

Patagonia Regional Times



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Patagonia School's Leaky Roofs a Symptom of State Funding Gaps



Photo by Marion Vendituoli

Patagonia Schools Superintendent Kenny Hayes inspects a puddle of water in the school gym. Tarps have to be set down each time it rains.

By Marion Vendituoli

Patagonia High School volleyball coach Brenda Somoza was in Tucson on Sept. 26 when Nate Porter, athletic director for the school, called and asked her if she had put the tarps down on the gym floor.

It had started to rain, and the failing gym roof has at least ten leaks. "I shot back from Tucson as fast as I could, and put the tarps down," Somoza said.

It was important to get the floor dried right away, as Homecoming ceremonies, as well as varsity and JV games against the Gregory School, were slated for later that afternoon. "It wasn't that bad yet because it hadn't rained much," she said. "It was kind of just sprinkling, but then once the game started it really started coming down."

"All the towels we had were all soaking wet, so I called my mom who was on her way to the game and told her to turn around and go get beach towels either at my house or her house. We mopped up the water in between the sets."

"It was really nerve-wracking

because that was a big game for us and at any time the ref could have been like, 'We're calling this, you guys forfeit.' We were really scrambling and just praying that the rain would subside a little bit so we could get through the games. We had kids racing out onto the court to mop it up between the sets. We had a station right behind the referee stand where I had two girls mopping up with the help of a girl from the Gregory School and then I had two girls at another spot back behind the locker room that just stayed there both games mopping up."

Michael Young, assistant principal and the school district's Building Director, said there is no quick and easy fix for the gym's roof.

"We've had assessors come down (to look at) the roof on the gym," he said, adding that one contractor refused to allow his men on the roof because of rot. "Some of them said they wouldn't even touch it, and some said that they would give me a warranty for as long as we can see their taillights

See Leaks, p. 11

PVFR Receives Surprise Fire Engine Donation



Photo by Mary Tolena

Rick Small donated this fire engine he found on Facebook to PVFR.

By Mary Tolena

It all started with a search for a utility trailer.

Patagonia resident Rick Small was looking for a utility trailer to buy on Facebook Marketplace when (oddly enough) a fire engine popped up in the search results.

"Hmm," thought Small. Though he didn't know anything about fire trucks, it seemed like a high-capability vehicle at a very good price. And it was close by, in Marana.

Small sent a copy of the listing in a message to the Patagonia Volunteer Fire and Rescue Facebook page, and said that if the department wanted to pursue it, he would make a donation for the purchase price.

Brianna Young Hubbell, daughter of longtime PVFR volunteer and current board member Michael Young, had recently taken over as admin of the department Facebook page, and saw the message almost immediately.

"Hey Dad," she said to Young, "someone wants to buy us a fire truck!"

In an enthusiastic phone call with Small, Young confirmed that the 1999 E-ONE Cyclone fire engine "would advance our capabilities by 15 years."

Young and Small met over the weekend to work out details for a proposal to the PVFR board. After confirming with the seller on Monday that the vehicle was still available, the department board called a special meeting the next day. They unanimously voted Yes to accept Small's proposal and send a team to fully inspect the truck.

That Friday, Oct. 3, Young drove to Marana with Nick DiNuzio, PVFR Fleet Manager, and his wife, Gabby, who own P-Town Auto & Offroad on Harshaw Avenue. They drove back with the new fire engine.

Better than expected

The engine had been in service as standby safety equipment at Skydive Marana, so it hadn't seen a lot of heavy use. The skydiving company was selling it because they had recently been awarded a contract to train paratroopers for the Army, which meant jet planes would be landing at their airstrip. The company replaced this truck with several aircraft rescue and fire fighting (ARFF) fire engines designed for aviation emergencies.

Before Skydive Marana purchased it at auction last year, the truck had been

See Engine, p.15

Patagonia Regional Times

MISSION STATEMENT

To be a reliable and engaging source of news for the communities of eastern Santa Cruz County—open to all views, focused on local issues, written and edited by local people, and providing a platform for community education and involvement.

WHO WE ARE

We are a nonprofit news organization, funded by paid advertising, donations and grants. The PRT is distributed in print monthly in eastern Santa Cruz County, weekly in the PRT News Bulletin and on our website.

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Submissions

Do you have an idea for a story having to do with the Eastern Santa Cruz County region? It could be a person or organization who's doing something interesting, a concern about possible wrongdoing, or a unique approach to local challenges. Send your idea to editor@prtnews.org

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COMMUNITY FUNDED, COMMUNITY DRIVEN:
THAT'S THE NONPROFIT NEWS DIFFERENCE.



November marks the beginning of the Patagonia Regional Times' annual fundraising campaign, that time of year when we ask you, our readers, to help us continue our mission to provide local news here in eastern Santa Cruz County.

We're enormously proud to be reader-funded: not only does it keep us going, but it's what makes the Patagonia Regional Times unlike other news outlets.

Reader Funding allows us to focus on important and meaningful stories that are worthy of your time.

Reader Funding allows us to focus on the local news that matters most to our community. No one dictates what—or what not—to report, investigate, or write.

Reader Funding keeps our website open to all with no paywall, no pop-ups.

We publish the PRT Weekly News Bulletin online every Wednesday to subscribers at no cost, bringing you breaking news stories, readers' photos, local events listings and community

resources.

For the seventh year in a row, the PRT has been selected to participate in NewsMatch, a national matching-gift campaign that drives donations to nonprofit newsrooms (like ours) around the U.S.

Here's how our fundraising campaign works: NewsMatch will match donations given in November and December. This can either be a one-time donation or a recurring monthly donation. The bottom line is, no matter how you donate to the PRT before the end of 2025, your donation will be doubled thanks to NewsMatch. That's a big deal for the PRT.

If you have not donated to the PRT before, we encourage you to consider it now. If we can secure just 50 new donors by the end of the year we are eligible for a \$1,000 bonus from NewsMatch!

Will you make a donation to the PRT? Just think of the impact that could have—not just for our newsroom, but for our community.

The best way to fund our

crucial journalism is on a recurring basis by becoming a sustaining member of our Press Core program. These monthly contributions provide the PRT with a steady source of funding that helps us keep our lights on and our stories flowing month after month. It's easy to sign up for Press Core. You can cancel anytime.

We need to raise at least \$35,000 from our donors before the end of December. If you have supported the PRT in the past, thanks for your continued support. If you have not yet donated to the PRT, now is the time. We hope that you will consider helping us to continue the work of bringing you your local news by participating in our NewsMatch campaign.

Trusted journalism like ours has never mattered more. Give today and double the impact of your tax deductible donation. Send a check to: P.O. Box 1073 Patagonia, AZ 85624. Or donate online at patagoniaregionaltimes.org/donate.

Some of the stories that would have gone untold in the last year if not for the PRT

Plans For a New Elgin Bridge Move Forward

Candidates For Congress Stake Out Turf on Opposite Sides of Trump

Your Tax Dollars Hard at Work

Gutfahr Receives 10 Year Sentence for Embezzlement

12-Year-Old Elgin Girl Survives Mojave Snake Bite

A Season to Remember for 'Mighty Nine' Little Leaguers

Sale of Gutfahr Property Includes Lochiel Chapel

Journee Hayes 2025 Santa Cruz County Teacher of the Year

Patagonia Town Council to Discuss Proposal for New Veterans' Memorial

Home Insurance Crisis Impacts Local Residents

Communities Give Input to Wildfire Protection Plan



Photo by Mary Tolena

Attendees at the CWPP meeting in October discuss the map showing the five mitigation priority areas proposed for Patagonia.

By Mary Tolena

Santa Cruz County’s Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) took a step forward in October with five community input meetings in Sonoita, Patagonia, Nogales, Rio Rico, and Tubac. About forty residents attended the meeting in Patagonia on Oct. 7.

Led by the county’s Office of Emergency Management in collaboration with local fire departments and stakeholders, the CWPP will identify wildfire risk areas, mitigation strategies, and response plans for Treatment Management Units throughout the county.

Developing the Santa Cruz County CWPP is a top priority for Sobeira Castro, Director of the Office of Emergency Management. “It’s important for us to be prepared and immediately responsive in any emergency,” Castro said. “Once we have the CWPP, we can qualify for various grants,” she added.

The CWPP is well-along in the development process. At the public meetings, maps were presented showing wildfire risk analysis based on over ten years of fire and hourly wind data. Around Patagonia, five mitigation priority areas are proposed to protect the town.

Work on the first one is already underway to create a fire break south of town running from The Nature Conservancy and Tucson Bird Alliance properties to the cemetery. That project is funded by the Community Wildfire Protection Grant awarded to the Tucson Bird Alliance earlier this year.

The CWPP maps and strategies focus on areas of wildland-urban interface — “the WUI” (woo-eee) in fire prevention-speak. Though eastern Santa Cruz County is rural, not urban, essentially all of our residential and business areas are considered WUIs,

i.e. areas where a wildfire can easily threaten structures and lives.

The community meeting was led by Dave Richins, community outreach facilitator for the CWPP team. He highlighted the cooperation and knowledgeable input they are receiving from all of the fire departments, as well as from the Nogales and Sierra Vista districts of Coronado National Forest.

“Fire department leaders in Sonoita and Patagonia knew the high risk areas off the top of their heads,” Richins said. “The CWPP team got great information very quickly.”

Beyond area planning, neighborhood-level input is needed to identify less obvious risks, and assure viable evacuation routes. That’s the kind of input that community members shared at the October meetings: insights into places that are of concern to the community.

Richins also emphasized that successful wildfire protection is a two-part effort of community-level planning and fuels reduction, combined with firewise protection measures taken by individual property owners. Public measures without protective actions by owners will not be enough, Richins said.

Acknowledging that many owners don’t have the physical or financial resources to make firewise improvements on their property, Richins said that the completed CWPP can help communities attract grant money and organize collaborative firewise efforts.

The fire departments can educate citizens, and provide firewise assessments.

“The CWPP will give us a road map,” said Zay Hartigan, Patagonia Volunteer Fire & Rescue Chief. “We all have to walk that trail, drive that road

See CWPP, p.16

Making Space for Grace

How PCUMC's new pastor left her partying days behind

By Linda Jade Fong and Binx Selby

“Don’t let the title ‘Pastor’ fool you,” warned the new Patagonia Community United Methodist Church pastor, Katrina Pahulu, during an address at a weekly Spiritual Roundtable meeting, an outreach program of the local church. The 34-year-old went on to explain, “As I grew up, I strayed from church, despised it. It felt stifling. I did my own thing. I was the outgoing party girl.”

Pastor Katrina was born on the Hawaiian island of Maui and grew up in Lahaina, a two-church town. The Methodist church had a congregation that was largely Tongan, and families like hers with that South Pacific background attended church every day. Her family moved to southern California, where Katrina ended up attending seven high schools and focusing on all sports, from basketball to rugby.

The “party girl” graduated with a degree in medical anthropology from Cal State Fullerton and thought she might author a book on traditional Tongan medicine. First, however, she found herself in many jobs, ranging from hospitality and travel to caregiving and disabled services, to even working as a personal trainer in a gym.

“I tried to find different people and places where I could express what I needed to express, not church and home,” Katrina said. She ended up feeling “everything was on my shoulders—all my bad experiences I had suppressed. I didn’t know I was going down into a dark hole. Spiraling.”

Seeking fulfillment and peace, Katrina became what she now calls a “Rastafarian-loving Buddhist.” It was not enough, but a bridge.

In the meantime, she had gotten an idea for a business.

“I thought it would change my life,” Katrina said. “I wanted this to work really really badly, and had paid a lot of money to get there. I felt like success was on the tip of my tongue. I wanted just one word, ‘Yes’, from God, [to be] ready to launch.

“When I listened I found the word that came to my heart was ‘Fasting,’” marveled Katrina. “I couldn’t believe



Photo by Linda Jade Fong

Pastor Katrina Pahulu focuses on the ‘service part’ of her ministry.

it. I asked for a word. This was the word?!”

She continued, “I told myself I would fast for 24 hours. I didn’t realize how much of my time I spent thinking of food, shopping and preparing food, eating food. I used that time instead to pray, meditate. I was basically feeding myself God’s word. It felt like being nourished. On the second day, feeling really weak, that’s when I really dug deep down inside and asked God to just give me strength.

“The third day was when my body felt renewed. The world was whirling around me with colors, I was moving at a steady pace and at ease, at peace with myself, focused on the inner. I was up there on the mountain with joy. I was in direct contact with God.

“On the seventh day of the fast I then heard a calling to ministry—serving God and others.

“My response was, ‘Not this, that’s not what I want to hear.’ I got mad. I was ready to go this [other] way and you’re turning me this way to a path I had despised growing up. I respected pastors but it was not something I could ever see turning myself into, not a righteous leader getting everyone to change.

“I had to wrestle with it for three more days; It wasn’t part of my five-year plan!”

Eventually Katrina realized it was the service part of ministry that made her feel she could do the job of being a pastor. That could be her focus. The transformative fast cleared her mind for making changes quickly, and she immediately enrolled in the California

See Pastor, p.14

Family Foundation Gains Title to Lochiel Landmark



Photo by Irma De La Ossa Sang

San Antonio De La Ossa Chapel in Lochiel was completed in 1958 by Felicitas and Alberto De La Ossa to fulfill a dying wish of Carolina De La Ossa.

By Adele De La Ossa Post and Carrie White

Under the sprawling cottonwoods of Lochiel, the De La Ossa family’s annual gathering this November carried a deeper sense of meaning. Between laughter, shared meals and stories of generations past, there was something new to celebrate—a homecoming of the most profound kind.

The De La Ossa Family Cemetery and chapel have been returned to the family. More accurately, they’ve been entrusted to the newly formed De La Ossa Family Cemetery Foundation, a 501(c)(13) nonprofit established to preserve and protect this cherished land for generations to come.

“It means everything to us,” said Arnulfo De La Ossa of Tucson, whose first wife, Marsha, rests in the family cemetery. “It’s where our loved ones are, where our stories are written.”

This outcome was far from guaranteed. The church and cemetery, which together make up less than an acre, had been swept into the complicated web of assets tied to Elizabeth Gutfahr, the former Santa Cruz County treasurer convicted of embezzling nearly \$40 million.

When Gutfahr’s holdings were placed under the control of MCA Financial Group to repay the county, the land risked being sold at auction.

“The cemetery and chapel were not part of the 130 acres we ended up selling,” said Keith Bierman, MCA’s senior managing director in Phoenix. Those parcels were spared precisely because of their cultural and historical significance—and because of the new-

ly established foundation’s clear legal claim to steward them.

That distinction mattered. While the remaining acreage fetched roughly \$590,000 through Sotheby’s, the De La Ossa family’s sacred sites were protected from becoming just another line item in an asset ledger.

Over 2,000 people had signed a public petition urging their return. The family’s deep ties to the land and their organized effort through the foundation gave officials a concrete pathway to honor both history and justice.

The roots of this place run deep. More than fifty De La Ossas rest on the quiet hill overlooking the San Rafael Valley, beginning with Antonio De La Ossa, who settled in the valley in 1880 with his wife, Carolina. After Antonio’s death in a horse accident in 1902, family tradition holds that Carolina prayed to San Antonio for strength to keep the homestead. In gratitude, she wished for a chapel to be built in the saint’s honor—a wish fulfilled decades later in the 1950s by Felicitas and Alberto De La Ossa.

“Money to build the adobe structure came from the community,” remembered Irma De La Ossa Sang. “Meat was donated for a barbecue fundraiser. Everyone wanted to help.”

By the late 1950s, the dream stood complete. Marshall Beaty, of Tucson, who served as an altar boy for the dedication, recalls Bishop Daniel J. Gercke traveling to bless the new church.

For Arnulfo De La Ossa, returning home from Navy service in 1959, the sight of the chapel was a moment of joy—and one that tied his life’s milestones to the land. “That’s when I



Photo by Carrie White

More than 50 De La Ossas are buried in the cemetery that sits above the San Antonio De La Ossa Chapel, including these two infants.

knew it was finished,” he said. Today, he and his wife Jolene plan to rest there beside Marsha one day.

Though Iglesia de San Antonio is no longer an active Catholic parish, it remains a living symbol of faith and family.

Even recent vandalism—broken windows and the theft of four sacred relics—could not shake that bond.

When the relics were taken, Gloria De La Ossa Lorta, 92, of Patagonia, made it her mission to replace them. Traveling to Magdalena, Mexico, she returned with new relics to restore the church’s spiritual heart. “They were there when my grandfather built the church,” said her daughter, Telma Lorta. “Their presence makes the chapel whole again.”

By forming the De La Ossa Family Cemetery Foundation, the family did more than regain title to their land—they built a lasting structure of protection. The foundation ensures the cemetery and church can never again be lost in legal or financial turmoil. It provides a formal way to raise funds, maintain the site, and honor the memories that rest there.

It also guarantees continuity: that when today’s

caretakers are gone, tomorrow’s will inherit not confusion, but clarity and purpose.

For the De La Ossa family, the foundation represents more than legal ownership— it is the modern expression of the same faith and determination that led Carolina to pray for her home over a century ago.

Through this act, the family has ensured that the heart of Lochiel—its church, its cemetery, its stories — will remain sacred ground, protected and passed down, forever their own.

Alison Bunting contributed to this story.



Photo by Irma Sang

This Sacred Heart of Jesus relic is one of four taken from the Lochiel chapel that the family is hoping will be returned, no questions asked.

Lobos’ Volleyball Success Mirrors Growth of Seniors Lewton, Majalca



Photo by Dave Lumia

Emma Lewton (left) elicits a smile from Brianna Majalca during Senior Night.

By Dave Lumia

It may be an oversimplification to say the upward trajectory of the Patagonia High volleyball program over the past four years directly parallels the careers of seniors Emma Lewton and Brianna Majalca, but it’s not far from the truth.

As freshmen in 2022, Lewton and Majalca played minor, complementary roles as the Lobos finished with a 9-10 record and No. 26 ranking in Class 1A.

As sophomores a year later, both had moved into prominent positions in the starting lineup as the team improved to 12-7 and a state ranking of 21st.

Last season, with a new coach and just one senior on the roster, juniors Lewton and Majalca stepped into leadership roles while helping the Lobos to a 15-8 record, a No. 13 state ranking

and their first trip to the state tournament since 2016.

This year, Lewton and Majalca have captained the team as the Lobos have continued their steady climb, compiling a 15-3 regular-season record and a No. 7 ranking in Class 1A.

Coincidence, you say? Hardly. “They’ve brought so much to this program since they were freshman,” said Brenda Somoza, who served as an assistant coach for two predecessors before taking over as head coach this season.

“Watching them grow over the years has been incredible. Their athletic ability, their leadership and their demeanor on the court, it’s unmatched. I haven’t seen that in a long time.”

The Lobos are not without other stars. Junior setter Amaya Somoza (Brenda’s daughter) and sophomore

See Seniors, p.20



Photo by Dave Lumia

Lewton and Majalca position themselves to receive serve from San Simon.

Air Smart Program Collects Air Quality Data Across SCC

By Robert Gay

During 2025, 20 particle sensors located in Santa Cruz County began contributing data to document a scientific baseline understanding of local outdoor air quality. The local placement of these sensors was facilitated by the Calabasas Alliance, a Rio Rico-based group that advocates "for responsible environmental stewardship and sustainable alternatives to mining in Santa Cruz County," according to their mission statement.

Calabasas Alliance teamed up with researchers at Arizona State University and the University of Arizona to help deploy a citizen-powered outdoor air quality monitoring program they call Air Smart.

With installation help from University of Arizona graduate students, the Air Smart program helped place sensors in SC County in mid-2025. In Eastern Santa Cruz County, five are currently operating in or very near Patagonia town limits and one in Sonoita. Another three sensors are located in the vicinity of Lake Patagonia, and there are several more in the Santa Cruz River Valley.

The sensors resemble puffball mushrooms and are powered by about 5 watts of household electricity. Using tiny lasers, they detect PM2.5, a particle size of 2.5 microns in size, or smaller. Particulate matter sized at that level—about 1/40th the diameter of a human hair—is a critical size for air quality research, as these tiny particles float in air and can travel far, penetrate deep into the lungs and then enter the bloodstream. At this small size, the particles might be dust, pollen, soot from fossil fuel vehicles or domestic heating, mineral dust from manufacturing or mining, gravel processing, dirt roads, volcanoes or wildfire smoke.

A facilitator for the Air Smart Program is Dr. Chris Lim, an Associate Professor at the University of Arizona’s School of Public Health specializing in Air Epidemiology.

“It is important to remember that just measuring particles by size doesn’t identify their composition,” Dr. Lim said. The particle sensors in the Air Smart program can measure the concentration of particles in the air, but cannot identify the source of those particles. Dr. Lim said that the long-term plan, depending on grant funding, is to add more particle and gas sensors, as well metal detection capabilities, in the sensor regions. Sensors that can analyze gases and detect



Photo by Robert Gay

Patagonia's Air Smart sensor is located near the gazebo in the park.

minerals have the potential to more directly track health hazards like lead and manganese.

The sensors use WiFi connections to transmit data every five or ten minutes to a web-based company called Purple Air, which maintains an interactive online air quality map.

PurpleAir and most other air quality maps display this massive flow of data using the scientifically based Air Quality Index (AQI) devised by the Environmental Protection Agency as a measure of threat level to human health. Nationally, people are beginning to use these ratings to plan exercise or outdoor activity, keep children indoors or not, or, if ratings are very low, get out and enjoy.

An Oct. 21 screenshot from Purple Air showed as good a day as possible in the Patagonia area: all five sensors read zero.

The Town of Patagonia’s particle sensor is near the gazebo in its central park, and the Town also has a more sophisticated sensing instrument, a little box called Quant AQ. Besides measuring three levels of particulate matter, the Quant AQ units also measure carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and ozone. Along with sulfur dioxide, these are the primary pollutants of concern and regulation by the national Clean Air Act, enforced by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

The data from both particulate and gas sensors are building a robust air quality baseline for the Town and the rest of Santa Cruz County. Mayor Wood confirmed that the Town supports the Air Smart program. She is looking forward to seeing the data.

See Sensors, p.16

LATCHKEY WARS, PART II



By Cassina Farley

The house next door to my childhood home was a rental. This meant that we had many colorful neighbors.

Among the group was the family whose kids would run in front of cars in hopes of getting hit so their mom could sue, my dad's brother and his super interesting wife from Alabama who would invite my sister over for drinks when she was in high school, and, our personal favorites, the Lopez family (name changed to protect the

innocent).

There were four kids in the Lopez household. The oldest, a boy, was dumber than a post. I will admit now before my sister tells you, that I was in love with this dummy, and as a woman now in my 50s I still shudder at the thought, but I digress. His sister was my sister's best friend and there were two little brothers, the same boys involved in the notorious turd-flinging event. Completing this family was their mother, a sweet lady who would make spaghetti with a 39-cent can of Hunt's tomato sauce and slap her kids with flip-flops when they misbehaved. Her longtime boyfriend was less of a bread winner and more of a couch sitter and far from a stepdad.

The kids of the house entertained themselves by calling the cops on their mother's boyfriend and waving at the cop car when they took him away. My sister and I joined in on this activity a few times and were always surprised when he returned to the home again and again.

In the early days we spent a lot of time together. My mom fed these kids often and was used to us being over at

their house or vice versa.

Our relationship with the neighbors was tumultuous. My brother, being the youngest, was often coaxed into doing things he shouldn't—one time the older boys convinced him to climb a tree only to fall and break an arm. My dad tried to beat up their dad one evening after a few beers and they never spoke again. Their daughter often sought refuge at our house and looked to my mom for help when her mother tried cutting her long hair into layers only to give her an involuntary pixie cut.

This leads me to the cats. I don't know how it started and I really don't remember how it ended, but the next-door neighbors had a lot of cats. So that meant we had a lot of cats milling around, hiding under cars and scattering whenever the front door opened. The kids next door didn't seem to mind and the adults didn't seem to care.

One fateful day my sister and I did something that would become family legend and to this day we couldn't tell you why.

One afternoon after school she and I saw the neighbors leaving their house. Off to Grandma's or Food City? We did not know but as they drove away, we noticed that their front window was open. Just a crack. Fortunately,

ly, the screen in this old rental house was gone.

This is when we decided to fill their house with cats. We rushed to the window of the house and slid it open just wide enough for a few dozen cats and then we started grabbing cats. At first, we were catching a cat in each hand.

The smarter cats ran when they realized what was going on. It was a bit of work shoving them through the window as they struggled and grabbed the curtains with their claws but one by one, we cleared the front yard. When we were satisfied with our handiwork, we fixed the curtains and slid the window shut.

We casually walked home and went inside and waited. I personally did not count how many cats we shoved through the window but I know for a fact that any number of feral cats inside your house is too many.

I have deep regret for what the cats might have done to their house but I have no regrets laughing to tears with my sister. We still don't know why we did what we did, but know that spaying and neutering your animals is a must when you live next door to delinquent kids.

Cassina Farley can be contacted at cassinaandzachfarley@msn.com

A New Chapter for the PRT

By Carrie Lumia
PRT Board President

Change is coming. After nine years at the helm of the Patagonia Regional Times, Marion Vendituoli is stepping down. While other organizations might be fearful for the challenges this could pose, the PRT is soundly positioned to handle the transition thanks to Marion's leadership.

A job search is well underway. The hiring of Amy Glass as interim Director of Operations and Development to support the business side of the house has already proven advantageous. The contributions of board members past

and present have set us up for continued success.

And now, as we look to the future with much gratitude for Marion's leadership, we are boldly optimistic about what lies ahead.

The PRT, our staff and board are grateful for your continued support. We could not do this without you. And be assured, we are unwavering in our commitment to impartial journalism and the First Amendment. From many, our citizens in Canelo, Elgin, Sonoita, Patagonia and beyond, we come together as one in the pages of our small but mighty newspaper. That will not change.

Now Hiring: PRT Managing Editor

The Patagonia Regional Times is a nonprofit newsroom serving eastern Santa Cruz County with an annual operating budget of \$175,000. We produce a free monthly print edition ten times a year, a weekly e-Bulletin with an estimated readership of more than 2,000, and daily news updates on our website.

The Managing Editor will serve in a dual leadership role with the Director of Operations and Development, with both positions reporting to our Board of Directors.

The Managing Editor oversees editorial operations for the print edition, weekly bulletin, website and social media. The position is responsible for supervising paid editorial staff and volunteer community journalists and for carrying out the editorial vision articulated in the PRT strategic plan. He or she also consults on grant applications

and other business activities as necessary and collaborates with the Director of Operations and Development on the annual report.

Applicants should have a four-year college degree, a background in community journalism, experience working with volunteers and familiarity with eastern Santa Cruz County.

Requirements include command of newswriting fundamentals, basic photography, web and social media skills, and a functional knowledge of InDesign,

A complete job description can be found on our website https://patagoniaregionaltimes.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/ME-Job-Post.FINAL_.pdf. Applicants should submit a cover letter and resume via email by Nov. 18, 2025, to board president Carrie Lumia at carrietalumia@gmail.com.



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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Mearns quail need better management

Having spent the last 25 winters in Patagonia, I feel it is certainly our second home (Montana is our primary residence). Many of our long term wintering friends are in Patagonia to enjoy your town and the people, but also to pursue Mearns quail when populations are solid.

I appreciate the metal cutout sign on the west entrance to the town featuring Mearns quail, which signifies the cultural importance of Mearns quail to Patagonia. As you likely know, hunting Mearns quail is economically important to Patagonia, and of cultural significance too. We rent or buy houses or rv spaces, buy groceries, eat in restaurants, buy beer and attend events.

Virtually all of my quail hunting friends study the quail populations and care about their well being. We are concerned

Mearns quail are in serious trouble, no thanks to the recent vote by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission.

With a limited US range, hunters from around the country flock to the oak grasslands of southeast Arizona. Increasing in numbers, hunters bring trailers of bird dogs and some hire

outfitters.

Mearns populations are largely dependent on the strength of the monsoon season. Following a 2024 weak monsoon and a long hot summer, Mearns quail were seriously depressed. Some seasoned Mearns hunters chose to not hunt them in 2024/2025 due to seriously depressed populations.

This year's nearly nonexistent monsoon season means there will be nearly no Mearns reproduction again this summer/fall. AZGF biologists recognize these back-to-back nesting failures requires significant reduced hunting mortality to save the few Mearns remaining on the landscape.

AZGF biologists recommended a significant reduction in both the season length as well as the bag limits to give Mearns a chance to recover. While Patagonia Commissioner Buchanan and Pinetop Commissioner Kerr voted to support both changes, the other three Commissioners voted to keep the same liberal season and limits.

Unfortunately, the extremely low Mearns population will be even further decimated by retaining a long season and a liberal bag limit.

Greg Munther
Patagonia winter resident

TOWN COUNCIL NOTES

By PRT Staff Reporters

October 8, 2025

In Call to the Public, Spirit World 100 promoter Zander Ault invited the Mayor and Council to be involved with the event, adding that preparations were going as he'd previously reported on.

Patagonia Volunteer Fire & Rescue Chief Zay Hartigan gave a brief report on the department's calls for September: 11 medical, nine of which were in town and two of which needed transport; one brush fire; one smoke report; and one snake call. Staff participated in 180 hours of training under the EMT program, with four members doing four hours each of other training.

Under New Business, Mayor Andy Wood announced the Town's proclamation of October as "Breast Cancer Awareness Month."

Bill O'Brien's resignation from the Town Engineer position and from the Flood and Flow Committee was accepted, with thanks for his three and a half years of service to the Town.

Council voted to request a proposal from CPE Consultants to do design reconstruction work for the parking area

at the Fourth Ave. public restrooms, adding a parking space, and modifying the sidewalk and curbing accordingly.

October 22, 2025

There were no speakers for Call to Public.

Under Old Business, the sale of 2,370 square feet of Santa Rita Ave. right-of-way at 275 Duquesne Ave. for \$1,493.10 was approved. The strip is adjacent to Parcel Number 106-38-038, in Block D of the Subdivision Patagonia Townsite. The buyer—the Mahalik Trust M-1, with John Michael Mahalik as Executor—will pay survey costs.

In New Business, the number of council meetings per month will be reduced from two to one for November and December of this year, and the meeting time kept at 6pm. November's meeting will be on the 19th, and the December meeting on the 17th.

The mayor and council were empowered to sign on to a letter opposing the Trump Administration's gutting of the BLM Lands Rule, which protects land conservation, recreation, and clean air and water on federal land.

The Patagonia Regional Times encourages everyone to comment publicly on the events and times in which we live. Letters must be signed by the author and include town of residence. Letters are limited to 200 words. PRT reserves the right to edit all submissions for language, length, and content. Please send your letter to editor@prtnews.org.

Adiós, Regalo



Contributed photo

Regalo, the Harshaw donkey, passed away in October.

By Terry Noel

It is with great sadness I inform you all of the passing of the Harshaw donkey, "Regalo." He passed away on Oct. 15, 2025.

Regalo's Harshaw story began 17 years ago, when my cousin Frank "Tarzan" Soto called my parents, Felix and Josefine Soto, and asked them if they wanted a donkey. Someone had given him to Tarzan a few days prior, but

Tarzan had no way of taking care of a donkey in Tucson.

My parents gladly accepted him and my cousins brought the donkey in a horse trailer to his new forever home in Harshaw with my parents and their cattle. He was already an adult, so we are not sure what his actual age was.

My dad gave the donkey the name "Regalo" because he was given to them as a gift. Regalo was also known by the cousins as El burro de Tarzan,

or other funny names. Others called him Frank, or Pedro the donkey.

Regalo loved hanging out with the cows, a couple of the bulls, and he especially liked being near the younger calves. He was their protector. He always walked behind them and stood watch when they lay down to rest. That was his family and even though the cattle didn't let him eat with them, he was always nearby.

Time passed and a few years ago my parents had to make the very hard decision to sell the cattle. That left Regalo very sad and alone. It was heartbreaking for my parents, but it had to be done.

Through the years so many of us have enjoyed him, whether it was seeing him on the side of the road as we passed by, taking a picture of him from far away, or up close as you fed him an apple or carrot.

One day a lady came up to my mom and offered her money to take pictures of Regalo. My mom told her that she did not charge for pictures but the lady insisted and told my mom that if ever anyone offered her mon-

ey, she should take it.

I believe Regalo's picture is in a lot of places, as my parents saw a lot of people stopping on the side of the road to take a picture of him over the last 17 years. So many people have given directions to family, friends and delivery drivers with Regalo as their marker.

But his story does not need to end. We would enjoy it if you shared your pictures or memories of Regalo with us. Email: terrynoel77@gmail.com

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New Teachers at Patagonia Schools



Priscilla Carrasco

By Sondra Porter

The fifth grade has a new first year teacher, but she isn't new to Patagonia Elementary. Priscilla Carrasco has been working at the school for three years now, and she is extremely pleased to have her own classroom this year.

Carrasco started as a paraprofessional, and then last year worked as the pre-K instructor. This is her first official year as a teacher. She is excited about working with the fifth grade.

"I completely fell in love with the kids and curriculum," she said. "They are just getting smarter and the teaching is so rewarding."

Originally from Rio Rico, Carrasco moved to Patagonia after high school. She was encouraged to apply for a position at the school by her partner, who is a Patagonia Union High School graduate, and Anna Coleman of the Patagonia Youth Enrichment Center. Carrasco got the job, and that job eventually led to the opportunity to continue her education and become a teacher.

"I feel like I am living the American dream," she said. "One thing I really like about Patagonia is how open and welcoming everyone has been, not just at the school. Everywhere we go, people here know my daughter [Mylah, age 3], and talk to her. I am imagining how nice it will be for my daughter to go to pre-school here."

Coleman, runner-up for Santa Cruz County Teacher of the Year last year, is pleased that Carrasco followed through on her suggestions.

"While I watched Priscilla work with youth at the youth center and got to know her quite well, I had no hesitation recommending that she pursue her teaching degree and apply to the local schools," Coleman said. "She is dedicated and passionate about young people, recognizing their potential, and holding them to high standards, while working at their own academic levels. Priscilla believes in youth and I foresee her doing great things in the education field."

Patagonia Schools Superintendent Kenny Hayes agrees with Coleman. "Priscilla told us in the interview process three years ago that she wanted to be a teacher someday," Hayes said. "She has worked very hard to get to this point and I believe that she is going to have a long and successful career at the Patagonia School Districts."

Carrasco is teaching at the school as part of the Arizona Pathways certification program, which allows individuals to teach while completing college requirements for a full Arizona Standard Professional Teaching Certificate.

See Carrasco, p.16



Michael Tackett

By Sondra Porter

Patagonia has a new, highly-qualified, high school science teacher who brings years of experience to the position. Michael Tackett, a 26-year veteran of the profession, possesses multiple certifications and degrees. And he brings fresh enthusiasm to the job.

"I have checked out Patagonia for years," he explained. "I thought this would be a great place to teach, and it is."

Tackett holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Arizona State University and a Master of Education in Bilingual Multicultural Studies from Northern Arizona University.

Prior to this school year, Tackett spent three years mentoring teachers as a field supervisor for iTeach Arizona. The program helps individuals with a bachelor's degree get certified for specific subject areas. All teachers must meet specific criteria set by the state of Arizona to teach a subject. Tackett's role was to conduct classroom observation and give feedback and guidance to individuals enrolled in the program.

Tackett taught in Santa Cruz County for the bulk of his career, mostly at Nogales High School where he served as Chair of the Science Department and taught chemistry, biology, and physical science classes until 2022. At Patagonia High, he is doing it all with a full schedule that includes Leadership Class, freshman Biology, sophomore Chemistry, junior Physics and a senior class that has so far included Anatomy, Physiology and Robotics.

"I feel like a novice," Tackett confessed. "At Nogales I only had to prepare for two or three different subjects, but here each class period needs individual preparations. This is tricky for setting up and taking down lab projects."

"Mr. Tackett is an outstanding addition to our staff," according to fellow high school teacher and Athletic Director Nate Porter. "It is a real pleasure to work with him. He readily volunteers his time after school to help us with the volleyball scoring. He is a good fit for PUHS."

One of the exciting things Tackett has introduced to students is the MESA (Math, Engineering, Science Achievement) program administered through the University of Arizona (UA). The MESA program is based on design challenges, with student teams able to enter regional and statewide competitions. Tackett is offering MESA as a class two days a week.

"This schedule is perfect to make it happen," he said. "In spring, teams will spend a day at UA competing."



Photos by Sondra Porter

Gardenia Moffett

By Sondra Porter

Gardenia Moffett is a new hire at Patagonia Elementary and teaching first grade for the first time in her career. Even though Moffett is new to the school, she is a longtime resident of Arizona and has lived in Elgin for the past seven years. She and her husband co-pastor the Vine Church in Sonoita.

Previously Moffett taught second grade at Village Meadow Elementary in Sierra Vista. She also subbed in local schools, hoping to find a position. She is happy to be working closer to home and with a smaller class size. Thirteen students are enrolled in her class currently.

"Patagonia is great!" she said. "The staff works so well together. Everyone is willing to share. Teaching here is a cooperative effort with all the elementary teachers and administrators working together to do the best for the students. I feel like I am home."

Moffett's background is in communications and journalism. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Broadcast Journalism and a Master's Degree in Mass Communications, both from Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism.

Patagonia Schools Superintendent Kenny Hayes is pleased to have her aboard.

"She completed the Arizona Pathways program last year and is doing a great job with our 1st grade students," he said. "Gardenia is new to the teacher profession, but she has experience in many other fields. This is an advantage for her."

Moffett is particularly pleased with the school's unified focus on literacy. This year teachers are implementing a new program from Pre-K through 5th called Haggerty Phonics Awareness. This is an evidence-based curriculum that explicitly provides systematic oral phonics awareness lessons daily.

"We are building a consistency between grades," Moffett said. "I am learning the strengths and weaknesses of the kids and seeing great progress. Literacy really is key to everything that follows in education and life."

"Teaching is my mission," she continued. "I saw a specific need for public school teachers. I believe it is a calling. I am a life-long learner, and I want to pass on the love of learning to others."

On the weekends, Moffett can be found working with her husband and Co-Pastor Tom Moffett at the Vine Church. Both Tom and Gardenia are licensed ministers of the Foursquare Church. Gardenia has a varied ministry background, which includes women's ministry, children's choreographer, hospitality and community outreach. The Moffetts are parents of a large blended family, eight in total.

"Everything I do in school and at church is about loving the community," she explained.

Great Trees of Eastern Santa Cruz County

The Cottonwood at the Lochiel Schoolhouse



Artwork by Angie Jessup

The cottonwood tree in front of the Lochiel Schoolhouse holds special memories of her mother for the author.

By Angie Soto Jessup

It is through our memories that we preserve the past and continue to give it life. It is through my own memory that I relive stories told to me by my mother, Carmen Astorga Soto.

Mom's stories of her childhood, told to me when I was a child, created vivid scenes in my own head that have endured to this day. Stories of her leading her brothers and sisters on the walk to school, seeing grazing cows, a skunk crossing their path. But it was her fond memory of the playground at the school that always brought smiles and laughter to both of us.

Visiting the restored Red Schoolhouse in Lochiel nowadays there aren't many signs of how clear or big their playground was in my mother's time. Yet, here is this nice huge cottonwood that must be at least 100 years old or more, still standing tall and strong by the dirt road in front of the school (with its tall sister, its companion in her own beauty, standing across the road). This tree witnessed many years of schoolkids, including my mother, enjoying innocent, happy times: boys

and girls playing baseball, kids chasing each other, children laughing.

In her early childhood Mom's family had moved north from Imuris, Sonora, settling in Lochiel. Her father worked as a ranch hand for the San Rafael Cattle company, which expanded to both sides of the border. The one-room schoolhouse served the local children of ranchers and miners working in the mines along the Patagonia Mountains just west of the valley.

Life in rural Arizona was never dull for Mom. There was school and chores. There were responsibilities helping Mrs. Sharp at the main ranch house with kids approximately her own age, plus caring for brothers and sisters, and later taking employment as a waitress and going to local dances.

She was in her twenties when she met her future husband from nearby Harshaw. Love followed, but World War II separated the young couple.

While serving in the United States Navy, Miguel (Mike) deployed to the South Pacific. Prior to his departure his parents took their future daughter in-law in to live with them. Shortly after returning home from service to his

country, Miguel and Carmen married on January 11, 1947.

The couple stayed in Harshaw to raise their young family. In 1956, returning from a community turkey shoot, a tragic auto accident involving the family sent Carmen to the hospital in Nogales with serious injuries. Recovery took more than six months. During this time Mike moved the children to Nogales to stay with relatives while their mother recuperated. From Nogales the family made a final move to Tucson, where Mike and Carmen raised seven kids.

Harshaw was always home, though. Mom and Dad often took us kids to visit our grandparents there. We would play outside all day long, picking quince from the fruit trees. A rusted frame of an old jalopy sat by the ravine, and I would climb it and pretend to be driving. Not knowing better, I ran around the open field licking blocks of salt meant for the cows or climbing the hill away from the house, using the fine dirt and loose sand as a natural slide.

Often Dad would take us for a ride. He would drive the loop heading from the homestead towards the Harshaw townsite where our home used to sit. We'd drive the dirt road leading towards Norman Hale's ranch, passing the empty lot where our home had once stood, before it was demolished by the Forest Service. Then we'd drive past the Harshaw school grounds, where a sad-looking swing and seesaw showed their age, while the church was still bright with its white walls. Reaching Norman Hale's, Dad would point out the peacocks and wave to people he knew. Then we'd turn around. A stop at the historical cemetery across the road was next. We climbed the hill to the gravesites to pay re-



Photo Courtesy of Angie Soto Jessup

Carmen and Mike Soto, circa 1940-1946

spect to our ancestors and baby brother. We mingled, viewing headstones, tying names with family relationships.

The drive would resume, taking the loop towards the old mines, Dad pointing and stopping to look for deer or coatimundis. Further, a memorial paying tribute to Friar Marcos de Niza stood tall along the side of the road. And finally, we'd reach Mom's little schoolhouse in Lochiel. We'd ask her again to tell us of when she used to play baseball out in the playground. A story which never changed, always brought laughter, and never got old.

The last time I took that same drive with my own family we, too, stopped at the schoolhouse. From keeping up with the local news, I knew the schoolhouse had been renovated. Now we saw it. We peeked through the windows. The freshly painted walls and new floors brought the room back to life. As it did then, as it does now, it brings tears to my eyes picturing Mom as a child in the classroom, of her playing baseball out in the yard. Remembering how her eyes would light up as her own memories took her back.

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Gardner Canyon Trail #143



Photo by Wayne Tomasi

The Gardner Canyon Trail crosses Gardner Creek as it enters the Mt. Wrightson wilderness area.

By Wayne Tomasi

If you are seeking an isolated and seldom used route to the upper reaches of the Santa Rita Mountains, the Gardner Canyon Trail is what you are looking for. The Trail is officially 4.4 miles long and stretches from the wilderness boundary in upper Gardner Canyon to the Super Trail, four-tenths of a mile below Baldy Saddle. On Baldy Saddle, the Super Trail junctions with the Crest Trail providing access to Mount Wrightson, the Old Baldy Trail, and several other upper elevation routes.

The Gardner Canyon Trail is one of the shortest routes to the summit of Mount Wrightson and is named after Thomas Gardner, an early settler to the area.

There are two ways to reach the Gardner Canyon Trailhead. One requires walking approximately half a mile more in each direction but eliminates driving several miles of challenging road. With the appropriate vehicle and a sturdy set of tires, driving directly to the trailhead in Gardner Canyon is probably the best choice. To reach the trailhead, turn off Route 83 onto FR-92 (Gardner Canyon Road). Drive west on FR-92 approximately six miles to the junction of FR-92, FR-4084, and FR-785. Turn left onto FR-785 and drive approximately five miles up Gardner Canyon where the road ends in a large parking area. The beginning of the trail is accessed through a hiker's gate at 5920 feet elevation.

An alternative way to access the trailhead is to follow FR-92 approximately nine miles to the trailhead for the Cave Canyon Trail. Hike up the Cave Canyon Trail approximately 0.2 miles where the trail splits: The Link Trail is to the left and the Cave Canyon Trail to the right. Take the left fork and walk 0.4 miles to the Gardner Canyon Trailhead.

The Gardner Canyon Trail scales the eastern slope of the Santa Rita Mountains, passing through country virtually void of people, especially when compared to the more accessible trails on the western slopes. Before the Forest Service closed the last mile of FR-785, the Gardner Canyon Trail was the shortest and most direct route to the summit of Mount Wrightson. Many people think the Gardner Canyon Trail has more expansive and impressive views than any of the west side trails, although the Gardner Canyon Trail is more isolated and its trailhead is more difficult to reach.

The trek begins through a hiker's gate and follows an abandoned road-bed for one mile to an open hiker's gate at the end of a large campsite. The mile-long section of old road gains little elevation. However, there are splendid views of Mount Wrightson as well as glimpses of Ditch Mountain, Gravesite Ridge, and the area in the vicinity of Tunnel Spring.

Almost immediately after passing through the open gate, the trail crosses Gardner Creek and enters the Mount Wrightson Wilderness Area.



Photo by Wayne Tomasi

The view of Mt. Wrightson from the Gardner Canyon Trail.

After a quarter mile, the trail leaves the creek, the grade steepens, and the route leads away from the primary drainage. As the path continues climbing, the surrounding vegetation changes, primarily with the appearance of ponderosa pine. The trail is well-groomed, and the tread is protected by strategically placed rain-deflector logs and an occasional stone retaining wall.

Approximately two miles from the trailhead, the path reaches a clearing on an exposed saddle where Walker Basin Trail #136 enters from the left. Beyond the saddle, the trail begins to switchback up a steep southeast-facing ridge with exceptional views of every imaginable landmark south and east of the Santa Rita Mountains. On a clear day, the Sierra Mariquita (ladybug) Mountains in Mexico are visible to the south beyond the San Rafael Valley.

About three-fourths of a mile above Walker Saddle, the route passes through an area canopied by silverleaf oak trees and the easy walking changes to difficult as the trail passes above the head of the main arm of Gardner Canyon and begins a steep ascent up the final ridgeline. The path here is

cluttered with sinister-looking burnt trees lying across the trail. None of the trees present a serious obstacle, although care must be taken not to lose the trail. After a dozen or more switchbacks, the track levels off at the edge of a small bowl-shaped hollow that is a magnificent place to rest and eat a snack. The forest floor is dotted with thousands of ponderosa pine saplings, ferns, and wild grasses, indicating that normalcy is slowly returning to what was once a peaceful sanctuary.

The trail continues and swings around the meadow to a saddle below the main block of the Santa Rita Crest. From here the junction with the Super Trail is only 200 yards, a few switchbacks, and 300 vertical feet away. However, take your time as this short section is one of the steepest parts of the trail and the tread is covered with loose dirt, pine needles, and small stones.

The Gardner Canyon Trail officially ends where it meets the Super Trail at 8400 feet. From the saddle it is only 0.4 miles to Baldy Saddle and another 0.9 miles to the summit of Mount Wrightson.

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Leaks (Cont.)

leaving the parking lot. “There are no blueprints that I can find. We’ve had engineers come out to look at it and they said they won’t touch it, there’s no specs on this building, and it’s rotten. There’s nothing we can do to help you.”

The bigger concern for district administrators and students goes well beyond forfeiting a volleyball match or the occasional leak. Significant repairs are needed throughout the Patagonia campus, which serves grades Kindergarten through 12, and funding for such repairs is unavailable due to politics and bureaucratic red tape.

“Every building needs a new roof,” Young said, noting that almost every classroom on the campus has a leak.

School facility repairs in Arizona are funded by the State Facilities Board (SFB). The SFB is limited in what it can fund, however, because its budget is set by the Arizona legislature, which has a long tradition of underfunding public schools in the state.

Funds are allocated to schools through a competitive grant process, a system set up to meet the needs of the more than 2000 public schools. For fiscal year 2026, the legislature appropriated \$200 million to the Building Renewal Grant fund at SFB. According to the School Facilities Oversight Board’s August 2025 report, there were 738 grants awaiting funding, with an estimated cost of \$338.3 million. This leaves a \$138.3 million gap between the money allocated by the state and the requests for funding from schools.

The SFB was created in 1998 after the Arizona Supreme Court declared, in 1994, that the state’s system of funding public education was unconstitutional. Previously all funding for schools had been provided primarily by secondary property taxes, which meant that funding was dependent on the property values of the individual districts. The SFB was formed with the intention that it would provide more equitable and uniform funding for all

schools. The legislature, however, has failed to fully fund the program.

In 2013, Arizona lawmakers implemented the competitive grant system so that districts had to compete for the limited pool of money. “The result was two-fold: not only was there less money available to schools, but there was no longer a clear benchmark for what adequate funding should be, limiting scrutiny of how much lawmakers were shortchanging schools,” wrote Jim Small in the Arizona Mirror on August 14, 2025.

In 2017, four school districts, the Arizona School Boards Association, the Arizona Education Association, and the Arizona School Administrators filed a lawsuit against the state legislature, arguing that the state’s method of funding of the schools was unconstitutional because it violated the state constitution’s requirement that there be a “general and uniform” school system. The plaintiffs argued that the present system led to underfunding, especially for schools in less affluent districts. Plaintiffs estimated that Arizona public schools have been underfunded by \$6-7 billion dollars over the past 25 years.

It took eight years for the case to move forward, but in August 2025, Maricopa County Superior Judge Dewain Fox ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, saying that the state’s model for funding school facilities is inadequate, and that “local wealth largely determines school quality.” The Arizona legislature has already announced that they will be appealing the ruling.

Meanwhile, the Patagonia district resides squarely in the lower end of the “wealth” scale, and the district’s students pay the price.

Superintendent Kenny Hayes said in addition to the gym’s leaky roof, its electrical and plumbing systems, installed in the 1970s, need replacing.

“Our gym is at the ‘End of Useful Life,’” he said, referencing a term used by the State Facilities Board. “No roofing company will even touch our gym roof because of how bad it is. There’s



Photo by Marion Vendituoli

A leak in the gym roof has damaged the ceiling in the weight room.

not a company that can provide us with the things we need to fix it, so we need a whole new facility.”

SFB conducted an assessment of the building, however, and does not agree that the gym should be replaced. The school has challenged this assessment, pointing out several factual errors in the assessment.

PUHS’s Michael Young said that two years ago, the plumbing had to be shut down when some of the cast iron pipes collapsed. The school was told that it would cost over \$100,000 just to replace the plumbing in the building. “I figured why should we pour more money into something that is rotting around us?” Young said. “We’d just be putting lipstick on a pig here.”

Patagonia art teacher Cassina Farley has been dealing with a leak in her art room for several years. When it rains, the water runs down through a light socket in the ceiling. “I get a bucket, I put it under the drip and then I get angry about the fact that our kids deserve better,” she said.

“These kids in this small school get it from every angle. They got it on the county level with the money stolen from them by the former treasurer, they get it from the state level from the legislators, in this case through the State Facilities Board, and they get it on the federal level with all the programs being cut.”

Mold is another big concern for both Hayes and Young. The cafeteria is particularly worrisome to Young. “In the cafeteria the water is penetrating into the block and the block is degrading,” he said. “It’s coming right through, and you can see staining all throughout the building.”

In 2018, the school received a building renewal grant from SFB to replace old swamp coolers with new HVAC units, and ever since then the roof has leaked.

“SFB is the one that signed off on the project, but the company never did

it per plan,” Young said. “[SFB] sued the company, but the company went out of business, and we’re left with the leaks. It needs to be completely redone. We need to pick the AC units up, redo all the flashing that they put up under the AC units, but then the roof itself is also failing because it’s just old and it’s a flat roof.”

Several of the tiles in the cafeteria ceiling were removed because of fear that they might fall when the roof leaks, but, according to Young, a representative from the State Fire Marshal’s office said the tiles, which are a fire retardant, needed to be put back in place. “When they get wet, I don’t want to put the health and safety of the children at risk of those falling, so we haven’t put them back up,” Young said.

Dan Erickson, superintendent of the Sonoita School District, testified at the recent hearing regarding the state’s funding model for school repairs, citing his experience as superintendent of Bowie Schools, where they had documented 17 leaks. “Every time it rained, you could go in the auditorium and watch the rain traveling down the side of a wall inside a building,” he told the PRT.

The Elgin School is in better shape, Erickson said. “We’re in a better spot than some schools because we have a newer facility and we do a good job keeping it up as much as we can.”

Erickson recognizes that the SFB program is underfunded. “They’re never going to have enough money to do what every school needs,” he said.

Arizona State Representative Lupe Diaz (R-Benson), who represents District 19, which includes Patagonia, Sonoita and Elgin, believes that the Patagonia School District should consider a bond election and not depend solely on the state for repairs. (The PRT also reached out to District 19 Representative Gail Griffin and State Senator

See Leaks p.14



Photo by Marion Vendituoli

Leaks in the roof of the cafeteria have damaged paint on the building’s exterior.

Notes From SEFD

Not everyone has assured fire service



By Eddie McArthur

Fire protection in Arizona is provided by municipalities, fire districts or subscription services. People in those areas are assured of a response to fires and other emergencies.

But what about outside of those areas? In Eastern Santa Cruz County, in 2025, there are large pockets of land where there is no assured fire service. On the map to the right, the large green areas are public lands that surround us. Both Sonoita-Elgin Fire District (SEFD) and Patagonia Volunteer Fire & Rescue (PVFR) are tinted. The tan areas are those that are not part of any fire district or department.

While local fire districts and agencies currently do all they can to service these pockets, this becomes more challenging as changing weather has led to a year-round "fire season" and the cost of fire service has skyrocketed. Response depends on the ability and willingness of the surrounding agencies to provide service without compensation.

Sonoita Elgin Fire District (SEFD) or the Patagonia Volunteer Fire and Rescue (PVFR) are not compensated for fighting fires in these 'pockets' because property owners in these uncovered areas don't pay fire district taxes beyond the minimal statewide Fire District Assistance Tax.

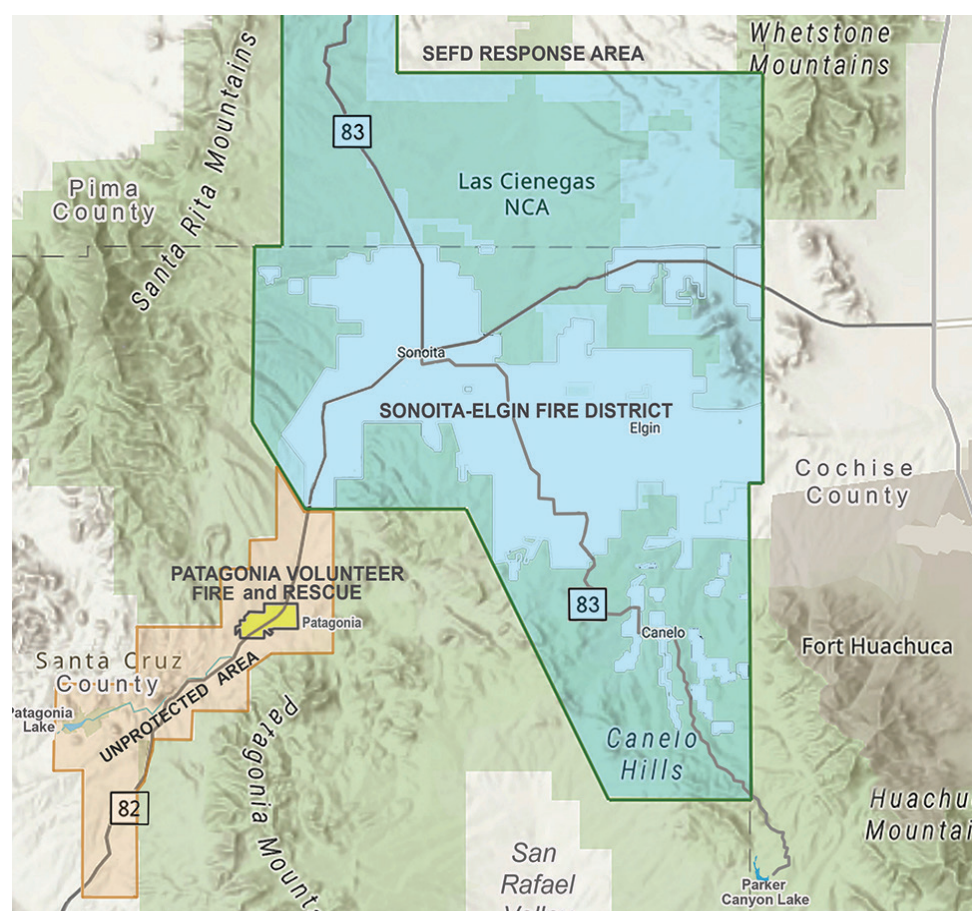
Fire districts, like SEFD, are special taxing districts formed under Arizona law which exist where property owners have created one and agreed to fund it via taxes. In some rural areas,

there are not enough people to fund a district, or residents never agreed to either form a district or join an existing one. Other areas are covered by a group of volunteers or rely on a subscription to an existing district. Some areas have no real plan.

It might seem like a good deal to not have to pay taxes for fire protection, but as we wrote in last issue's column, property insurance is becoming increasingly expensive to obtain in rural areas. If a property falls outside the 3 - 5-mile radius of a responding agency, as do most of the pockets without assured coverage, obtaining or keeping affordable fire insurance is more difficult.

So what can property owners who find themselves in these pockets do to obtain assured fire protection going forward? There are three alternatives:

- 1) They can form their own fire district with other non-covered property owners in their area. The new district must be made up of contiguous parcels in an unincorporated area, and must be capable of supporting services. The process to establish a new district includes submitting a petition to the County Board of Supervisors to form a new fire district, which must be signed by at least 50% of the property owners, and represent at least 50% of the assessed value of the area. The petition has to include a map and a legal description of the proposed new district. As a practical matter, any proposed new district must be able to fund equipment and personnel from



Map by Robert Gay

Map of Eastern Santa Cruz County showing coverage areas for Sonoita-Elgin Fire District (blue), Patagonia Volunteer Fire & Rescue (yellow) and areas with no fire coverage (tan).

scratch—a very difficult and expensive proposition.

- 2) They may join an existing fire district that is willing and able to service the additional area. Property owners must file a petition for annexation signed by at least 50% of the owners, and representing at least 50% of the assessed value. This petition is submitted to the existing district's board of directors. After a public meeting, the board may vote to approve the annexation. The documents are then submitted to the county board of supervisors to formally record the annexation. That area will then begin paying the tax rate of the existing district and

receive services through that agency.

- 3) They may seek subscription services from an existing district. This can be even more complicated as it is dependent upon an agreed-upon rate for such services and the willingness of individual property owners to pay that rate. Unlike the first two options, there is no vote of the area, so conceivably one home might "buy" coverage and the next door neighbor opt out.

In addition, individual property owners that are contiguous to an existing fire district can ask to join that district or subscribe to the district's services. This is contingent upon the

See SEFD, p.16



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Glimpses Into Our Past

The Solano Family

By Alison Bunting

Brothers Cosme (1856-1943) and Refugio (1858-1922) Solano arrived in Arizona in the late 1880s. Both took advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862 to establish themselves in Arizona Territory.

Cosme farmed/ranched on 320 acres in the San Rafael Valley, east of Lochiel. He married Natividad Durazo (1866-1960) in 1887, and they had ten children—eight daughters and two sons. Cosme remained in the area until his death.

Their eldest son Filiberto “Bert” worked for Colonel William Greene’s Cananea Cattle Company and lived in Cananea, Mexico. By 1930 Natividad was living in California with two of their youngest daughters, and son Cosmo M. was nearby, operating his auto repair shop.

Refugio married Elisa Fraijo (1868-1965) in Santa Cruz, Mexico in 1887. The 1900 U.S. Census records the couple living in Greaterville with their son Yndalecio (1894-1964), known as Y, and daughter Inez (1898-1982). Refugio was a storekeeper and served as an election judge in the Greaterville precinct.

By 1910 the family included seven children, and they were farming in Elgin on the 160-acre homestead

Refugio received title to in 1914.

Refugio and Elisa, Y and Inez each filed homestead claims for additional property about 1918. Y and his parents claimed 860 acres in the Rain Valley area of Pima County. Inez claimed 640 acres nearby, in Cochise County.

The 1920 census documents a significant change in Refugio’s family. Elisa and most of her children are living with Y and his wife Josephine Escaig (1897-1978).

In 1920 Y was shot by a neighbor, Tom Larrieu. Y survived and Larrieu was convicted and imprisoned. [Arizona Daily Star 7/23/1920].

There is no further record of Refugio until his death from kidney disease in 1922 at the Ft. Huachuca Hospital. He is buried in the Elgin Cemetery near his home.

In 1924 Elisa, Y and Josephine sold their Rain Valley property to Louis Sands, who established today’s Sands Ranch. They received “\$10 and other valuable considerations” for each 320-acre parcel. [Pima County Book of Deeds, 99, p. 337]. It’s likely that Inez’s property was also purchased by Sands, as it lies within the Sands Ranch boundaries.

Y and Josephine had eight children. By 1930 the family had moved to Tucson where Y continued to work in



Photo Courtesy of Family Search

Cosme Solano (seated) and his children, 1913. From left: Betty, Evelyn, Cosmo M., Filiberto, Sophie, Hazel (on Sophie’s lap) and Phyllis (on Cosme’s lap).

ranchoing and as a train inspector.

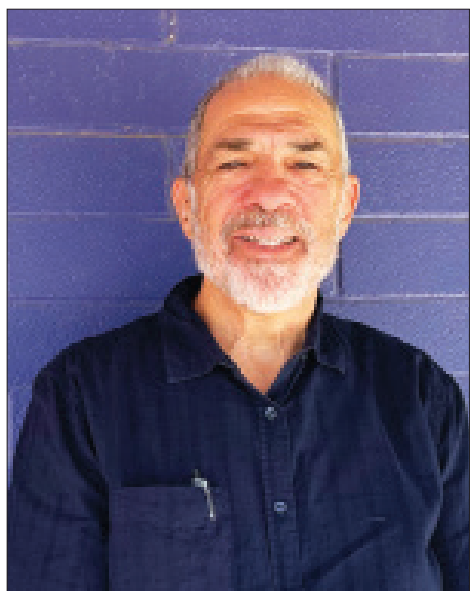
Inez married Arla Harkey (1882-1939), a Cochise County rancher, in 1921 and they had one daughter, Clemmie. Inez remained in Cochise

County until she moved to California in the late 1940s to live with Clemmie and Clemmie’s husband.

Alison Bunting can be contacted at alisbunting@gmail.com.

STARSTRUCK

The Pillars of Creation



By Harold Meckler

The Pillars of Creation, some 7,000 light years away in the Eagle Nebula, seem to race outward towards open space, towards the freedom and peace that the unknown teases. Born from the radiation of young, hot stars deep within the cloud that gave birth to them, the Pillars are the embodiment of life itself.

Like children, they have changed the very environment that created them. They have become their own

entity, one that is constantly changing. Their majesty has eclipsed that of the parent cloud, proving that there

is but one direction in which everything moves: forward.

Very accidentally, I recently came across a 1000 piece puzzle of the Pillars at a shop in Bisbee. For days I hunched over a folding table. I started at the edges and then placed some of the more obvious pieces. I finished a few days later, staring at what I knew was already a dated image. Just in the past year or so NASA has released a combined photo from the Webb and Hubble Telescopes that gives the Pillars the look of a hand stretching forth. Still, I was quite happy at what I had put together and sent shots of it to family and friends.

What I didn’t send was any other information. I didn’t note that the Eagle Nebula is located in the Serpens Constellation, a faint and drawn out series of stars that winds from Corona Borealis and ends not far from Altair, one of the vertices of the Summer Triangle. I didn’t mention that one could follow the Milky Way from high in the sky to Sagittarius knowing that the Pillars are roughly at the half-way point between those stops.

I really didn’t think it mattered to anyone that the Eagle Nebula is mas-

sive, incredibly old, and is one of the most magnificent star nurseries in the heavens. I doubted that adding that the French astronomer Charles Messier first observed it in 1784—calling it a “cluster of small stars, suffused with a faint glow”—would spark any additional interest. I certainly didn’t think that calling it Messier 16 would add any relevance.

I figured that the image itself said enough, and elicited all the wonder that anyone would need. And yet Ryan, one of my grandkids, responded with a question. He wanted to know about the composition of the clouds, the Pillars themselves. I laughed when I read his text. I had never given it any thought, though it really was at the core of it all. So, I looked it up. They are made of molecular hydrogen. I wrote him back with the answer, and a whole new sense of wonder washed over me.

There are some of us, I realized, who see more, who always long for and need something extra, who are not satisfied with the same things that seem to satisfy others because, for them, there is always another question to be asked, always another path to consider. And, sometimes, it must be that their desire to go further becomes frustrating when they can’t quite get to where they need to be, or learn

what they need to learn. I knew right then how wrong I had always been about the wonder of astronomy.

It is not that spectacles like the Pillars of Creation exist, but rather what they tell us about ourselves. Our reactions, our quests for more knowledge, our desire to understand are unique within each of us. What we see and feel comes from and through our own personal lens. The observer, then, is even more important than what is being observed. Astronomy is not about space. It is about us and the range of our need to grasp what we often can’t fully comprehend. In that regard, it mirrors life on Earth in every way.

It’s illuminating how a simple, direct question—especially from a grandchild—can reorient one’s perspective. We see so many things so differently, and we respond to our world and to the stars above in so very many different ways. There’s no value judgment attached to that. Just the opposite. From now on I will continuously remind myself of those two seemingly mundane truths because, clearly, they are anything but mundane. They allow us to question everything, but also to accept that, often, there are no easy answers and, sometimes, to understand that there are no answers at all.

Harold Meckler can be contacted at byaakov54@gmail.com

Pastor (Cont.)

Methodist pastor licensing program.

That first fast lasted ten days, when she was 30 years old, which, interestingly enough, is the same age as Jesus when he started his ministry after 40 days of fasting and internal struggles in the desert.

"When I surrendered my need for being in control, my need for doing it my way, that's when I started my spiritual path," said Katrina. "Fasting wasn't just the means to find the answer, it was the answer."

Katrina has done fasting ever since. Each day, she takes the OMAD (one meal a day) approach, and once a month she does a fast lasting three to four days. She likes to talk about it because she wants others to experience the joy and clarity that can come from a spiritual practice.

Katrina explained, "In the Methodist tradition, fasting is understood as a spiritual discipline—a way of drawing closer to God by setting aside something that usually sustains us, so we can be sustained instead by God's presence. It's not about punishment or deprivation, but about creating space for grace. Fasting reminds us that our true dependence is not on food, comfort, or control, but on God's provision. It's a physical way of expressing an inward hunger for righteousness and deeper communion with God."

Last month, Katrina initiated a "fasting about money" challenge as part of the 21-Day Stewardship Season at PCUMC.

"It wasn't just about spending less — it was about shifting our mindset from ownership to stewardship," Katrina said. "Participants were invited to refrain from unnecessary spending and to reflect daily on what it means to trust God with their finances. Just as traditional fasting brings awareness to how much we rely on food, this financial fast revealed how easily money can take hold of our hearts."

"By pausing our usual spending habits, we learned to see God's blessings more clearly, practice gratitude, and become more intentional about generosity. It was a spiritual reset—



Photo by Binx Selby

Pastor Katrina believes that fasting "creates a space for grace."

not just for our wallets, but for our souls."

Two days after moving to Patagonia in July to take her first post as pastor, this "small-town girl," as Katrina smilingly calls herself, was already declaring to people how much she loved the town.

"I could see myself becoming a part of the community," she said. "The cashier at the market knew my name before I introduced myself! And I was so excited to see that 'Community' is part of this church's name!"

Due to unforeseen circumstances, Katrina is the third pastor in one and a half years at the church's post. She's looking long-term. Katrina's younger sister Olivia has joined her in Patagonia, as Katrina juggles working in her half-time pastor position at PUMC and doing graduate studies for her Master of Divinity degree through Claremont University in California.

"I love doing this work," Katrina said. "It's a new way of thinking of how to live life—not trying to shoot for success, but something instead to pour my life into. It stretches me, makes me go out of my comfort zone. Not only receiving love from others, but building relationships with others, reaching out."

"Not like a party girl," she laughs.

"I'm not the kind of pastor trying to pull people into church to read the Bible. I'm an action person. I like to think my experiences emanate from me, the person I've become today."

"I realize I always had it in me. I just needed to sharpen. Through my love I show people who I am—and who they can be."

Leaks (Cont.)

David Gowan for this article, but neither legislator responded to our inquiries.)

"It's worth noting that neither school district [Patagonia High School and Patagonia Elementary School] has gone out for a bond in recent years, and they should look at that," Diaz said in a phone interview. "And neither have they gone for a voter approved override ... which means there's some things that they can do as well."

Both these options would have to be approved by voters in the school district. Bonds, which are used mainly to fund capital expenses, are debts that are paid back to the investors by the taxpayers of the district. A tax override would allow the district to increase taxes beyond the limits set by the state.

In response to Diaz's comments, Patagonia High School Board President Ron Pitt said the state constitution places the responsibility for maintenance of school facilities on the State Legislature, and that responsibility has not been met, resulting in school facilities all over the state are in various states of disrepair.

"I believe that bonding should be used by local districts to construct new facilities and not for repairs," Pitt said. "Overrides should be used when state and local funding is inadequate to fund annual operational budgets. Current operational budgets for both districts are adequate."

Pitt also pointed out that it would be illegal to use elementary district funds on buildings owned by the high school district.

Superintendent Hayes said it would be irresponsible to ask local taxpayers to approve a bond initiative for facility

repairs.

"For a community as small as Patagonia is, it would have to be such a large amount of money to fix all the problems that need fixing at the school that it would be an undue burden on the taxpayers of our district," he said.

"It's sad that representatives for the state of Arizona can't change from campaigning to actually governing once they are in office. Ideologies such as this are the reason that Arizona ranks the lowest in all of the 50 states for educational funding."

Erickson believes that one solution to school funding shortages would be to limit the state Empowerment Scholarship program, which diverts funding from public schools to pay for voucher programs. "If you would take even half of that money, \$500 million, out of the voucher system and put it into schools, we would have enough money to fix up schools all around the state," he said.

Meanwhile, Young has no idea when there will be funds available to fix all the leaks at the Patagonia campus. For now, tarps and buckets seem to be their only recourse.

His biggest worry is that one of the roofs on campus may cave in. "We go to [SFB] facilities meetings and they're always after us. They keep drilling through us that you have to do roof inspections, you have to go through and ensure that they're safe. Well, we are, but when there's no backing, what do you do?"

"They showed us [pictures of] roofs that had completely collapsed in the Valley area and that's my biggest fear. Are we next on that list for that whole roof to cave in and just pray that there aren't children in there at the time? It's hard to sleep at night."

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BUFORD HAYES PIPPIN III

JUNE 30, 1949 – SEPTEMBER 29, 2025

The One known as Buford Hayes Pippin III has dis-integrated
Buford lived 76 years. Only memory survives his death.

Father of daughter Katie who is an organic farmer, and of son Charles, senior VP at CBRE Brokerage Firm, and grandfather of Jameson and a soon-to-be-born baby girl.

Buford passed away peacefully, leaving behind a legacy of adventure, creativity, and love that will resonate in the hearts of those who knew him.

Like us, he had his joys, sorrows, and revelations.

Throughout his life, Buford was a true renaissance man, embracing numerous passions and pursuits. From being a surfer to exploring the world as a Merchant Marine, he thrived on new experiences. His journeys led him to become a successful Paris art dealer and computer tech guru.

One of greatest joys was backcountry travel on horseback.

His spiritual revelations led him to travel extensively through India and Nepal, where he practiced Tai Chi, yoga & meditation.

His addictions did not serve him or the greater good, which caused him



pain and suffering. He was not able to live up to his high ideals.

Then, the revelation...

The last few weeks of his life, his spiritual revelations resurfaced. Buford shifted his negative attitude of complaining, self pity, blaming, and expressing anger toward his situation and others. Through the support of devoted friends who saw the beauty of Buford's core being, he began to express appreciation and gratitude. In his final hours, he shared these words, "I'm giving up alcohol" (his pain reliever). He died a few hours later.

Buford left us with our own individual lessons to reflect upon or not.

Engine (Cont.)

in the fleet of Mountain View Fire Rescue, which operates in Boulder County, CO, on an annual budget of over \$100 million. The truck did not meet Colorado emissions requirements, so Mountain View sent it to Brindlee Mountain Fire Apparatus in Alabama to refurbish and sell.

The original motor and transmission were replaced with a 2014 Cummins engine and Allison transmission, which have had only 1554 hours of operation since then.

Brindlee originally listed the truck at \$100,000, but it didn't sell. Mountain View Fire Rescue took it back, and ultimately put it up for auction, where Skydiving Marana bought it.

The aviation park had received an earlier inquiry from a fire training school in North Carolina. But when the PVFR team arrived with check in hand, they were thrilled that a local volunteer fire department would be the new home for the truck.

The original listed price was \$34,900, but Young's and DiNuzio's detailed inspection revealed that a few things were missing, and that it needed new front tires. Young negotiated the price down to \$30,000 to leave funds for the additional parts.

Young and the PVFR team are especially enthused about the fire engine's great lighting system. It has super-bright LED scene lights around the tank, which illuminate a 360-degree area. In addition, it has a remote-controlled boom light on top that can be directed wherever needed.

"The system lit up the whole P-Town yard like daylight when we tried it out," Young said. "The lights will definitely help our crews do their jobs in both fire and accident situations. They'll help keep them and victims safe."

Who buys a fire truck?

After starting the ball rolling with his Facebook discovery, Rick Small is delighted with how everything turned out.

Small is a native of Tucson, and came to love Patagonia through frequent family visits to see his aunt, Sally Greenleaf, who still lives above Harshaw Avenue. After Small's mother, Susan (Sally's sister), passed away last year, Rick decided to make Patagonia his home and help manage Greenleaf's property. "I love Patagonia's strong feeling of community and inclusion," he said.

Greenleaf moved to Patagonia from Tucson several decades ago, after her husband passed away and her children went off to college. She cultivated a robust organic garden, and sold her produce to Red Mountain Foods and at farmers' markets. She was very involved with the Patagonia library, and other organizations in town.

Small has been tuned into community service his whole life, influenced

by both of his parents. His father, Bill Small, was in the Tucson newspaper business from the 1930s to the 1970s, and owned both the Tucson Citizen and Arizona Daily Star.

Bill and Susan were dedicated philanthropists. Rick remembers his father saying many times, "It's a responsibility for people who have means to help those who are less fortunate."

Bill was an enthusiastic modern art collector as well, who supported up-and-coming artists. He left an enormous trove of paintings that were disbursed to almost four dozen museums after his death. Susan's chief passions and beneficiaries included the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Tucson Botanical Gardens, and Tucson Symphony.

Bill and Susan set up the private Stonewall Foundation in 1966, which focused on community needs, conservation, and supporting the arts in Tucson and southern Arizona. After Bill's death in 1994, Rick and his mother ran the Stonewall Foundation, which donated over \$50 million to southern Arizona organizations in its forty-plus years. In 2021, the Stonewall Foundation was folded into the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona as a donor-advised fund.

In addition to his foundation work, Small taught third grade for a while, raised grass-fed beef and lamb in Willcox, hosted his own show on KXCI radio, and coordinated environmental education for Tucson Botanical Gardens.

"I'm a networker," Small said. "I listen to people, hear what they need, and follow up. I aspire to be an 'earth angel,' a quiet positive force making a difference in people's lives, on my own terms. I was glad to be able to do this for the fire department and town."

Patagonia Volunteer Fire and Rescue's new fire truck is currently behind P-Town waiting for some additional lighting parts and new front tires. When it's ready, PVFR will retire its 40-year-old green Engine #3. The new truck will be christened in honor of Sally Greenleaf, and will take its place in the PVFR station.



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CWPP (Cont.)

together to make this work.”

Satellite communities—clusters of homes outside of town or fire district boundaries, whether in HOAs or not—especially need to work together to assess their risk factors, take mitigation actions, and develop evacuation and shelter-in-place plans.

Next steps

The CWPP team will finish its draft plan in early November to circulate to all fire departments for their review and sign-off. Then the plan will be presented to Santa Cruz County supervi-

sors for review and eventual approval early next year.

Plan implementation will include a public-facing Dashboard website that will include interactive maps that incorporate the 10+ years of historical data with wind and humidity readings to portray conditions in real-time.

Meanwhile, residents can take advantage of the cooler days to take basic firewise actions now, like clearing leaves from gutters, and removing combustible materials from within five feet of the house. More information can be found at FireWise.org.

Carrasco (Cont.)

“It is a great program,” Carrasco said. “I am planning on getting my Master’s degree after I finish my Bachelor’s, which is coming up real soon.”

Carrasco’s classroom is alive with color and student projects. She believes in keeping the kids active and engaged.

“This is my third year, and I’ve known the fifth graders since they were in third, so it has been really

nice—it’s also been challenging because now I’m not the ‘fun aide,’ I am the teacher,” she said. She laughed and quickly added, “They are a great group, and I still let them call me Miss Priscilla.”

Carrasco appreciates all the opportunities she has had over the last few years.

“Patagonia has definitely challenged me in a good way to bring out the very best of me,” she said, smiling broadly. “And it’s taught me patience.”

SEFD (Cont.)

policies of that district and their ability and willingness to absorb individual properties.

In the past, our area has been spared the major wildfires seen elsewhere, but our risk is very high and is complicated by the large amount of public land around us.

Santa Cruz County government is currently working to develop a “wild-fire protection plan” that will discuss vulnerabilities, fire prevention and response, and related issues such as evacuation routes. While not designed specifically to deal with pockets without coverage, those areas in particular

are among those most affected by issues such as only one route in or out, hampering both fire responders and residents’ ability to evacuate promptly.

In small rural districts, annexation of an additional area by an existing district might fund more personnel and/or equipment to better serve the communities. Those property owners would also be eligible to become members of the board of directors of that district and influence decision making. Increasing wildfire danger and year-round fire season make it imperative that we all work together to protect not just our own property but our entire communities.

Sensors (Cont.)

The monitoring of air is also of concern to South32. “Air quality,” wrote Hermosa South32’s Community Lead Taja Vivens in a Sept. 24 email, “is one

of several resource areas currently being discussed as part of the Community Benefits and Protections Agreement (CBPA),” adding that “the conversations include monitoring, response, and community priorities.”



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Cowbelles Seek New Members



Photo by Marion Vendituoli

Cowbelles hand out promotional material and sell baked goods at the Santa Cruz County Fair in September. From left: Ann Gardner, Barbara Harris, Pat Fischer, Emily Wilson, Nancy Conahay.

By Pat McNamara

The Elgin-Sonoita Cowbelles are looking for new members.

The goal of the Cowbelles is to promote ranching, the beef industry, cattle by-products, good herdmanship, and land stewardship.

The membership does this through various activities throughout the community. For the local youth, the ladies have several events, including a fun and interactive station at the Elgin School Ranch and Rodeo Day and hosting the Cake Walk at the Sonoita Fairgrounds Halloween night. Additionally, the Cowbelles support local youth by providing scholarships for both high school and 8th grade graduates.

Their community support doesn’t stop there. They help with ranch tours, disperse informational packets (i.e. recipes, beef nutrition, safe handling and cooking practices), and assist with agriculture literacy programs.

“We are a fun group of ladies!” said Linda Brooks Vensel, current president of the Elgin-Sonoita Cowbelles, who has been a member of the Cowbelles since 1967.

Currently, the Elgin-Sonoita group has approximately 40 members, and is in the middle of a drive to attract new members. One no longer needs to own a ranch, be married to a rancher or, indeed, even own a cow to join this “fun group of ladies.”

Meetings are held the first Wednesday of the month at the Elgin

Club. “We try and make the meetings interesting and fun,” said Vensel. They offer entertaining and educational activities each month, including guest speakers and tours.

One upcoming meeting will host local Cowbelle Pattie Oliver, who will discuss her time as an extra in movies filmed locally including “Oklahoma!,” “Tom Horne,” “Red River” and several others.

The Cowbelles group has a long history in the area. In fact, the Cowbelles organization was started as a social club by a group of 16 ranch wives in Douglas in 1939. Other women across the state heard of this unique group and started their own local chapters.

In 1947, the Arizona State Cowbelles was created. Eventually a national organization, the American National CattleWomen, was formed in 1952. Because of their place in history, the Patagonia Museum has dedicated a room to the Cowbelles and ranching in Santa Cruz County.

Prospective members are welcome to attend a few meetings and see what Cowbelles is all about. For more information, call Linda Vensel at 520-604-1960.

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Halloween Scenes 2025

Photos by Megan Thomas and Robert Gay



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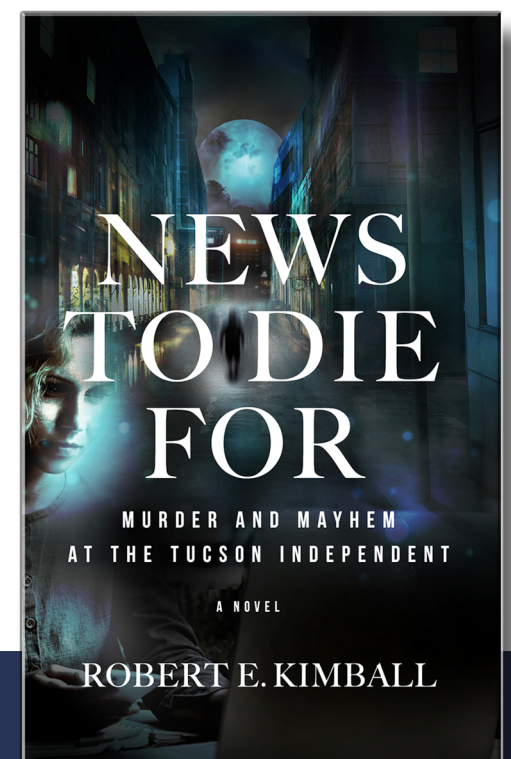
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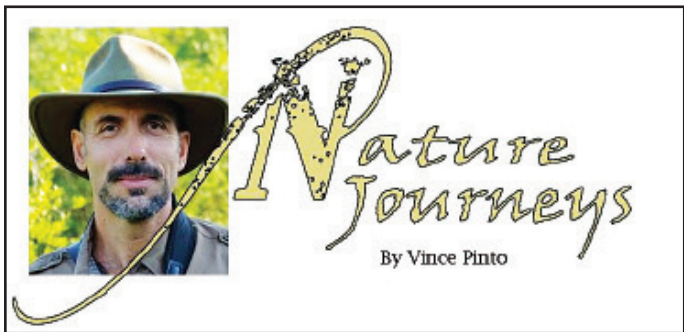
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by local author Robert E. Kimball
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Aerial Maneuvers

As we enter November, I entreat you to turn your eyes towards the sky. I suspect that long before our primate forerunners evolved into humans, they too marveled at various species that have the remarkable ability to fly.

That primate fascination with flying things continued with modern humans, eventually translating into a hot air balloon flight with people on November 21, 1783. Despite the conventionality of humans flying in various contraptions these days, observing and learning about nature's winged things still can be truly awe-inspiring.

Here in the Sky Islands we have a plethora of aerial species, none more ubiquitous than those in the class Insecta. Not all insects can fly, but they are the only invertebrate group to develop the power of flight. Probably a good thing—just imagine flying scorpions and tarantulas!

Paleontologists tell us that a dragonfly-like insect was the first species on Earth to take to the skies, approximately 325 million years ago, slightly beating humans to the punch. The speed of dragonfly flight is truly remarkable, with large species approaching 35mph. Further, they can change directions 180 degrees within a very small distance. Watch our common green darner or flame skimmer not only for these and other feats, but also for the therapeutic value they provide

to your eyes—it's a workout just following them through the air.

Most people may well think that either a species is winged or not, and with birds or bats this is certainly the case. Certain insect groups have, however, evolved into having only

select members of their species with flight capabilities. Witness ants and termites. Both of these vaguely similar looking, yet highly divergent, groups have workers that lack the ability to become airborne. When it's time to mate, though, they join the insect equivalent of the "mile high club." The kings and queens take to the skies in lustful nuptial flights where they copulate. King ants then die, having served their sole purpose in life: to sire a new generation. King termites, minus their wings which they shed after their first flight, persist in colonies to provide sexual services when required.

Some other insect groups, among them beetles and grasshoppers, have species where only one gender has the ability to fly. In those cases, typically it's the males who have wings and are mobile. Females of these species tend to be larger—the better to produce more offspring—and release scents and/or sounds to lure in their paramours.

While flying insects numerically dominate animals that are able to ply the skies—approximately 95% of all insect species can fly—birds too have clearly excelled in this rather demanding evolutionary path. They are even more committed to flight as a group, with a mere 0.54% of bird species being flightless. Given its many migrating



Photo by Vince Pinto

A hummingbird gathers nectar at Raven's Nest Wildlife Sanctuary.

species, November is prime time for watching our Sky Island birds, none of which are flightless.

So many bird groups are fun to watch in flight, it's hard to pick a favorite. But hummingbirds certainly must be near the top of the list. This strictly New World group takes center stage in Arizona, where more species—18—have been recorded than in any other state. Like dragonflies, hummingbirds can fly in almost any direction or, obviously, hover. Some species beat their wings 80 times per...second!

Our white-throated swifts live up to their billing, with top flight speeds of about 105mph. Don't tell local law enforcement. The "sheriff of the sky," peregrine falcons, have taken down as many as 450 bird species in North America—including hummingbirds and swifts—and about 2,000 species across their nearly global distribution.

We conclude with the only other animal group on the planet to currently—RIP pterosaurs—possess the power of flight: bats. Bats are well-represented in Arizona, with 29 species having cut through our skies at one

time or another. As a group, bats are "all-in" when it comes to flying—no flightless species of bat has ever been discovered.

While "blind as a bat" is a familiar slur tossed around, many bat species in fact have good vision. Still, many species navigate mainly via echolocation, bouncing vocal signals off of objects that their sometimes out-sized ears then interpret. Catching aerial prey, especially insects, in utter darkness hence becomes a plausible act of predation.

I hope that you too are inspired by our Sky Islands aerialists—their beauty, functionality and prowess. Just don't get any crazy ideas like Icarus!

Vincent Pinto and his wife Claudia run RAVENS-WAY WILD JOURNEYS, their Nature Adventure & Conservation organization devoted to protecting and promoting the unique biodiversity of the Sky Islands region. RWWJ offers a wide variety of private, custom-made courses, birding and biodiversity tours. Visit ravensnatureschool.com



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NOV 28 & 29: Holiday Art Walk November 28 and 29. <https://patagoniaartwalk.com/> for participating businesses/artists and map

DEC12, 5:30PM: Tish Hinojosa in concert
www.bordercommunityalliance.org for tickets and event details

DEC14, 1PM: WREATH MAKING WORKSHOP. www.patagonia-plants.com for details and to register
Dates and Times Subject to Change

If you would be interested in sponsoring upcoming events, please contact Cassina Farley at 520-394-9369.
Visit www.patagoniacreativearts.org or 394-9369 for more information.

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The Santa Cruz Foundation for the Performing Arts

Benderly-Kendall Opera House,
344 Naugle Ave., Patagonia, AZ

November Schedule

Nov 16, 3pm: Kyungsun Choi Trio

Don't miss an inspired program performed by a trio of gifted musicians, Kyungsun Choi, Caroline Bell and Daniel Becker. Beethoven's Clarinet Trio in B major Opus 11 is celebrated for its lyrical themes while Brahms' trio is known for its rich dark timbres and a deeply integrated conversation between the piano, clarinet and cello. These works are considered jewels of the clarinet repertoire, each offering a distinctive perspective on the tonal relationships between the instruments.

Prepaid admission is \$30 – adult or \$15 – student. You can pay online until noon on the day of the concert (using your preferred credit/debit card or PayPal) or by sending a check to SCFPA PO Box 875, Patagonia AZ 85624. Tickets purchased at the door on the day of the concert are \$35/\$20 (if seats are available)

Nov 30, 3pm: Ben Albertson- The Art of the Harp

Award-winning concert harpist Ben Albertson will grace our venue with a program that is unique and perfectly paired with the elegant tonality of the harp. Included in the program are works by Faure, Debussy, Bach, Hindemith and a new composition that was premiered in 2025 "Brain Storms" by Chelsea Komschlies.

Prepaid admission is \$35 – adult or \$17.50 – student. You can pay online until noon on the day of the concert (using your preferred credit/debit card or PayPal) or by sending a check to SCFPA PO Box 875, Patagonia AZ 85624. Tickets purchased at the door on the day of the concert are \$40/\$20 (if seats are available)

Visit www.scfpapresents.org for more information

3RD ANNUAL PARA GALA MOONLIT BLUES BARBECUE SOIREE

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 5pm til 8pm
at the PATAGONIA LUMBER COMPANY**



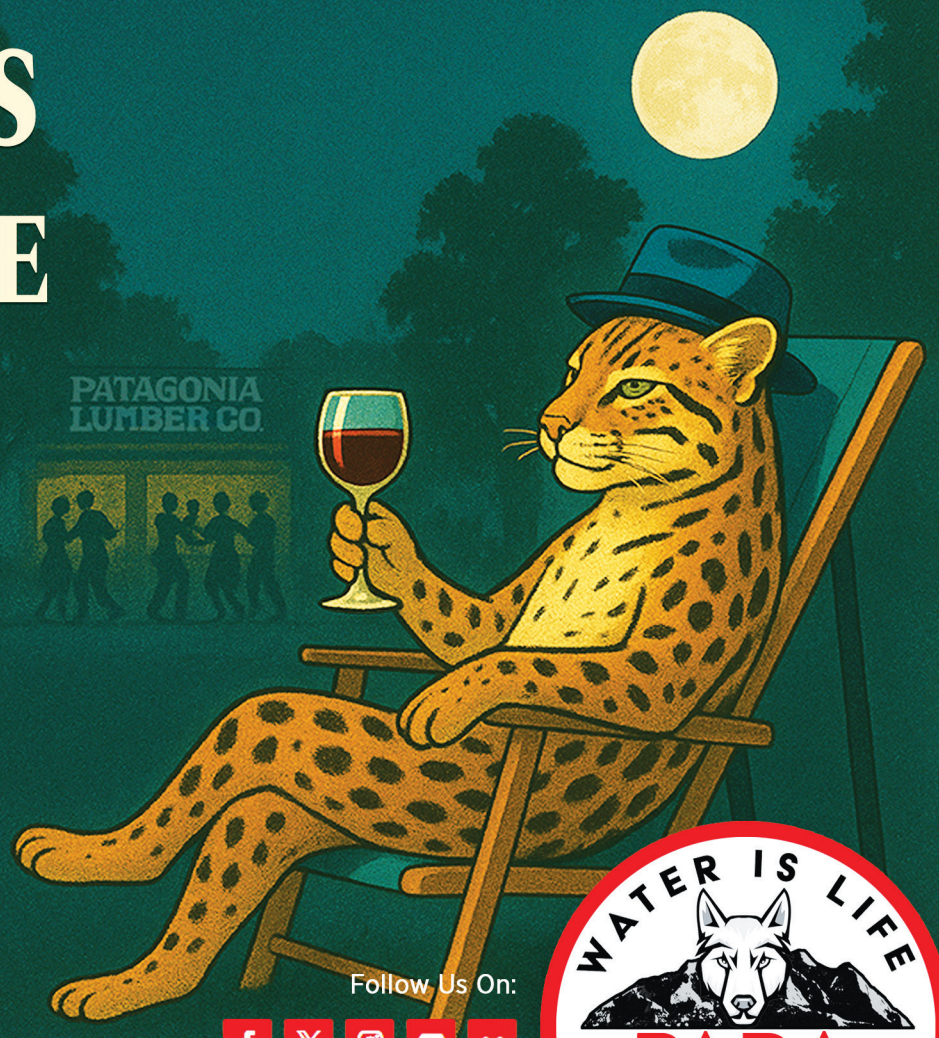
TICKETS:

\$45 – Entry + Full Barbecue Dinner
(vegan and gluten free options available – must be purchased in advance)

\$15 – Entry Only
(\$20 at the door)

Tickets available online at PatagoniaLumberCo.com
or in person at 295 McKeown Ave.

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Sheriff's Blotter

Nov. 2: A deputy reported booking a male subject for a DUI at 2900 SR 82.

Oct. 28: A Patagonia caller said her boyfriend was attacking her.

Oct. 26: A caller reported that a dog had injured a deer near Wagon Wheel Lane and Cayuse Trail in Sonoita-Elgin. A caller from Harshaw Avenue outside Patagonia advised that she had just arrived to her family's residence and she believes someone has broken in. She said the door was open and things were moved. She said she'd checked the whole house and no one was inside. She was advised to wait with her family outside.

Oct. 23: A caller from somewhere off SR 82 said there was a white van in her driveway with its wheels spinning. She

doesn't know if it got into an accident. She said she just got home and doesn't want to get out of her vehicle.

A caller said the vehicle owned by her ex-boyfriend, who had an arrest warrant placed on him recently, is parked right down the road from her house where he has been working on building another house. She said she also has a protection order against him.

Oct. 20: A caller from Elgin School reported that a student in a note during class had threatened to kill another student. The student who made the threat is currently at the principal's office.

A caller from Patagonia requested a deputy to an address in Sonoita to retrieve belongings from a residence.

Oct. 6: A caller reported a trailer that

was stolen from Patagonia is possibly located on Apache Trail. The caller said she didn't know where exactly it was stolen from but that it was somewhere in the Red Mountain area.

A caller said he wanted to meet up at the washrooms at the entrance of Patagonia to report his gun stolen or missing. He refused to explain where it was lost or stolen and said he would explain it to the officer.

A caller requested a deputy to Pennsylvania Avenue in Patagonia due to an elderly woman that tried to attack the

caller during an argument.

Oct. 5: A Patagonia Lake ranger asked for assistance in escorting people from the lake.

Oct. 1: A caller from Duquesne Ave. in Patagonia said the back of their vehicle was shattered. They said they did not know when it happened.

Sept. 27: A caller from Elgin said her husband might kill himself. She said he walked away with his handgun, saying "I'm done." She said he might attempt to take her vehicle.

Seniors (Cont.)

outside hitter Monique Snell have been pivotal in their success, but Coach Somoza said the team feeds off the energy and examples set by Lewton and Majalca.

"For sure," she said. "Big time."

For their part, the two senior leaders say it's been a blast.


Asked about their favorite memories of the past four years, neither mentioned the on-court success,

though that has made it more enjoyable.

Lewton said: "Probably just hyping everybody up on the court. That, and a lot of practices. They were a lot of fun."


Majalca also appreciates the lighter moments.

"The bus rides," she said. "Those are just unforgettable. Honestly, just laughing with everybody on the court about little things that happen. That's one thing I'm going to miss a lot."




Concert with Tish Hinojosa

Friday December 12, 2025
Reception 4:30pm
Concert 5:30 - 7:00pm
Tin Shed Theater
304 Naugle Ave, Patagonia, AZ



with Gary Nabhan






Please join us for an evening with acclaimed singer & songwriter, Tish Hinojosa. Born to Mexican immigrant parents in San Antonio, Texas, Ms. Hinojosa began performing at an early age. She has released 16 albums, in the folk, country, pop, and Latino/a music genres and her musical works are expressions of cross-border cultures, diversity and life.



She will be joined by renowned ethnobotanist, storyteller and author, Dr. Gary Nabhan, author of many books, including his most recent books, *Against the Grain: A Borderlands History of Resistance* and *Agave Spirits*.

The events will begin with a brief honoring of our Lady of Guadalupe and an (optional) meet & greet reception with Ms. Hinojosa and Dr. Nabhan.



Tickets: \$35 for concert only
\$50 for pre-event reception with tamales, + tequila/ wine & concert


INFO/TICKETS
BorderCommunityAlliance.org
(520)398-3229

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NOVEMBER 28TH & 29TH
10:00AM - 4:00PM



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Word Search

Santa Cruz County Fall Gardening

By Carrie White



How many Fall/Winter vegetables can you find?

According to the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map, Canelo, Elgin and Patagonia are in Zone 8a, which means low temperatures between 10° F. and 15° F. Sonoita has 8a and 8b distinctions, meaning some areas have low temps between 10° F. and 15° F. Other spots have a low range of 15° F. to 20°F. Either way, these veggies grow great here. The space between two-word vegetables have been removed for this word

Word List

Arugula	Broccoli	Cauliflower	Peas
Asparagus	BrusselSprouts	Kale	Radishes
Beets	Cabbage	Lettuce	Spinach
BokChoy	Carrots	Onions	SwissChard

Stumped? See solution on page 23

What is that??

Curios from the Patagonia Museum

By Tom Shore

Candlesticks used in metal mining first appeared in California in 1860 and were common throughout the West. These devices enabled miners to place lit candles near their work area to illuminate the space. A typical mining candlestick measured ¾ inch in diameter and 12 inches long. It was designed to be hammered into a wooden beam or hung by the hook on rocks. Blacksmiths or miners handcrafted some, while others were mass-produced. This particular piece, which is on

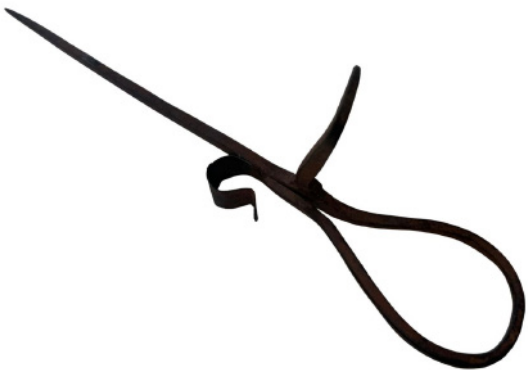


Photo by Linda Shore

loan to the Museum as part of the George Proctor collection, appears to be handmade.

Check It Out at the Library

The Library of Things

By Linda Shore

Our shelves at the Patagonia Public Library hold more than just books, DVDs, and audiobooks. We also offer “things” that you can enjoy for free for a week with your library card. Cool things like:

- **Trail cams**
So you can discover the wildlife in your yard! The Library has three trail camera kits available for check-out. The trail cam will capture animals during the day and at night.

Each kit includes a battery-powered trail cam, a memory card, a USB memory card reader and a detailed user guide.

If you’d like, the library staff can assist in configuring the camera to your needs, such as motion detection vs time lapse, photo vs video recording, etc., as well as helping you check the recorded files on the memory card.

- **Nature Exploration Backpacks**
Take a walk around town. The Library offers three different nature exploration backpacks for you to borrow. Whether you’re interested in “Birding,” “Butterflies,” “Wildflowers,” or “Venomous Critters,” we’ve got



Contributed Photo

This telescope, as well as a trailcam and a nature exploration backpack, can be checked out at the Patagonia Library

you covered with binoculars, plenty of reference materials, and a first aid kit (just to be prepared).

- **Telescope**
Explore the dark night skies in the Sky Islands. The Library has an Orion StarBlast 4.5’ Telescope available for checkout. The kit contains the telescope, an instruction manual and a Constellations pocket guide from the National Audubon Society.

We also have a good selection of astronomy literature available for checkout, suitable for both kids and adults.

MEAL PREP COOK & COMPANION ORGANIZER (PART-TIME)

Location: Sonoita, AZ
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We’re looking for a kind, reliable, and confident person to join our home part-time as a **meal prep cook and light home organizer**. Must enjoy preparing healthy meals, keeping spaces tidy, and bringing positive energy to the household.

- Duties include:**
- Prepare 3 meals per week (one or two prep days)
 - Cook and serve in-person dinners twice a week
 - Light organizing (closets, pantry, refrigerator, etc.)
 - Provide friendly companionship with warmth and respect

- Ideal candidate:**
- Experienced in home cooking or meal prep (no chef training required)
 - Organized, trustworthy, and self-motivated
 - Kind, grounded, and takes initiative

Pay: \$18–\$24/hour + monthly gas stipend (based on experience)

To Apply:
Email a short introduction and why you’re a good fit to **m.sonderer58@gmail.com**.
References welcome but not required.



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- Naiz, Project Coordinator



Learn more

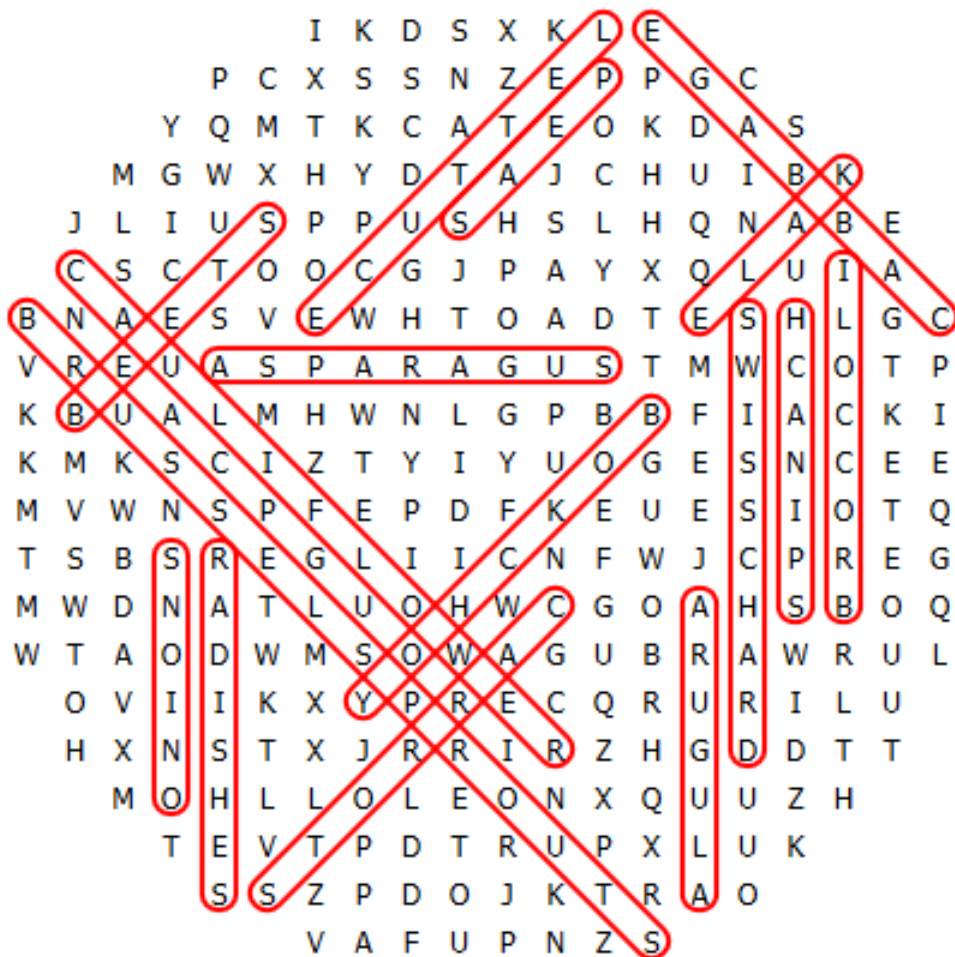


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Solution for this Month's Word Search Santa Cruz County Fall Gardening



KPUP Broadcast Schedule Autumn 2025

Mon: 5pm to 6pm: Swing Hour
7pm to 8pm: eTown repeat of Saturday's show

Tues: 10am to 12pm: World Jazz with Mark Berg
7pm to 9pm: Jazz and Blues with Fred Hansen

Wed: 5pm to 6pm: Swing Hour
7pm to 10pm: Sean Alexander show

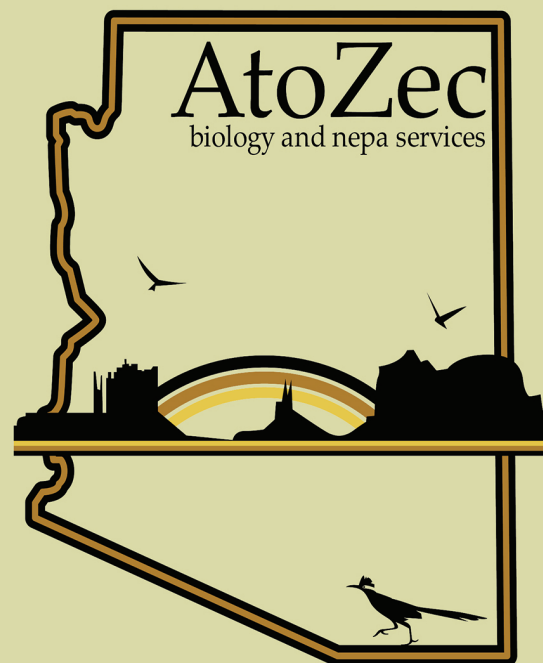
Thurs: 7pm to 10pm: Possibility Explorers. "Celebrating Mushkil Gusha, the Remover of All Difficulties." Hosted by Graves

Fri: 7pm to 9pm: Hook's Sunken Roadhouse

Sat: 12pm to 1pm: eTown - "Educate, entertain and inspire listeners through music and conversation"
6pm to 8pm: Acoustic Café. A bit of country, rock, blues, folk, pop"
8pm to 10pm: Folk Alley "Folk Music Radio from WKSU-FM in Kent, OH"

Sun: 1pm: Sunday Classical Connection

Daily Shows: StarDate: 9am & 5pm/Best of the Oldies: 1pm to 2pm/
BirdNote: 6am and 10am/Growing Native with Petey Mesquitey:
MWF at 7am, Sunday at noon/
Feature Story News (FSN.com) Mon – Fri. 8am, 12pm and 6pm,
Sat. 8am & 6pm, Sun. at 8am
Patagonia Weather Forecast: Every odd hour.



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MLS # 22504897 109 RED MOUNTAIN CT

Stunning mountain views from this brand new home in Patagonia's prestigious gated community. High ceilings, 3Bd/2Ba, 2 car garage. JEAN MILLER 520 508-3335

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VIEW LAND ABOVE PATAGONIA

MLS # 22422417 PROCTOR LANE 16+ ACRES

STUNNING land with gorgeous views of Red Mountain. 16.56 acres. Can be divided. Private, yet near Town. No HOA. JEAN MILLER 520 508-3335

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THE CAFÉ IN SONOITA

MLS # 22523141 3280 HIGHWAY 82

Commercial property. Was a well-loved restaurant. Still almost ready to go with kitchen equipment and furnishings. Lots of room to expand. CHERYL VOLK 520 975-7271

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108 STODDARD WAY 26.1 ACRES

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CASAS ARROYO SONOITA

MLS # 22519385 91 CASA ARROYO ROAD

Flocks of birds visit this lovely hill top home. Split level, 2Bd/2Ba, 2 car garage. Gated community w/greenbelt. Community pool. BARBARA HARRIS 602 826-4026

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