became one of eight statewide Teachers of Distinction and attended the awards banquet in Phoenix. "Just having that label was amazing," she recalled.

To her surprise, Messner won the top honor. The Arizona Rural Schools Association praised her rapport with students and ability to create a classroom where they grow as communicators, writers, and leaders. Cochise County School Superintendent Jacquie Clay added that Messner tutors after school, checks on students even when ill, and fosters critical thinking.

Messner's approach blends creativity and empowerment. "When your vocabulary base is larger, your writing is richer,"

she said. She incorporates outdoor learning, taking students to Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area to observe sandhill cranes and write poetry inspired by nature. She's seeking a grant for binoculars to enhance these experiences.

Art also plays a role in her lessons—students craft projects from recycled materials, such as bird nests and cranes, to deepen their connection to the world. "It expands their creativity," Messner said.

Her ultimate goal: helping students find their voices. "If you can think it, you can write it; if you can write it, you can speak it." Winning the award, she insists, is a shared achievement. "It's our award—this school, these students, and this town—they're my heart." ■

ABOVE: Pearce Elementary School Language Arts teacher Patricia Messner received the 2025 Rural Teacher of the Year award from the Arizona Rural Schools Association in September.

Ramping it up

Nonprofit builds wheelchair ramps for Cochise County's residents

By R.J. Cohn

A dedicated team of volunteers — from seasoned carpenters to first-timers — are transforming lives in Cochise County by building wheelchair ramps for low-income disabled residents at no cost. For many, these ramps mean more than accessibility; they offer freedom and dignity after years of isolation.

“The need in Cochise County is absolutely huge,” says Dale O’Neil, Operations Manager for Servants at Work Southwest (SAWS), a nonprofit affiliated with a national foundation that began its mission in 2003. Since launching locally in 2019, SAWS has built 42 ramps, with more underway. Rising costs — from \$1,000 to \$2,200 per ramp — make funding a challenge, but the emotional payoff is priceless. “When recipients use the ramp for the first time, they’re so moved with joy they have no words,” O’Neil adds.

The process starts with an application or referral verifying financial need and permanent disability. After approval, a site survey ensures feasibility. Ramps are built to ADA standards using pressure-treated wood and assembled in a Sierra Vista shop before installation. While construction takes about a week, the full process spans two months.

SAWS relies on grants, donations, and volunteers—most with little building experience. “As long as people have willing hands and can hold an electric drill, they’ll be pros in no time,” says O’Neil. Volunteers pre-cut and fabricate ramps, securing them with 1,000 screws for durability.

Beyond the technical work, the mission exposes rural poverty. “Many manufactured homes sit on rough terrain, making exits dangerous,” notes volunteer Eric Anderson. Firefighters often assist residents who fall or need transport to appointments. The ramps restore independence and reduce these risks.

SAWS continues to expand across Cochise County — from Willcox to Patagonia — thanks to community support. “Without donations and volunteers, ramps don’t get built,” O’Neil emphasizes.

Visit www.sawssouthwest.org or call (844) 668-7297 to volunteer or apply for a ramp. ■





ABOVE: Volunteers, from left, Dale O'Neill, Gail Query, Bill Huston, Jesse Bennett, Steve O'Neill, Christopher Munioz, Shane West, Mario Tamez, James Harper) take a break from building ramps to pose for a group photo in the workshop. **TOP:** Volunteer Ramp builders proudly present finished ramp to local recipient. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Volunteers put materials into place for the ramp-building project.



Christin Thompson is pouring a High Heat patron's favorite on tap beer.



Taking customer service to a **higher level**

By R.J. Cohn

The last thing customers want is lousy service—yet that's what many are getting. Poor experiences drive away 96 percent of customers, costing businesses thousands, according to Forbes. The American Customer Satisfaction Index reports the steepest decline in satisfaction in 30 years.

Currents Magazine found Cochise County employees reversing that trend, reviving the art of customer care and earning loyal patrons. One standout is Christin Thompson, general manager of High Heat Sports Grill in Sierra Vista. Known for her five-star service and warm smile, Thompson treats every guest like family.

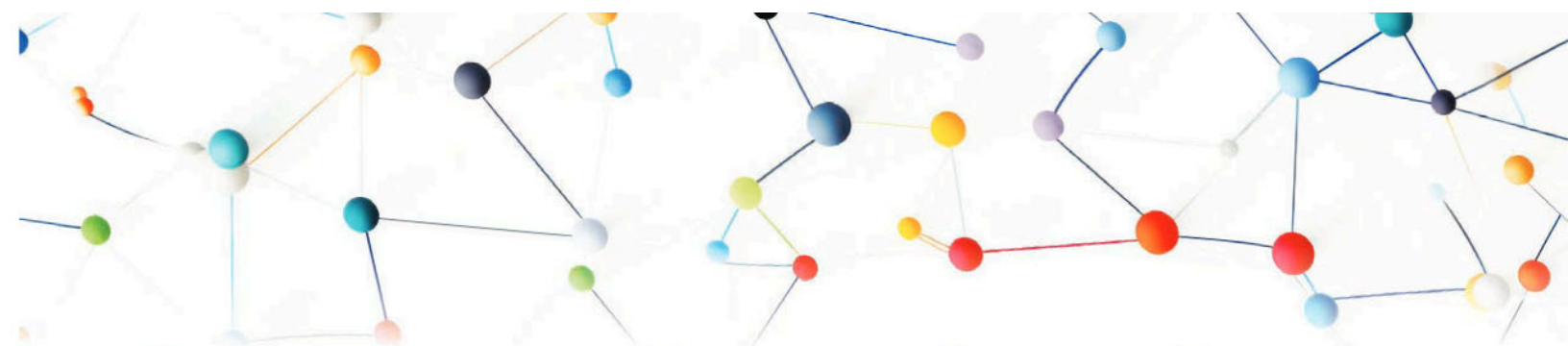
"I take pride in knowing everyone by name," she says. "It's not just my job—it's about caring for this community." Nicknamed "mom" for her nurturing approach, she connects with customers from the moment they sit down.

Patrons notice. "The food's great, but I come here for how she acknowledges me," says Alan Simpson. "Her genuine warmth is rare."

Co-workers agree. "Her drive to make customers feel at home is unmatched," says bartender Rachel Gray. "Christin has that rare something that shines in customer service."

Currents magazine celebrates employees like Thompson who go the extra mile to create satisfied customers. ■

Nominations for great customer service providers welcome at epetermann@ssvec.com.



Connecting the dots for people in need

Sierra Vista Community Connect brings help to struggling families



By R.J. Cohn

Sierra Vista Community Connect (SVCC), a program launched in 2022 to assist struggling families and individuals, has seen record participation since relocating to the Salvation Army Sierra Vista Corps on Wilcox Avenue. The move this spring made the event more accessible and added perks like free lunches, drawing nearly 90 attendees on the first Thursday of each month—double the previous turnout.

SVCC serves as a hub linking residents to essential resources through a growing network of local organizations. Initially starting with about 10 groups, the collaboration now includes food banks, housing programs, health services, recovery support, and family resources. “We wanted to create a group of organizations so people could get the help they were looking for,” said coordinator Leah Davis.

The initiative began when Bisbee resident Jay Matchett, founder of Cochise Housing Connection, sought partners to address low-income needs. After Matchett moved on, Davis, Lee Henney, and Richard Juhl expanded the program with backing from the city’s Better Bucks voucher system for essentials.

On May 1, the Salvation Army site was bustling with organizations like Fort Huachuca’s Soldier & Family Readiness Center, domestic violence services from Lori’s Place, WIC, and Cochise County health programs. Attendees left with information packets, Better Bucks pamphlets, and connections to vital services.

“We’re thrilled to keep this going and help the community under one roof,” Henney said. SVCC hopes to replicate the model in Bisbee, Willcox, and other Cochise County communities where needs remain high.

SVCC meets the first Thursday of each month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Salvation Army Sierra Vista Corps, 180 E. Wilcox Ave. ■



Adult Sandhill Crane
flying over Cochise
Lake in Willcox.

PHOTO BY
HOMER HANSEN

Wings Over WILCOX

By Larry Scott

More than 40,000 sandhill cranes winter in the Sulphur Springs and Gila River valleys.

The cranes migrate in family units from the northern United States and Canada, and some from as far as Siberia.

The cranes begin arriving in the area in mid-September to October and migrate north in mid-February to March.

Since 1993, the annual Wings Over Willcox festival, held this year January

15 to January 18, has attracted people from around the world to see the cranes. Festival activities originate at Willcox Community Center, 312 Stewart Street in Willcox.

A popular viewing spot managed by Arizona Game and Fish, known as Whitewater Draw, is a great area for people to observe the cranes, and an additional 140 bird species. Cochise Lake by the golf course in Willcox is also a great location to see the cranes.

For more information, visit YouTube and check out Wings Over Willcox Nature and Birding Festival (posted Oct 1, 2025).

Also on YouTube, 2014 Wings over Willcox Birding and Nature Festival by Arizona Game and Fish.

There are also some great websites: <https://our.willcox.az.gov/willcoxar/205779> and <https://na.eventscloud.com/website/79513/home>. ■



Three cranes, probably a family, at Whitewater Draw. PHOTO BY LARRY SCOTT



Enjoying the San Pedro **Riparian** **National Conservation Area**

Recreational activities abound in the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) and the Friends of the San Pedro River (FSPR) is here to help you enjoy them!

The FSPR has an active Facebook page and website (<http://sanpedroriver.org/wpfspr/>) where you can find schedules and more information about all of our activities.

Celebrate the San Pedro! is our annual festival to welcome migrating birds back in the spring. In 2026, it will be held on Saturday, April 25th at the San Pedro House. The event is focused on history and nature. It will feature hands-on activities for all ages, speakers, informational displays, and our yearly Big Birding Day species count. Save the date!

The FSPR operates two visitors centers where you can get information about hiking, birding, picnicking, and all other forms of recreation: the San Pedro House, our Nature Store that offers a selection of gifts, outdoor clothing, and books on local history and nature; and the Schoolhouse Museum, which has exhibits on the history of the San Pedro River Valley.

Every week, FSPR docents lead free history, nature, and birding walks. Our nature walks are a great way to learn about the plants and animals of the area. Our birding walks see over 350 species annually. Our history walks visit historic sites within the SPRNCA, including the Murray Springs Clovis Site and the Clanton Ranch.

Consider this your invitation!

A stage for community

CrEaTiViTy

By R.J. Cohn

Just 15 minutes into an Open Mic Night on the second Thursday of each month, it hits you like a wave you never saw coming: Sierra Vista is absolutely stacked with talent.

Sierra Vista's Onyx Grounds transforms into a vibrant showcase of local talent. What began in 2017 as a modest gathering at Broxton's Coffee has evolved into a cornerstone of the city's arts scene, offering musicians, poets, and storytellers a welcoming stage.

Founded by Beth Colburn Orozco, a creative writing instructor at Cochise College, Open Mic Night was designed as a regular outlet for artistic expression. "I wanted to do something to get people who played music and wrote stories and poetry together for a venue that was a regular creative outlet," she recalls. Today, the event draws anywhere from 15 to 45 participants, creating an intimate yet dynamic atmosphere for performers and audiences alike.

The pandemic briefly pushed the event online, but its return to an in-person format at Urbano Bar & Bistro's event center has only strengthened its sense of community. From gut-wrenching memoirs to haunting poetry, each performance is met with applause that empowers artists to keep sharing. ■

“Stories and music are the lifeblood of human connection and often the lifeline in creating community.”

— Beth Colburn Orozco

Where & When

Onyx Grounds at
Urbano Bar & Bistro

State Route 92,
Sierra Vista

Second Thursday
of every month



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Abstract impressionist artist/poet James Mustard posing with one of his recent paintings. Tina Durham reads a portion of her gut-wrenching story about an adult child who stopped communicating with her. Sierra Vista's guitar player performs at Open Mic Night, telling a story accompanied by a song.





"There is no half-best in writing. It's demanding, all-consuming, and you have to dig deep again and again."

Beth Colburn Orozco creating her next short story.

The writer's life: **How a child with dyslexia found her voice**

By R.J. Cohn

Beth Colburn Orozco lives the life many writers dream of — immersed in words, stories, and the relentless pursuit of craft. But her journey began with a challenge: dyslexia. At nine years old, writing became her lifeline, opening a world where imagination triumphed over limitation.

Today, Orozco is a published short story writer and has spent 17 years teaching creative writing at Cochise College. She directs the college's Writing Celebration workshops and launched Sierra Vista's Open Mic Night, fostering a community of voices. Her passion for writing is matched by her dedication to students, instilling confidence and resilience in those who dare to share their words.

Her own process reflects that

rigor. A single short story can take a year and dozens of drafts. She labors over imagery and metaphor, revising until every word earns its place. "Writing has never been easy for me," she admits. "But I don't mind the challenge; it's part of who I am."

Beyond the page, Orozco is a dog rescuer and trainer, often sharing her writing space with a lively pack. She keeps journals scattered throughout her home—dream journals, spiritual reflections, health notes—alongside the stories she crafts each morning.

For Orozco, writing is more than art; it's a philosophy. "It gives clarity to my life," she says. "Nothing else comes close." From a child struggling with dyslexia to a writer shaping worlds with words, her story is a testament to perseverance—and the transformative power of writing. ■

Quick facts about Beth Orozco

- **YEARS TEACHING:** 17 at Cochise College
- **PUBLISHED WORKS:** Short stories, poems, MFA novel
- **COMMUNITY BUILDER:** Founded Sierra Vista's Open Mic Night
- **ANIMAL ADVOCATE:** Rescued 29 dogs
- **WRITING PHILOSOPHY:** "Writing gives clarity to my life."



EXPLORING

By Ted Forte

The constellation of Auriga is prominent on winter evenings. It's dominated by the bright star Capella, the sixth brightest star in the sky. The name Capella means "she goat" in Latin and the star represents Amalthea, the goat that suckled Zeus in Greek mythology. Auriga represents a charioteer and Capella marks either his left shoulder or the goat that he is carrying. Southwest of Capella is a noted triangle of stars, Epsilon, Zeta, and Eta Aurigae, that are collectively known as The Kids. Epsilon Aurigae, the apex of that triangle, is perhaps the most enigmatic eclipsing binary star in the heavens – every 27 years or so, it dims for about 2 years. It last dimmed in 2009–2011. Astronomers still aren't sure exactly what is eclipsing what in this weird system.

The figure of the Charioteer is formed by a lopsided pentagon of bright stars, with Capella as its northwestern corner, that sits between Gemini and Perseus. Lying as it does along the band of the Milky Way, the constellation is rich in star clusters. Open or galactic clusters are gravitationally bound groups of tens to thousands of stars that were formed together in the same giant molecular cloud, are roughly the same age, and have a similar velocity through space.

The best known of Auriga's clusters are the three that made it to the Messier list. The French astronomer, Charles Messier, was an 18th century comet hunter who is famous for his catalog of comet look-alikes: objects that appear comet-like in small telescopes.

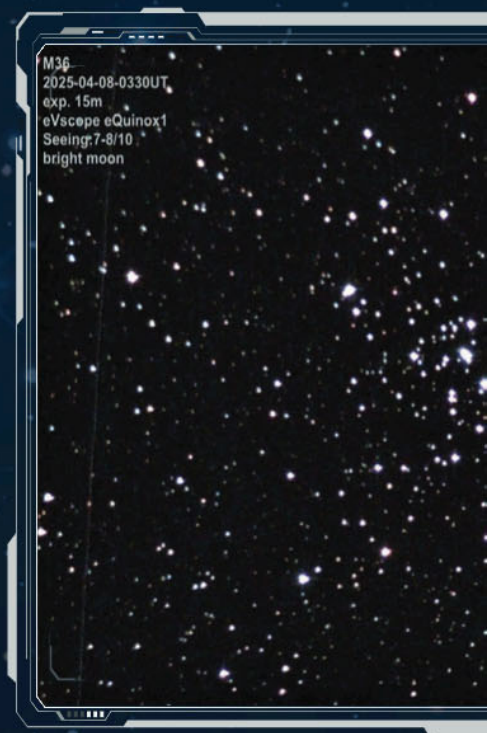
The three, today known as M36, M37 and M38, were all discovered by the Italian astronomer Giovanni Battista Hodierna before 1654. He saw them each as a "nebulous patch". The French astronomer, Guillaume Le Gentil, identified M36 and M38 as clusters of stars in 1749. Messier did the same for M37 in 1764.

M38, aka NGC 1912, lies just a bit north of a line connecting Iota and Theta Aurigae and about midway between the two stars. It's a lovely cluster of 160 stars. About 120 of those lie in an area half the size of the full moon. About a dozen of its brightest stars form a slanted cross through its center. M38 is over 4,000 light years distant.

From M38, jump 2.3 degrees southeast to M36 (NGC 1960), a smaller



M37 by RikHill



M36 by RikHill

AURIGA

cluster of about 60 stars. While it's less massive, it's the brightest of the three Messier clusters in Auriga and is visible to the unaided eye as a fuzzy star. It lies about the same distance away from us as M38. The cluster is estimated to be about 20 to 30 million years old, making it rather young. The 19th century British astronomer, Thomas Webb, described the cluster as a "beautiful assemblage of stars ... very regularly arranged". The cluster has a loose central condensation of stars with several curving streams radiating out. It vaguely looks cross-like, similar to M38.

The third Messier cluster is M37 (NGC 2099). It lies outside of Auriga's pentagon asterism another 3.7 degrees southeast of M36. It's a bit further away at 4,380 light years. Rich in stars, it

probably has about 1800 members; 170 of those stars are brighter than 13th magnitude. At an age of 230 million years, it's still considered young. This cluster looks more condensed than M36 or M38 and even resembles a loose globular cluster. I think it's the more impressive of the three. See if you can detect the red tinge of its brightest star.

A small round cluster, NGC 1907, is just 32' south-southwest of M38 and will occupy the same field of view in a medium power telescope. It was discovered by William Herschel in 1787. It's nearly the same distance from us as M37. Well detached from the background and having a strong central condensation, it contains about 113 stars, generally of similar brightness. See if you can detect a bit of nebulosity

associated with the cluster. This is starlight reflecting off of the residual dust and gas that still infuses the cluster.

Another small cluster that will be obvious in a backyard telescope is NGC 1778. It was discovered by William Herschel on the same night he discovered NGC 1907. He noted it as "a coarsely scattered cluster of large stars". Containing about 112 stars, it has no central condensation. Look for it 4.5 degrees northeast of Iota Aurigae, the western most star in the pentagon asterism. It's about 4800 light years away.

There are more than 50 open clusters in Auriga and many of them are visible with binoculars or a small telescope. I hope this small sampling gets you started discovering them. ■



Richard "Rik" Hill ©2025
London Obs., Tucson
rhill24@cox.net 14:12:57



M38
2025-04-08-0350UT
exp. 16m
eVscope eQuinox1
Seeing: 7-8"/10
bright moon

Richard "Rik" Hill ©2025
London Obs., Tucson
rhill24@cox.net

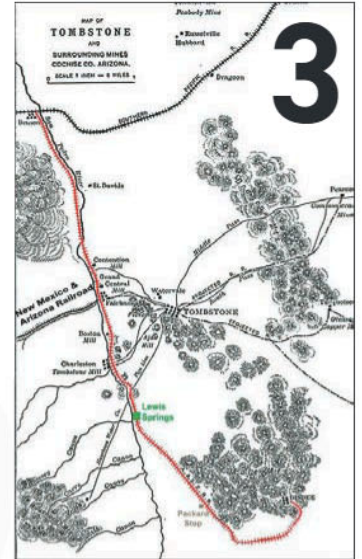
M38 by RikHill

Cochise County's **FIRST SETTLEMENTS**



By Kathy Klump

1. Tombstone: Ed Schieffelin began prospecting on a flat mesa known as Goose Flats. In September 1879, he made his first strike. He had his ore assayed by Richard Gird. It was so rich, that Gird left Signal, Arizona and settled with Ed, and Ed's brother Al at a place they called Gird Camp. Ed Schieffelin had been warned that all he would ever find would be his Tombstone. So that is what he named his mine, and that became the name of the town. The boom was on as miners rushed to the area. A tent community rose up nearby called Tank Hill about three miles west of Tombstone. Near its base was the community of Watervale. It was temporary, for it lacked room for building permanent structures for the hordes of newcomers. John B. "Pie" Allen built the first permanent home. By the end of 1879, Tombstone had one hundred permanent residents and a thousand others camped in tents on nearby hills. A community named Richmond was named by Virginians who flocked to the region and was absorbed into Tombstone Town Association with the Tombstone mine and the Toughnut mine. A post office was established December 2, 1878. By 1881, there were about 8,000 people



in the town. Tombstone served as the Cochise County seat from 1881 to 1929. The County courthouse was built in 1885. The town became known as "The Town Too Tough To Die" and is most famous for the Earp brothers and the shootout near the OK corral.

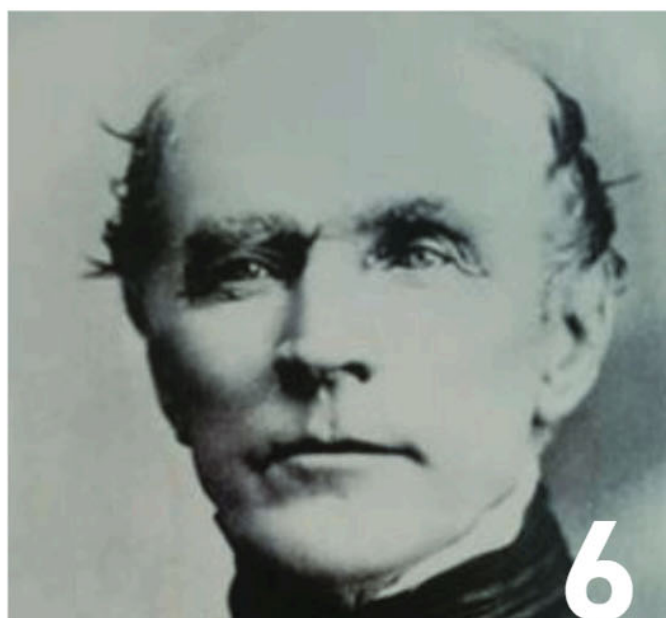
2. Dos Cabezas: (Spanish for Two Heads) The town is named after the nearby mountain with twin peaks. It is located about fourteen miles southeast of Willcox and one-half mile west of Ewell Springs. The springs were used by the Boundary Survey party in 1851, and the Birch Stage route at a station owned by the San Antonio and San Diego stage line (The Jackass Mail) in 1857. In 1859, John Butterfield



built Ewell Springs Station about four miles south of the spring. The first mining claims were filed near Dos Cabezas on Aug. 15, 1864 by several soldiers from Fort Bowie. Gold and silver deposits were found nearby in 1878 by the Casey brothers. In 1883, John D. Emersley discovered a rich vein. Other early miners were Theopholus and William T. Cooper. The very first school house in Cochise County was built in Dos Cabezas in 1878. The post office was established on April 8, 1879. Mrs. George Cummings arrived in Dos Cabezas on June 2, 1900 as housekeeper for Jack Howard at his mine. Many years later it was learned that she was "Big Nose Kate" the notorious companion of Doc Holliday during the Earp days in Tombstone. In 1906, T. N. McCauley arrived and purchased twenty-five of the early mining claims covering an area of over 600 acres. This became the Mascot Copper Company. The Mascot and Western Railroad line was built from Willcox to Dos Cabezas in 1915. The mine was later known as Central Copper Company. It provided a living for many families in the Dos Cabezas area, but turned out to be a big scam to sell stock.

3. Lewis Springs: Fritz Hoffman located these springs on June 6, 1878 and named them Fritz Springs. In 1889, the name was changed to Lewis Springs when Robert Alpheus Lewis settled there and named them after his father. A post office was established on November 15, 1904. "Old man" Clanton and his two sons, Ike and Billy (part of the OK Corral shootout) had a ranch here.

4. Swisshelm: The Mountain Queen Mine was located on September 5, 1878 by Henry Henson, J. W. Fleming, and John Swisshelm. The name of the mountains at that time was the Pedrogosa Mountains. The three men renamed this part of the mountain range as the Swisshelm Mountains and named the highest peak as Fleming Peak. The mountain range is about 15 miles long and about half way between Willcox and Douglas. The Swisshelm post office was established December 12, 1907 to serve the one hundred miners who worked at the mine, but was discontinued four months later.



5. Charleston: In March 1879, A. W. Store of Tombstone laid out the town of Charleston on the San Pedro River bank. It was a mill town with reduction works that served the Tombstone Milling and Mining Company as Tombstone had no water to work reduction facilities. A post office was established April 17, 1879. The town was known as a center for rustlers and a place for soldiers from Fort Huachuca to have a heyday. When the mines in Tombstone flooded, Charleston was no longer needed and the post office was discontinued October 24, 1888.

6. Millville: Located northeast across the San Pedro River from Charleston was another site for the reduction of ores from Tombstone. The post office there was established May 26, 1879 with John B. "Pie" Allen as postmaster, but discontinued only one year later on May 3, 1880. Pie Allen came to Arizona in 1857. He got his nickname based on his pies made with dried apples that he sold in Tucson. He was a prospector, businessman, politician, and Territorial Treasurer from 1867 to 1872 ■

Taking time to Smell the Roses

By R.J. Cohn

Step inside Sierra Vista Flowers on Fry Boulevard just days before Valentine's Day, and you'll witness organized chaos. Owner Billy Powers and his 12-person team are racing to complete 500 arrangements for the floral industry's busiest day—a holiday that sees 250 million roses sold nationwide.

Powers has been planning since early January. His nine delivery drivers will crisscross Cochise County with 280 arrangements, while walk-in customers keep the shop buzzing. Despite competition from grocery stores, Powers sells out every year thanks to Ecuadorian roses that are twice the size and last longer than supermarket blooms. For Valentine's week, his orders skyrocket from 23 boxes to 200—about 4,500 roses flown in fresh weekly.

Not all orders are roses; tropicals, lilies, and sunflowers are popular picks. Powers also donates 50 arrangements to local retirement homes, a tradition he calls "priceless."

After years of frustration with online floral giants like Teleflora and FTD, Powers cut ties, citing unfair fees. Instead,

he offers early-bird and military discounts through his website. When Feb. 14 arrives, the phones won't stop ringing, and cleanup waits until the last delivery is out the door.

"It's just one big whew," Powers laughs. ■

Sierra Vista Flowers

Address: 1400 E Fry Blvd, Sierra Vista, AZ

Valentine's Day by the Numbers:

- 500 arrangements prepared
- 50 arrangements donated to senior centers
- 4,500 roses ordered
- 9 delivery drivers

Discounts:

- 5% before Feb. 1
- 10% military discount

ADOBE STOCK
IMAGE BY CHIKA



The Sierra Vista Flowers team that makes the beautiful arrangements possible. From left are Billy Powers, Dan Thrasher, Holly Williams, Hannah Gilfilen and Alissa Amaya.

TOP RIGHT: The Sierra Vista Friends of the Library team that makes everything possible by helping sort and organize the array of donated books. Pictured are, left to right, Teresa Bowe, Jean Kroger, Heidi Schubert, Edith Burroughs and Lily Wadsworth. BELOW RIGHT: ChanQuetta "Chan" Robertson, executive director of The Library.



Friends of the Library turns bookstore into a business winner

stunning transformation

By R.J. Cohn

When Chan Robertson walked into Sierra Vista's Friends of the Library bookstore in January 2024, she saw more than shelves of books — she saw potential.

"I wanted this to be magical—a place where kids fall in love with reading."

A retired U.S. Army First Sergeant and confessed bibliophile, Robertson has transformed a struggling nonprofit into a thriving enterprise in just 18 months. She consolidated two costly locations, redesigned the store's footprint, and created inviting spaces

like a cozy nonfiction room and a whimsical children's nook, its ceiling painted with hundreds of butterflies.

"The kids absolutely love it. It's their own private book room."

Her vision extended beyond décor. Robertson launched an online sales campaign through eBay, Amazon, and AbeBooks, generating \$5,400 on eBay alone since January, with orders reaching the UK, Canada, and Mexico.

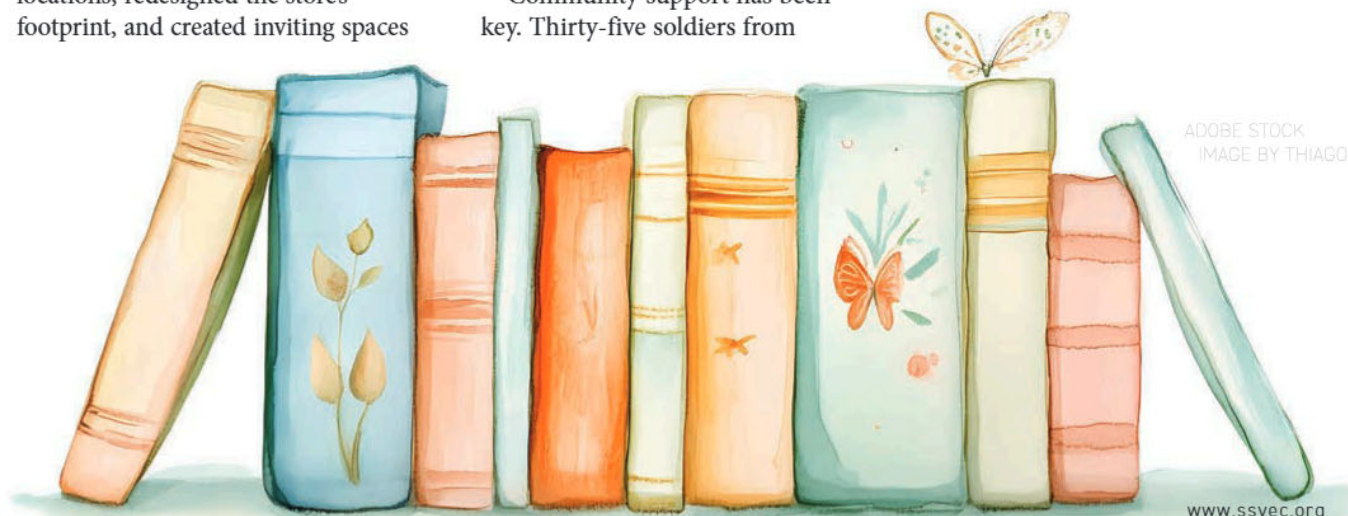
"Our goal is to sell books online to 27 nations by year's end. It's staggering."

Community support has been key. Thirty-five soldiers from

Fort Huachuca volunteered over 100 hours to build the children's room, and 53 volunteers—ages 8 to 94—keep the operation humming. With an annual budget of \$100,000 and growing, Robertson hopes to fund even more library upgrades.

"I used to be like Mary Poppins—fix things and leave. But Sierra Vista feels like home now."

Robertson's efforts promise a bright future for both the bookstore and the library it supports. ■



ADOBE STOCK
IMAGE BY THIAGO

Two feet forward on payphones

Where have all the payphones gone?

By R.J. Cohn

I have been searching high and low, on every street from Sierra Vista to Benson, even pursuing a tip that took me to Portal, near the Chiricahua Mountains, on a quest to find a working payphone.

But I might as well have been hunting with a penlight for the Lost Dutchman Gold Mine in the Superstition Mountains.

It wasn't so much about making a 10-cent phone call to Aunt Marguerite in San Simon.

I'm on a hunt to adopt this relic of history, much like ADOT's Adopt-A-Highway program.

Where have these once ubiquitous utilities gone? Where are these marvels of communication that dotted the American landscape like billboards?

Payphones were on every street corner, at every desert outpost, in saloons, restaurants, bus terminals, and yes, even at Walmart.

They were the bulwark of civilization, offering up a breath of hope for making one desperate call in the night.

They were everywhere, like nail salons in strip malls, as familiar as your face in a mirror, a rope of rescue, sometimes in the middle of nowhere.

Not long ago, there were more than 2.1 million payphones in the U.S. Today, they're almost like artifacts, outnumbered by the Amur Leopard, an endangered species that calls northern China home.

Payphones have become so rare that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) stopped requiring audits in 2018.

In that same year, an estimated 100,000 payphones remained in the U.S., with roughly a fifth of them in New

Writer Robert Cohn reminisces about when he would use a payphone to call in his next big story.

York. Four years later, New York City removed its last one, though some private payphones remained on public property. Whether they were working or not, four full-sized booths still stood in New York's Upper West Side in 2022.

With more than 97 percent of Americans carrying mobile devices – the vast majority of which the Pew Research Center says are smartphones – it's hardly surprising that payphones have virtually vanished, as obsolete as the Fuller Brush man.

But my search for a working payphone, smeared with graffiti and a torn phonebook on a lonely desert patch of mesquite, has a more personal connection than simply nostalgia.

When I was a young, hotshot reporter writing to meet unrealistic afternoon and evening deadlines for large metropolitan newspapers, payphones were how I made my living.

You could cover breaking news 35 miles from the newsroom, 15 minutes from deadline, and rush to a payphone to call in the story. It was an exhilarating feeling, reading your story of a bank robbery in progress, cradling a payphone against your ear, while narrating it to a transcriptionist who typed faster than the wind.

By the time you got back to the newsroom, your story was running through

the rollers in the pressroom.

Now, cities where banks of payphones used by young hotshot reporters who aren't young anymore, have been transformed into Wi-Fi corners, embracing a smartphone-centered era of technology.

It was inevitable.

It's not just big cities like New York where the death knell of payphones sounded long ago.

Arizona is right up there with the big boys.

The FCC says there has been a 95 percent decline in the number of operating payphones in the Grand Canyon State since 2016, which translates to 1,695 phones, down from 33,363 in 2000.

There remains a slug of them still around. Independent companies that saw these antiques still had monetary value purchased them from providers like Sprint and Verizon, operating them in places lacking cellphone or landline coverage like Yosemite Valley, where they became extremely profitable. In 2015, independent payphone companies reported \$286 million in annual revenue to the FCC.

Arizona does boast several oddball phone booths that have created a buzz, like 'The Alien Phone Booth' in Heber-Overgaard with a wood-carved alien, where Travis Walton made a phone call after

allegedly being abducted by aliens in 1975.

There's also 'The Superman Phone Booth' in Lake Havasu City where people can take a selfie, dressed as Superman.

Even our own Cochise County has managed to tiptoe its way into the jumble of payphone parodies.

A resident poet in Bisbee turned a once-operating phone booth by the Jonquil Motel in Tombstone Canyon into a "Telepoem," where you can put change into the coin slot, dial a number and hear the poem of your dreams through the receiver.

But these are goofball things, a slap-in-the-face to the once-cherished payphone that deserves better than a cheesy parody.

That's why I'm looking everywhere I can to adopt a working payphone that has to exist somewhere in Cochise County.

I feel I owe it more dignity and honor than having it tossed in a rubbish heap, or resurrected as a tawdry tourist exhibit on the banks of Lake Havasu, or as a gimmicky "Telepoem" in the playland of Old Bisbee.

Give me a call – preferably from a payphone – if you've seen one around.

I'll grab the adoption papers and be there before you drop another dime in the coin slot. ■

...they were
the bulwark of
civilization, offering
up a breath of hope
for making one
desperate call
in the night...

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.

JANUARY 15 TO 18

Wings Over Willcox

It's time for the 33rd Annual Wings Over Willcox Birding and Nature Festival! Join us for birding field trips, a nature expo and the annual festival banquet. Come visit the Willcox Community Center at 312 Stewart Street, Willcox, to see what Wings Over Willcox Birding and Nature Festival is all about. During the Nature Expo there will be live animal displays, educational exhibits, and vendors showing a wide variety of nature-related items that you can purchase. Additional information about the event is available at wingsoverwillcox.com. Registration is Open: email: info@willcoxnature.org; phone: (520) 384.2874.

WILCOX

FEBRUARY 1 TO 24

45th Annual Tombstone Quilt Show

Tombstone Art Gallery

Come out and see the area's best work by the area's best quilters at the Tombstone Art Gallery, 383 Allen Street. Open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day. Free admission. Reception, awards, and drawing for the raffle quilt on February 21. For more information email: tombstonequiltshow@gmail.com.

TOMBSTONE

FEBRUARY 13

Spaghetti Dinner

Join us at 5 p.m.! Tickets \$10 per adult, \$5 per child 12 and under, followed by free concert at 6 p.m., presented by Canada's Double Portion, a family with seven children playing and singing Christian music of all kinds! Love offering will be appreciated. First Baptist Church of Willcox; 321 W Maley Street. Phone: (520) 384-2305 email: firstbcinfo@gmail.com.

WILCOX

FEBRUARY 28 AND MARCH 1

Hummingbird Quilt Guild Annual Show and Sale

Our Sierra Vista quilt guild presents a spectacular show with more than 200 quilts on display, boutique sale items, vendors, opportunity quilt tickets. Plus, a chance to win a quilt each day. Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Buena High School. Admission \$7, kids under 12 free. No charge to visit the vendors. Free parking and handicapped accessible. Our website: hummingbirdquiltguild.com. If you need more information or have questions, please contact: Dana Rexroad, Guild Publicity, dana.c.rex@gmail.com

SIERRA VISTA

MARCH 21

Gordon Mote

Join us at 6 p.m.! Gordon Mote is an American Christian country/southern gospel singer, piano player, and worship leader. He was born blind. Just after graduating, Lee Greenwood asked Mote to join his band. Since then, he has released eight studio albums and has toured with artists such as Trisha Yearwood, Tanya Tucker, Porter Wagoner, the Gaither Vocal Band, and the Gaither Homecoming Tour. He will present a free concert at First Baptist Church of Willcox at 6 p.m. Love offering will be appreciated. First Baptist Church of Willcox; 321 W Maley Street. Phone: (520) 384-2305; email: firstbcinfo@gmail.com.

WILCOX

MARCH 3 TO 26

Art Show

The 16th Annual San Pedro River Arts Council (SPRAC) Fine Arts Show and Sale will be held March 3 to March 26 at the Cochise College Benson Center, 1025 S. Highway 90, Benson, Arizona. For more information visit: <https://sprarts.org/fine-arts-show>

BENSON

Sierra Vista Symphony Celebrates Season 31 – American Adventures

The Sierra Vista Symphony continues its 31st Season – American Adventures – with a Music at Twilight on February 21 at 4:00pm at Village Meadows Baptist Church featuring Dr. Fanya Lin on piano and Maestro Toru Tagawa on violin. March 7 will bring the annual Men Who Cook fundraiser to be held at the Community Innovation Center at 5:30pm. April 11 brings the final concert of the 31st Season Canyon Reflections featuring Kiril Laskarov performing the Tchaikovsky violin concerto, and other pieces including Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody No.

2 in C minor and Flurry's Canyon Reflections.

The April concert will be held at Klein Center for the Performing Arts (Buena High School) beginning at 7:00pm. A pre-concert lecture will be held at 6:00pm. 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 6:30pm. This is a wonderful opportunity for community members to

gather and enjoy a free concert at the Veteran's Memorial Park band shell. Bring your lawn chair and enjoy the beautiful sounds performed.

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.



Grand Opening

The wait is almost over, coming February 2026 the Center for Art and Heritage will be celebrating its Grand Opening. The completion of the Willcox Arts and Heritage campus will provide Willcox with even more arts, technology, entertainment, and cultural programming than ever before.



Looking Ahead

WILLCOX ARTS, MUSIC, AND MOVIES FESTIVAL

Coming May 2026, WAMM Fest takes over Railroad Ave. A celebration of creativity and family fun. This year WAMM will include the Southern Arizona Independent Film Festival. Regular entry submissions are due January 30, with the Extended entry date due on February 27.



Learn more about SAIFF by scanning the QR code!



CLASSES, CAMPS, AND ETI

Summer at WTA is the place to be for art and technology programs. Classes and camps for kids and teens in all things drawing, painting, crafts, photography, and more! The Engineering and Technology Institute returns for its third year. This exclusive 10 day program gives students opportunities to participate in multi-disciplinary projects in electrical, civil, mechanical, aerospace, and other engineering fields. Visits to and from local organizations give participants a look at what real world engineering jobs are like.

**Check out
upcoming
events
here!**



**Keep an eye on our website as summer approaches
for more information and registry!**

(520) 766-3335 | willcoxtheater@gmail.com | willcoxtheater.com

TIME TO REMIND: You are what

By Chef Chris

ClownChef@Yahoo.com

DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

We tend to get in a rut with our cooking and just keep making what we've been making and end up bored or dissatisfied. Or worse! We abandon the kitchen and our ambition to eat better and therefore feel better. I offer you a mess o' suggestions for upping your game. You're worth it!

The farmer's market is the best place to find new things in part because they will give you loads of ideas on how to prepare the UVO — unidentified veggie object. And if you've been looking at some "thing" in the produce section for ages, go for it! Especially if it's green. We have this marvel of technology called the internet these days and

there is plenty of help there.

PREP AHEAD

Chopped garlic can be kept for a few days in a glass jar (so you can get the smell out) covered with a little olive oil.

Dried beans are much tastier and toothier than canned, but any bean will bring huge benefits. Drop a few in your salad.

Fresh herbs like cilantro and parsley can be washed, wrapped in a paper towel and kept in a bag in the fridge for a quick addition.

I like to chop dried fruit and nuts and keep them in a jar ready to go into my quinoa porridge. I make a double batch of quinoa in the morning and have one serving for breakfast, then use the rest in a salad, soup or over veggies.

Romaine and shredded brussels sprouts are good for meal prep salads.

DON'T PREP AHEAD

Onions, for several reasons — trust me! Cucumbers and zucchini will get weepy.

Delicate greens will likely wilt. Berries degrade quickly once washed.

SECRET AGENTS

Tahini: Full of calcium and important trace nutrients.

Romanesco is a cross between cauliflower and broccoli. Roast it and toss with parmesan cheese.

ADOBE STOCK IMAGE BY STOCK INGAE

Sub it for peanut butter on crackers with jam. Make a creamy dressing with orange juice, garlic and olive oil. Try it as a thickener for soups and stews.

Miso: This nutrient dense food is also a probiotic with many benefits. Try in soups and salad dressings. Add to a pasta primavera for a sultry guilt-free creamy finish.

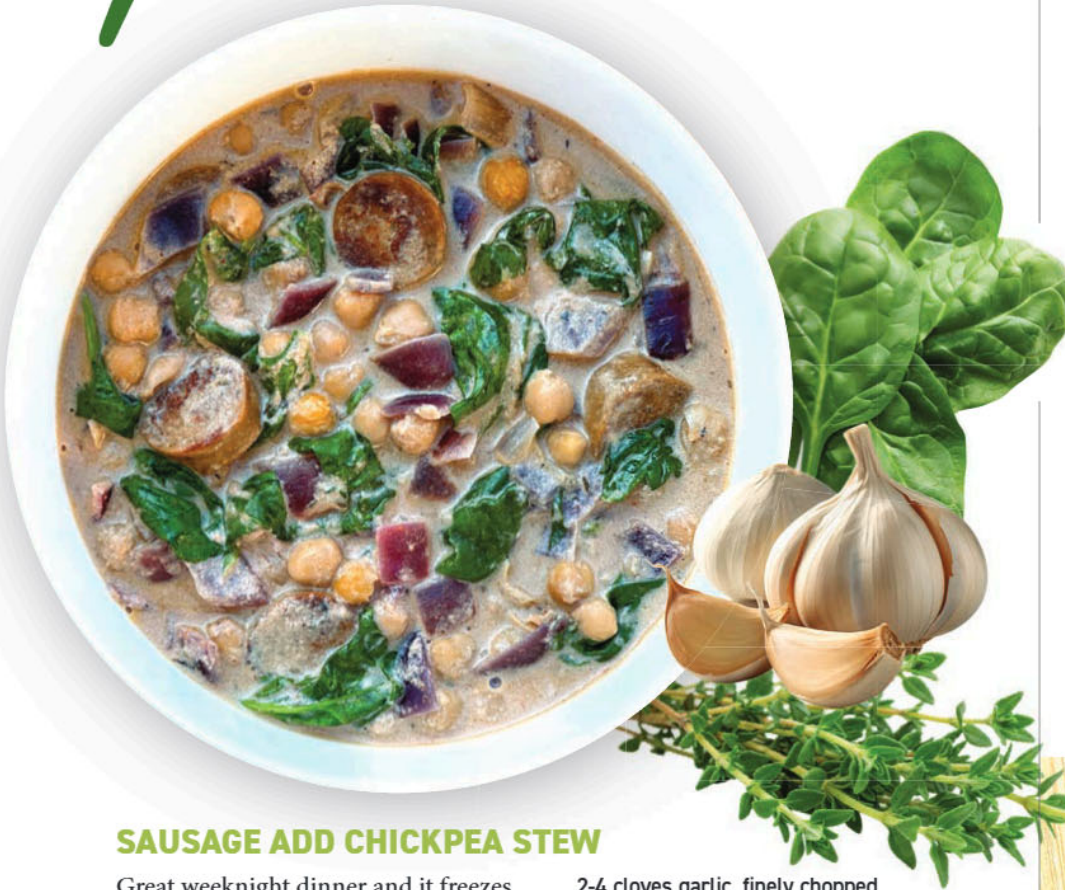
Quinoa: Must be rinsed to get rid of bitterness. Can't say enough about it! So good in so many ways. I like it much better than oatmeal. You can cook a couple of cups to have on hand for salads, soup, tossed over your side veggie.

The freezer: Frozen veggies can have more nutrients than fresh. You can make broccoli soup in a flash with a bag of the frozen stuff. I've also been finding some real time savers in the natural market like diced beets and mushrooms.

Cabbage: Full of vitamin C and other goodness. A head of cabbage in the crisper drawer means you can make a meal. I have braised wedges, blanched leaves to replace bread for a sammy, and when you shred purple cabbage and drop it in a salad, stir fry, or a soup, they suddenly look magical. Oh, and slaw will always be a good thing.



you eat



SAUSAGE AND CHICKPEA STEW

Great weeknight dinner and it freezes well! There are a few nifty nutrition secrets here and multiple possibilities for swaps.

First, the tahini (see the “Secret Agents” sidebar) adds some thickening and powerhouse nutrition at the same time. Second, the chickpeas are a good source of protein, and the sausage gives it extra flavor.

Shallots will work if the red onions are giant. I use vegan sausage and it's still yummy. Almost any leafy green will work. You could add cauliflower or broccoli to get another serving of veg. Eat it right out of a bowl or serve over rice or noodles.

- 1 small red onion, chopped
- 1 link Italian sausage, sliced

- 2-4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 cup Veggie or Chicken broth
- 1 can chickpeas, drained
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 2 shakes dried thyme
- 3 Tbsp tahini
- ½ bag baby spinach, about 3 oz.
- Squeeze of lemon juice or ½ rice vinegar

Heat a skillet over medium-high. Add a little olive oil, then the onion and a little salt. Let brown a little, then add the sausage and brown. Add the garlic and cook for about 30 seconds. Add broth and stir up any brown bits from the bottom of the pan. Add the chickpeas, Dijon, and thyme, and gently stir together. Reduce heat and let simmer for about 5 minutes. Stir in the tahini, taste and adjust seasoning, then add the spinach and lemon juice and taste again.

BRUSSEL SPROUT SALAD WITH QUINOA, CRANBERRIES, AND PECANS

This is a new favorite of mine. Tri-color quinoa is a little trickier to work with so start with white. Swap any nut you like, add any veggie you like.

- 1 cup quinoa, rinsed
- 1.5 cups water
- ½ pound Brussels sprouts
- ¼ cup dried cranberries
- ¼ chopped nut of choice
- Leftover chicken or steak
- 3 Tbsp. orange juice
- 1-2 Tbsp olive oil

Heat 1½ cups water with quinoa and a little salt. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and let simmer for 12 — 15 minutes, or until the “tail” (endosperm) appears. Drain as needed and reserve.

While the quinoa cooks, remove the outer leaves of the sprouts and slice thinly, avoiding the stems. Place in a medium bowl and add remaining ingredients and toss well. Add quinoa and toss again. Enjoy warm or cold.





You're going to

→ LOVE →

SSVECcurrents.com!

    You can also find us @YourSSVEC on social media.