

Patagonia Regional Times



MAY 2026 SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF CANELO, ELGIN, PATAGONIA AND SONOITA SINCE 2009 VOL. 16 ISSUE 5

Library lover leaves \$400k to town 'jewel'

By Sondra Porter

Locals and visitors often refer to the Patagonia Public Library as one of the gems of our community. But the library, opening its doors back in 1901, has struggled in recent years. Setbacks came with the shutdown during COVID-19 as well as funding and staffing issues after the longtime library director, Abbie Zeltzer, retired. Currently, not only is the library hopefully in recovery mode, but a generous donation from an avid fan of the library generates new enthusiasm.

Patagonia Town Manager Ron Robinson confirmed that the town has received \$400,000 from a trust set up by Patagonia resident Judith Whitcomb, who died in 2025 at the age of 87, and her husband, Robert Whitcomb, who died in 2007.

The executors of Judith Whitcomb's

estate, her brother Robert and his wife, Bonnie Leach, said that the couple set up two trusts before his death. His trust was to benefit his children from previous marriages and her trust was to be evenly distributed among the Patagonia Public Library, The Wilderness Society, The Nature Conservancy and family members.

Judith Whitcomb did not specify how the library donation was to be used, the Leaches said.

Steven Finch, treasurer of the Friends of the Patagonia Library, learned about the donation from Bonnie Leach and directed her to Robinson, he said.

At first, Robinson said, he understood that the library would receive \$200,000.



Judith and Robert Whitcomb were married in 1982. Around Patagonia, they were known for their elaborate Christmas parties. | Contributed photo

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Pickup soccer focuses on fun for all ages and ability levels



Ricardo Diaz leads an attack during the weekly pickup soccer gathering at the baseball field on the Patagonia Public School campus. | Photo by Dave Lumia

By Dave Lumia

The late soccer icon Pele popularized the phrase "the beautiful game" to describe the sport's grace, simplicity and artistic, skillful nature.

And beauty, as we all know, is in the eye of the beholder.

Every Thursday afternoon, a dozen or more like-minded beholders congregate at the Patagonia Middle School baseball field to offer up their interpre-

tation of this beautiful game. Some are more skillful and graceful than others, but a good time is had by all.

"It's open to all people, all ages and abilities," said Caleb Weaver. "The whole goal is to just come out and

have some fun."

Weaver, who coached the Patagonia Union High School soccer team for four years back when there were enough players to field a team, instigated the weekly pickup soccer ritual about five years ago, but it's picked up steam recently since Yaritza Cortez created a poster that was shared on a local Facebook page, displayed at the post office and distributed via the Patagonia Regional Times.

"A bunch of people saw that, and it's really filled out the numbers for us," said regular Aaron Mrotek. "We have people that have been coming up every week from Nogales."

The players – mostly males, but a few females also get in on the action – range from preteen to 63-year-old Jan (pronounced "yan") Koch of Sonoita, who refers to himself as the "most experienced" of the group by about 20 years.

"Until my body gives out, I'm going to be out here and pushing it to the limit," Koch said. "Soccer is just something that challenges the whole body. Your mind, your body have to work in

See SOCCER, p. 20

Patagonia Regional Times



MISSION STATEMENT

To be a reliable source of news for the communities of eastern Santa Cruz County – open to all views, focused on local issues, grounded in community perspectives and needs, and providing a platform for community education and engagement.

WHO WE ARE

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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

Patagonia Regional Times

PO Box 1073, Patagonia, AZ 85624

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Letters to the Editor

Barring service dogs breaks ADA's promise of 'access, dignity and inclusion'

What feels like a lifetime ago, I was in a Hum-vee rollover during my time in the military. It was an event that, at the time, didn't seem out of the ordinary. Something that had happened before, and something that would happen again.

But that rollover damaged my spine in ways I didn't immediately recognize. Bulged and fractured discs compressed nerves, slowly atrophying my left side. What I didn't know then was that I was also born with a neuromuscular disease – Charcot-Marie-Tooth – a progressive condition that affects the peripheral nerves, causing weakness, imbalance, and slowly chipping away at the ability to move freely through the world.

As the years went on, both conditions progressed. Navigating obstacles became harder. Trips, falls, and injuries became more common. Chronic pain became part of daily life. And movement – something most people never think twice about – became a constant challenge, a daily reminder that the world can feel like it's moving on without you.

On Tuesday, after a long day at work, our dinner plans fell apart. The food we had prepared had gone bad, and with three kids to feed, we made a rare decision to eat out on a Tuesday night. Service dog by my side, we headed into town.

The first restaurant we walked into would not allow us to eat inside. They cited a "no dog" policy. When I tried to explain the protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act, it was dismissed. After attempting to educate and reason, it became clear it wasn't being heard, so we left.

At the second restaurant, we were told no dogs were allowed – no exceptions, not even for a service dog – and that we would not be served.

In that moment, I was angry. I was embarrassed that it happened in front of my kids – not once, but twice.

And more than anything, I felt like I wasn't a whole person ... like I didn't belong in the very country I had served so proudly for 10 years.

Because for many of us living with disabilities,

this isn't rare – it's reality. It's the quiet barriers, the misunderstandings, the moments that make you question your place in a world that should have space for you.

But adversity doesn't just break us – it trains us. It teaches us to stand, even when standing is hard. To speak, even when our voice shakes. To advocate, not just for ourselves, but for everyone who comes after us.

The Americans with Disabilities Act isn't just a law – it's a promise. A promise that access, dignity, and inclusion are not optional.

This isn't about blame. It's about awareness. It's about education. It's about building a community where no family has to question whether they belong.

Because we do.

And when we fight for inclusion, we don't just change one moment – we change the path forward for everyone.

Daniel Blevins, MSHS, NBC-HWC

Health and Wellness Coach

Adaptive Athlete

Sonoita

From columns to grad profiles, April issue 'thoughtful and optimistic'

PRT, April 2026, is thoughtful and optimistic. Thank you Harold Meckler: "The health of the planet, at the very least, used to be right there among the most critical human endeavors." And Cassina Farley: "I spend my time giving back to the community. I hope I have given back tenfold." Sonoita-Elgin Chamber of Commerce priorities: "Preservation, "recognition," "sustainable," "responsible," "protects the environment." And Vince Pinto: "This profusion (of migrant birds) helps all of us to keep our faith that life indeed springs eternal." The fresh optimism of the PUHS seniors is wonderful. The Earth Day Garden Party fits right in. I can only hope that the South32 people not only buy an ad, but read the newspaper. A final thought, recently read: "Faithful to the small things" (Abraham Verghese).

Doug Morris

Sonoita

WHAT IS THAT? Before lasers, there was this

By Tom Shore

Going all the way back to ancient Egypt, the plumb bob has been one of the most reliable tools in construction. This pointed metal weight, attached to a line, uses gravity to establish a true vertical reference line. Builders, carpenters and surveyors use this tool to make walls, columns and door frames, and to accurately transfer points from high positions to the ground.

This example of a plumb bob was made of brass by General Hardware Manufacturing Co. Dating to the 1950s, it is marked "No 800 16oz" and is part of the George Proctor collection.

The reason you rarely see them used now is that lasers have largely replaced plumb bobs in today's construction industry.



Photo by Linda Shore

SPEAK UP, EASTERN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY!
SUBMIT YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR TO EDITOR@PRTNEWS.ORG AND BE HEARD.

Once trained, never bitten

By Pat McNamara

Ah, springtime in the Sky Islands. A time of returning hummingbirds, blossoming succulents, warmer days and ... rattlesnakes.

Most of our local rattlers possess a neurotoxic venom that is lethal to man and beast alike, so they are to be avoided at all cost. We humans – well, at least most of us – naturally give rattlesnakes a wide berth when we encounter them, but dogs can sometimes see a snake as a toy, a challenge or even a danger that needs to be disposed of. This exposes our canine friends to possibly fatal bites or, at the very least, some real physical trauma. And it exposes dog owners to a big emotional hit, as well as the inevitable bill for emergency veterinary treatment.

Enter Sonoita resident and dog trainer Jill Cruz. After 20 years in civil service, Cruz calls her current endeavor a “happy accident.” Looking for something to do, and possessing a love of dogs, she began to volunteer at animal shelters, working with the “incarcerated” dogs. As she acquired more experience as a dog trainer, she saw a need in the Southwest to help with people whose dogs were in danger of being bitten, and focused on adding snake avoidance training to her repertoire.

Cruz related an incident from a woman who was walking her snake-trained dog on a trail. The dog stopped and refused to proceed down the trail, so the woman got in front of the dog to pull it along. The woman was bitten by the rattler that the dog was trying to avoid.

“Venomous snakes have their own scent and some dogs can tell the difference in the snakes,” Cruz said. “My dogs are snake trained and I’ve had one of them bring me a gopher snake!” Apparently he knew the difference, but it was still a bit of a surprise.

Employing shock collars and timing learned from years of experience, Cruz takes dogs and their owners through a series of progressive snake encounters, starting with the snake’s scent, progressing to the rattler’s sound, and then on to actual exposure to the live snakes. This is where the expertise of Cruz’s snakewrangler friend Cassandra Grogan – and Grogan’s snakes – help to complete the training experience.

Grogan, a resident of Marana, has

been in the snakewrangling business since 2017.

“I was always a weirdo kid and liked the creepy-crawlies,” she said. Her first rattlesnake encounter happened as a 10-year-old in Yuma, when a rattler turned up in their backyard. Grogan pleaded with her father not to harm the snake, so together they improvised a tool attached to a long stick, caught the snake, placed it in a bucket, and released it in the desert. Little did she know that years later this would be her vocation.

Possessing 16 snakes of her own, some of them venomous, Grogan has developed the skills to manage these adrenaline-triggering reptiles with ease. This is especially important as she needs to muzzle – yes, muzzle – the snakes who are going to be used in the training classes for the dogs, as some are released in the training area and only managed with a hooked snake stick. Muzzling a snake, she says, takes two people: “One to hold the snake and the other to use a special piece of equipment on a long stick to place the muzzle on the snake.”

Grogan is currently in the process of developing a better muzzle that causes less stress and is more comfortable for her charges. She very seldom uses her personal snakes for the dog training classes. “I don’t want to stress them out and prefer to use wild caught snakes,” she explained.

As a private contractor with Tucson-based Animal Experts Inc., Grogan is frequently called to catch and remove problem wildlife, especially rattlesnakes, from private property. That is where she usually gets her rattlers for the classes. “I like them feisty,” she said, as they are more reactive to being disturbed by the dogs as they go through the training process. After using them a time or two, she releases them in the wild, away from any developed property.

The partnership between Cruz and Grogan has been a positive venture for the community. Both aim to help dogs and their owners avoid tragic outcomes.

“I wish everybody would do this training. It sucks to have a dog bitten,” Cruz said.

Prime season for rattlesnakes is generally from March to September,



Snake avoidance training helps dogs recognize and avoid snakes, as Sadie demonstrates in this photo. | Photo by Jill Cruz



Trainer Jill Cruz holds Dudley, the author's dog.



Prime season for rattlesnakes is May through September.

so now is the time to have your dog trained. For more information, con-

tact Jill Cruz Dog Training at jilocruz@yahoo.com or 832-216-5875.



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Q&A with Alexis Stark, site manager at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds

By Pila Martinez

Alexis Stark, who became site manager of the Paton Center for Hummingbirds at the beginning of this year, brings a background in avian research, nature education and volunteer coordination to the role. A lifelong Arizona resident, Stark studied biology and wildlife ecology at Northern Arizona University and focuses her work on wildlife conservation, bird monitoring and community outreach. In this Q&A, Stark reflects on her early months at the Paton Center, sharing her impressions of the Patagonia community, the sense of connection she sees among visitors and volunteers, and the priorities she has set for the site.

What was your official start date?

I officially started as the Paton Center site manager at the beginning of this year, and I am still actively learning and growing into the role. I feel more confident stepping into this position thanks to those who built such a strong foundation before me – past site managers, habitat and field crew staff who have cared for the grounds and native plants, and the dedicated volunteers who have contributed countless hours to habitat restoration, visitor engagement, and maintaining the hummingbird feeders. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity and excited to see what 2026 brings.

Can you tell us a little about your background and what led you to this work?

I became a bird watcher while studying biology and wildlife ecology at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, and I was immediately hooked. Since graduating in 2019, I have grown into a dedicated naturalist, with my work centered on wildlife conservation, avian monitoring, and community outreach and education. My past roles and volunteer experiences have included avian research, nature education, volunteer coordination, park ranger work, and more. As a lifelong Arizona resident, I have developed a deep sense of connection to the Sonoran Desert and a special appreciation for the Sky Island region. The diversity of wildlife found in the small border community of Patagonia is truly remarkable and continues to inspire my work.

What drew you to the role at the Paton Center, and what excited you most about the opportunity?

This role felt like a perfect blend of my past work and volunteer experience, which interweaves bird knowledge, education and outreach, volunteer support, wildlife conservation, and a love for natural spaces. The opportunity to bring all of these elements together in such a meaningful place is what excited me most.

What are your early impressions of the community?

I moved to Patagonia in June 2024 and have absolutely loved living in this community. Everyone has been incredibly welcoming and supportive. I look forward to continuing to build connections and am always open to local suggestions on how the Paton Center can better support, represent and serve the community.

The Paton Center has such a special history and sense of place. What has stood out to you most about being on the center grounds day to day?

While the diversity of birds here is truly incredible, what stands out to me most is the constant presence of joy. Every day, I see smiling faces among visitors, volunteers and staff, all sharing their appreciation for birds and nature. That sense of shared excitement and connection is what makes this place so special.

What do you see as your priorities for the center in the coming months or year?

Some of the immediate priorities include important infrastructure improvements, such as new restrooms, a more functional parking area, and upcoming renovations to the interiors of the house and casita. These updates will improve day-to-day operations for volunteers and hopefully help support future opportunities, such as a gift shop. Additional improvements include enhanced wayfinding and interpretive signage. These will help visitors locate the new parking area, reduce traffic along the street, and better navigate the trails to fully experience all that the Paton Center has to offer. On a broader level, one of my personal priorities is to continue building deeper connections within the Patagonia community.

How do you hope the Paton Center continues to connect with the Patagonia community, both longtime residents and visitors?

I hope to expand community engagement through a variety of programs and events, including family and youth-focused nature education, bird walks, and other outreach opportunities. I would love to strengthen partnerships with local schools by inviting students to participate in on-site programs, as well as collaborate with other conservation organizations and local businesses. I also aim to empower community members to engage in conservation by planting native habitat, supporting monitoring efforts, and becoming active stewards of hummingbird conservation. By fostering a strong network of nature enthusiasts and citizen scientists, I hope to contribute to long-term conservation efforts while highlighting the importance of the Sonoita Creek watershed's health.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

I spend much of my free time in nature, especially bird watching, which



Alexis Stark, who became site manager at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds earlier this year, brings experience in avian research, nature education and volunteer coordination. | Photo by Dave Lumia

naturally connects both my personal and professional life to hummingbird conservation. I also enjoy volunteering for wildlife conservation and research efforts across Arizona. Recently, much of my energy has been focused on hummingbird monitoring. I have been fortunate to work under the mentorship of Susan Wethington through the Hummingbird Conservation Networks. This past fall, I was trained in hummingbird banding through a grant from the Arizona Game and Fish Department. I am grateful for the opportunity to

continue developing my skills in bird handling, ecological research, and data collection, including participating in the Hummingbird Monitoring Network's 2025 Banding Workshop. I look forward to continuing to contribute to local hummingbird conservation and research efforts in the years to come.

The Paton Center is currently looking for volunteers to help with a range of activities. Email astark@tucsonbirds.org to learn more.

2026 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PRIMARY ELECTION Important Dates for Early Voting

- June 6, 2026:** Ballots mailed to Arizona Uniformed and Overseas Citizens.
- June 22, 2026:** Last day to register to vote.
- June 24, 2026:** Early voting begins / Early ballots are mailed.
- July 10, 2026:** Last day to request a mail ballot.
- July 14, 2026:** Deadline to mail back your ballot.
- July 17, 2026:** Last day to vote early in person at 7 p.m.
- July 21, 2026:** Election Day
(Drop off your early ballot by 7 pm):

Anita Moreno, Santa Cruz County Recorder
2150 N. Congress Drive, Suite 101, Nogales, AZ 85621
Phone: 520.375.7990 • Fax 520.375.7996
www.santacruzcountyz.gov/986/Voter-Information



2026 ELECCIÓN PRIMARIA DE CONDADO DE SANTA CRUZ Fechas Importantes para la Votación Anticipada

- 6 de Junio, 2026:** Se envían las boletas a ciudadanos uniformados de Arizona y votantes en el extranjero.
- 22 de Junio, 2026:** Último día para registrarse para votar.
- 24 de Junio, 2026:** Comienza la votación anticipada / Se envían las boletas anticipadas.
- 10 de Julio, 2026:** Último día para solicitar una boleta por correo.
- 14 de Julio, 2026:** Fecha límite para enviar su boleta por correo.
- 17 de Julio, 2026:** Último día para votar anticipadamente en persona hasta las 7 p.m.
- 21 de Julio, 2026:** Día de la elección
(Entregue su boleta anticipada a más tardar 7pm).

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Students, teachers and administrators embrace judicious use of AI



Kyndra Ortiz, fifth grade math teacher at Sonoita Elementary School, pulls up a Khanmigo lesson that students can access on school-provided Chromebooks. | Photos by Carrie White

Editor's note: This story includes information provided by AI. This information has been labeled.

By Carrie White

As far back as 370 B.C, Socrates argued that writing would introduce “forgetfulness in the soul.”

More recently, trains could cause “neurosis” (19th century). Automobiles were a “threat to pedestrians” (20th century). And television would “rot the brain” and “ruin children’s eyesight” (mid-20th century).

Technophobia, anxiety around emerging technologies, is no less true now than it was in Socrates’ time. Enter artificial intelligence, the simulation of human intelligence by machines.

AI: Throughout history, technological advancements have consistently triggered fear, often centering on concerns about job displacement, health risks, moral degradation, or the loss of human control.

Now, though, writing, trains, automobiles and television are central to everyday life. And as to those concerns? The fact is, some people manage innovation well, while others allow it to manage them.

Responsible use of AI is exactly what public schools in Elgin and Patagonia are promoting as teachers and students navigate the landscape together.

“The best teachers are going to use this as a teaching tool to become even better teachers,” said Dan Erickson, superintendent/principal of Sonoita Elementary School District #25. Erickson said staying on top of technological advancements is crucial in preparing students – the next generation of leaders – for the future. But also, it’s an important tool for teachers and admin-

istrators like himself.

“Our special education teachers in this country spend countless hours writing IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) for students with special needs,” Erickson said. “I’ve seen ChatGPT write an IEP in two minutes. You just put in the student’s current level of academic performance and what the goals will be and it will create a template for you.”

Erickson uses AI to save time on tasks related to his role as superintendent/principal. “Today I am going to create a letter of recommendation for someone,” Erickson said. “I am going to put in the prompts and ChatGPT will write a better letter than I could write in 30 minutes in two minutes.”

Kenny Hayes, superintendent/principal of Patagonia Elementary School District #6 and Patagonia Union High School District #20, remembers the fears prompted by the introduction of calculators.

“People were afraid everyone was going to lose math skills,” he said.

Instead, calculators have become a valuable tool performing rapid, accurate mathematical operations that save time and reduce human error.

In Elgin, middle school teacher Kyndra Ortiz has embraced Khan Academy – which provides educational tools for those in kindergarten through early collage – and its Khanmigo AI as a tool to support math learning. In Patagonia, paraprofessional Priscilla Carrasco has used AI in her lesson planning to move students from comprehension to critical thinking.

AI: Khanmigo is an AI-powered teaching assistant and personal tutor ... that helps students solve problems without giving them the answers, while offering teachers tools to create

lesson plans, rubrics and educational content.

Khan Academy, which was launched in 2004, was the brainchild of Sal Khan, who built it to tutor his cousins in math. It later evolved into a collection of YouTube videos and then software that provided instant feedback for students.

“I have them (students) using old-fashioned Khan Academy when they work on mastering content stuff – watching videos and answering questions – to reinforce what they are learning in the classroom,” Ortiz said. But she has also incorporated Khanmigo to help students when they get stuck. Students must phrase the question properly in the chatbot in order to get the needed cue to solve the problem. Thus, the bot is not only assisting in math skills but reinforcing vocabulary skills.

Over in Patagonia, Carrasco used AI recently to create a play and collateral materials aimed at satisfying a specific state-mandated standard.

AI: A teaching standard in education means aligning instruction, curriculum and assessments with specific, state-mandated goals that define what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.

In this case, the standard was the ability to “quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.” Using AI, the lesson took Carrasco roughly 10 minutes to formulate. Had she searched for the materials by more conventional means, it would have taken her at least an hour.

Both Ortiz and Carrasco admit to not being entirely comfortable with AI – especially in the beginning. Both pointed to a familiarity with Photomath, a smartphone app developed in 2014 by MicroBlink, that solved math problems rather than teaching students how to solve those problems for themselves.

Hayes pointed out that the fear of students using advances to cheat was no less true when the internet came into being than it is now with AI. With the internet, the concern was the ease with which students could find answers and copy and paste them into assignments. With AI, the fear was that machines would be used to solve problems rather than support learning.

“Our No. 1 concern as educators is that our students are going to use AI to avoid doing the work,” Hayes said. “Instead, we should be asking ourselves how we can teach students to use AI to further their learning while maintaining academic integrity.”

Certainly, there are other concerns with AI, such as bias.

“There’s bias in AI just like there is bias in everything else,” Hayes said. He illustrated this point through an

example provided by Emily Sanders, who spoke at the 2025 School Superintendents Association meeting in New Orleans. Sanders is Deputy Superintendent at Hempfield Area School District in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.

“So, the story goes you’ve lived in a library since birth and all you know is the information that’s in that library,” Hayes said. “And a lot of information can be biased. AI is the same way.”

For Hayes, a big win to come out of Sanders’ AI session was the “traffic light strategy.” This strategy, posted in all Patagonia public school classrooms, guides teachers and students alike:

- Red: No AI use on assignments
- Red/Yellow: All AI used on assignments must be cited
- Yellow: Students may use AI under the direction of the teacher
- Green: Students are encouraged to use AI

At Sonoita Elementary in Elgin, the board developed a policy on AI in 2025 based on Arizona Department of Education guidance. The policy’s key takeaways are as follows:

AI: Emphasizes responsible use of AI tools in the educational settings; Encourages integration of AI to enhance learning experiences; Mandates training for staff and students on ethical AI usage; Prohibits the use of AI for cheating or academic dishonesty; Requires parental consent for AI-related projects involving students; Establishes guidelines for data privacy and security in AI applications.

“The more I learn about it (AI), the more I want to learn about it to make sure my team is up to speed on how we can use this to make our school better,” Erickson said. “If you’re afraid of technology and not willing to change with the times, you’re going to be left behind.”

Adds Hayes, “rather than fight it, we are going to embrace it and teach our kids how to use it right.”



Priscilla Carrasco, fifth grade teacher at Patagonia Elementary School, with the lesson plan and guidelines she used to create a state-mandated standard.

A coffee shop moment becomes a children's book

By Mary Tolena

On a Thursday at the end of January, Patagonia resident Joe Ciofalo was enjoying his weekly visit to The Quail Covey coffee shop. As usual, he brought a book to read while he enjoyed his coffee.

There were several other people in the place, including mothers and their children playing in the children's corner. In other words, a typical morning at the Covey.

When photographer Shannon Dudley arrived, her dog, Charlie, naturally attracted the children's attention. As little Robert, age 1, toddled toward Charlie, his sister Violet, then 2 1/2, noticed Ciofalo sitting at his table with his book and brought one for herself.

"She put the book up on the edge of the table and looked at me," Ciofalo said. "It was a big book – like a novel that her mother was reading.

"So I knew that Violet wasn't actually reading it," Ciofalo continued. "She looked at me, and I said, 'Hi, do you want to join me?'"

Without saying a word, Violet took her book and climbed onto the other chair at Ciofalo's table. She started flipping through the book like she was reading it.

"I was just amazed," Ciofalo re-



Violet Lucero (left) and Joe Ciofalo reading together at The Quail Covey – the moment that inspired "Rosie's Wonderful Discovery." | Photo by Shannon Dudley

called. "Violet kept going through her book for about maybe five minutes. She didn't really look at me much, and I didn't look at her. We were just quiet. She read her book and I read mine."

Meanwhile, Dudley was watching the scene and sensed a special moment was happening. She discreetly snapped a couple of photos from her chair. "I saw Violet climb up into

the chair and then open one of Joe's books as if she was going to pick up on the page where she left off," Dudley recalled.

"I love that our town has so many different generations and I'm grateful for places like the Covey that give us spaces to connect," she continued. "When I saw that moment, I just had to take a photo that encapsulated what a

special town we get to live in."

When Violet's mother, Genesis Murillo, noticed Violet at the table, she first asked whether the girl was bothering Ciofalo. He assured her all was well, and Murillo let the scene continue.

"Violet was content and happy to be there. She's an independent little girl. If she's happy doing something, I'm not going to interfere," Murillo said.

When it was time for the family to leave, Ciofalo thanked Violet for the nice time, and said he hoped to see them again.

After the family left, Dudley showed her photos to Gianna Luna, owner of The Quail Covey. "Awww, how cute!" Luna thought. "That is exactly the kind of moment we want to happen here."

Reflecting on the encounter later that night, Ciofalo was struck by how unusual it was in today's culture. A young child confidently climbs into a chair next to a stranger, and matter-of-factly mirrors the act of reading a grown-up book. Her mother does not interrupt.

"It's very strange to have a girl that young come up to a man of my age and want to interact with him, whether it's through talking or playing with a toy or something," Ciofalo said. "But with a

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Join **Patagonia Area Resource Alliance** for a community meeting to hear the latest on actions related to mining in the Patagonia Mountains. Get updates on the U.S. Forest Service Environmental Impact Statement, state permits, the proposed Community Protection & Benefits Agreement, and ongoing legal actions. Hear from local experts and have your questions answered.

FEATURED SPEAKERS:



Russ McSpadden
Center for Biological Diversity



Robin Lucky and Jay Thompson
Calabasas Alliance



Chris Gardner
Hydrogeologist



Dr. Rebecka Meyers
Pediatric Surgeon

WHEN: Monday, May 4 • 6 PM

WHERE: Cady Hall, Patagonia Public Library
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Patagonia, AZ

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Notes From SEFD



By Kat Crockett

March Meeting

- There were 55 responder incidents in February.
- Following an executive session, the board authorized the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District attorney to negotiate a settlement offer with Santa Cruz County and the State of Arizona in connection with

the theft of funds by SCC Treasurer Liz Gutfahr.

- Acting Capt. Tim Hart announced that cancer is now the leading cause of firefighter occupational deaths.

April Meeting

- There were 65 responder incidents in March, marking a continuing increase in delivery.

• Chief Marc Meredith updated the board on fiscal year 2026-2027 budget planning and plans to present the board with a draft budget during the May 18 meeting. If the board adopts the draft budget, it will be presented to the public during the June meeting, which will include a workshop session for public comment. Following public comments, the board may vote to adopt the budget.

- Due to the rise in fuel prices, Meredith has reinstated a fuel allowance for staff commuting, which will be reviewed monthly and adjusted as needed.

• The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors approved a Wildfire Protection Plan in March. It was presented to the SEFD board and adopted unanimously. Meredith identified Papago Springs and State Routes 82/83 as major risk areas. The adopted plan allows SEFD to apply for related grants.

- On April 25, SEFD welcomed about 150 people to the station to enjoy pancakes with firefighters.

Kat Crockett is a member of the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District Board of Directors.

TOWN COUNCIL NOTES

April 8, 2026 – Regular Meeting

- Patagonia Mayor Andy Wood and the Town Council adopted Resolution 2026-08, a Fair Housing Policy, which describes actions the town can and will take to advance the cause of affordable and equitable housing, along with the posting of a Mayor's Proclamation on Fair Housing.
- The council approved a proposal from Community Homes of Patagonia to use the Town Park's gazebo area for an annual Cinco de Mayo Home Repair Fundraiser. The event will be held Wednesday, May 5, from 5:30-8 p.m. The town approved CHOP's payment of

the \$100 administrative fee but waived the \$225 daily use fee.

- The mayor and council reappointed Concepcion Bracamonte to another four-year term as town magistrate after her current term expires on April 28.
- Lawyer's Title was given permission to use the town's gazebo area for a picnic luncheon in appreciation of local customers. The event was scheduled for April 17.
- The mayor and council gave approval for Town Manager Ron Robinson to sign a Design and Project Management Agreement for the reconstruction of Fourth Avenue from Naugle Avenue to

Pennsylvania Avenue. Project funding will include a mix of block grant and Highway User Revenue Fund monies. Subtracting paid invoices toward the design of the Fourth Avenue bathroom parking project, the project amount is \$28,920.

April 22 – Regular Meeting

- Wood summarized the work done by the town's Public Works department, citing projects involving maintenance, landfill, water treatment plant, waterline repairs, road signage and the Patagonia Public Library, with special mention of the planting of a Christmas tree for future use, along with a branch irrigation line to it. She added that the town held an employee appreciation event in April.
- The mayor and council approved

the sale of a short piece of right-of-way along Pennsylvania Avenue west of Second Avenue. The sale affects three parcels owned by Caleb Smith, at 243 N. Second Ave., with parcel numbers listed.

- Judge Mary Helen Maley, acting pro bono, was appointed as judge pro tem for a one-year term that will end on April 27, 2027.
- A combined workshop presentation with the council and the Planning and Development Committee was planned for Tuesday, May 5, at 6 p.m. At this workshop, Wood will present details and status for the future Patagonia day-care facility, to be located on Town of Patagonia land on Harshaw Avenue. The council scheduled a student session on the town budget for May 6 at 6 p.m.

Sheriff's



Blotter

April 26: A caller from Patagonia said their sibling was trying to commit suicide.

April 24: A caller from Patagonia reported people had been trespassing on their property that morning and for the past five months.

April 21: A deputy reported having

conducted a traffic stop on State Route 82 north of Patagonia that resulted in the driver having a confirmed warrant for his arrest.

April 20: Sonoita Border Patrol requested a deputy due to one of their agents locating an old, rusted AK-47 with no serial number.

April 20: A caller from Patagonia reported that a Jeep had rolled over and was resting on its roof. The caller said no one was inside.

April 19: A caller from Patagonia reported that they could see neighbors fighting and that there were kids around.

April 9: Border Patrol called to request assistance for a pursuit of a vehicle suspected of smuggling humans that was on State Route 82 headed towards Patagonia. BP said a unit had been hit.

April 9: A caller from Sonoita report-

ed an ongoing suspicious circumstance.

April 8: A deputy requested a call card for a traffic offense on State Route 82 in Patagonia.

April 4: A caller requested assistance on Upper Elgin Road due to going off the road in their Jeep after a deer ran in front of them. The caller said the Jeep was not drivable and no one was injured.

March 30: A caller from Sonoita reported that a vehicle had been parked on their property for several days and someone was living in it.

Get Involved!

Last month, we listed a dozen volunteer organizations in our area. Here's some more! There surely will be something that grabs your interest.

- **Patagonia Community United Methodist Church Thrift Store**
patagoniaumc.org
This thrift store raises funds to support UMC's various causes, including East Santa Cruz County Food Bank, Patagonia Volunteer Fire Department, Patagonia Youth Enrichment Center, Community Homes of Patagonia, Patagonia school supplies, holiday events, Vacation Bible School, Nogales Crossroads Mission, UMCOR Disaster Relief and many other national and international charities.
- **KPUP 100.5 Community Radio Station**
kpup.info

This community radio station broadcasts 24/7 with a variety of music. The KPUP board normally meets at the station on the second Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m.

- **The Patagonia Museum**

thepatagoniamuseum.org
The Patagonia Museum, incorporated in 2004, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to collecting and preserving the culture and history of eastern Santa Cruz County.

- **Santa Cruz Foundation for the Performing Arts**

scfpapresents.org
There is only one way in the scenic Santa Cruz Valley to experience breathtaking, soul-enriching, world-class arts performances – through the Santa Cruz Foundation for the Performing Arts – with its unique events steeped in rich, diverse cultural heritage.

- **Sky Islands Tourism Association**

visitskyislands.com
The mission of SITA is to grow regional tourism, enhancing business and employment opportunities within the Sky Islands communities of Elgin, Sonoita and Patagonia.

- **Mat Bevel Company**

matbevelcompany.org
Founded in 1990, this arts and science nonprofit sparks the creative genius in people using its found-object kinetic art museum, science theater productions, hands-on learning and multimedia tools. Through its programs, people discover new ways to use their imaginations to solve problems, generate original ideas and invent things that improve lives and communities.

See INVOLVED, p. 22

The road to the Hermosa mine CPBA

By Lynn Davison

The first public product of the Community Protection and Benefit Agreement process was the Early Action Community Investment Agreement. It is a legal document between the Town of Patagonia, the City of Nogales, Santa Cruz County and South32 focusing on community benefits that can be accomplished within the next 12 months while the negotiation of the separate Community Protections and Benefits Agreement continues. The PRT covered the content of the Early Action agreement in the March 30 Weekly News Bulletin.

Representatives for the signatory entities of the CPBA – Mayor Andrea Wood for Patagonia, Supervisor John Fanning for Santa Cruz County, Nogales Mayor Jorge Maldonado and South32 Hermosa mine President Pat Risner – agreed to delay negotiations on the protections component of the CPBA until the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Hermosa project. The data in the FEIS will provide significant information on which to base negotiations on protections. Final comments on the FEIS were

due April 20. The FEIS should be finalized in July, although it could take until September to be formally released.

In the interim period, each of the governmental partners is doing some form of community engagement. Wood scheduled five 30-minute public comment hearings for public input on the protections component of the CPBA. The first three were on water, air and soils.

“Public comments are important to the CPBA negotiations, as they help provide a full picture of what we need and expect in the negotiations of protections,” Wood said at the April 22 public meeting, on soils.

The final two topics, nature-based restorative economies and biodiversity, will be discussed May 13 at 5:30 p.m., prior to the May 13 Town Council meeting.

On May 20, from 4:30-7:30 p.m. in Thurber Hall at the Patagonia Community Church, the Town of Patagonia will hold an open-to-all workshop on community protections. There will be information on the CPBA process going forward, written copies of all comments received in the five public meeting sessions, and opportunities to ask questions as well as offer additional

comments and suggestions. Signatories from each of the parties to the CPBA will attend the workshop.

An engagement team, with representatives from each of the negotiating parties, is tasked with assuring regular consistent messaging is flowing from the signatories to the community and back. Linda Shore is the team's Patagonia representative.

The CPBA website (cpba-hermosa.org) serves as the official hub for community members to review progress, take surveys, leave comments and find information on the Community Protection and Benefit Agreement. The signatories see all comments that come from public sessions and the website. Shore suggests that comments that are specific and constructive are likely to have more impact on the final agreement.

The CPBA is a legally binding agreement that can be amended, with the agreement of all parties, if conditions change. The signatories' goal is to have the basic agreement completed in early 2027.

No decisions on the framework and content of the final CPBA have been made. The signatories have agreed that all decisions will be by consensus.

On May 4, Patagonia Area Resource Alliance will hold an informational, facilitated community meeting to hear the latest updates on actions related to the South32 Hermosa project and other mining activities in the Patagonia Mountains.

Topics will include:

- The U.S. Forest Service Final Environmental Impact Statement
- State permits and regulatory actions
- The proposed Community Protection and Benefit Agreement
- Ongoing legal efforts and next steps

The meeting will be held at 6 p.m. at Cady Hall in the Patagonia Public Library, 346 Duquesne Ave. It will be livestreamed at youtube.com/@PatagoniaAllianceOrg.

Speakers will include Russ McSpadden, Center for Biological Diversity; Robin Lucky and Jay Thompson, Calabasas Alliance; Chris Gardner, hydrogeologist, Friends of Sonoita Creek; and Dr. Rebecka Meyers, retired physician and PARA board member.

Representatives from the Town of Patagonia, Santa Cruz County, South32 and the U.S. Forest Service have been invited. A representative of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality is expected to attend.

Check It Out at the Library

Books on preparing for the last chapter of life

By Sarah Klingenstein

“Our ultimate goal, after all, is not a good death but a good life to the very end.”

– Atul Gawande

"Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End"

It comes to this for us all: How do we help ourselves, our parents and other loved ones exit the world in a gentle way that maintains their dignity and integrity to the end?

Some preparation is in order. And the Patagonia Public Library is well stocked with resources to help you navigate:

- Elder care (caregiving and dementia/Alzheimer's)
- Estate planning (financial and legal issues)
- Creating a “good death” and a memorial for ourselves and our loved ones
- Navigating the medical system
- Coping with grief

Before highlighting a few popular titles, I'll share that the Patagonia Public Library organizes the nonfiction titles in the Reading Room by topic and subtopic, not by the Dewey decimal

system that many are familiar with. The library staff can steer you to the books you are seeking. Below, I'll note the section where I found each book.

"Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters Most in the End"

Atul Gawande

The author, a physician himself, lays bare the ways that the medical miracles of the last few centuries have made aging and death clinical problems to overcome, with sometimes little regard for the quality of the life of the patient. He examines aging and dying in our country and offers suggestions for a more humane way to care for our elders. Written in a natural and conversational style, it is very readable. Many readers have said the book transformed their perspective on our later years. (Social Science/Death/Dying)

"The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning"

Margareta Magnusson

This book, whose author is recently deceased, is not about clearing the dust bunnies from under the couch before we die, nor is it just about giving away our old clothes. Cultivating an



acceptance of our mortality is the first step, as we cast a fond look toward those who follow us, and whose lives we genuinely want to make easier. Then Magnusson outlines the more practical steps, from prioritizing which areas to tackle first and next, to getting your papers in order, which makes life easier for your family, to having discussions with them about your decisions to say goodbye to certain possessions. (House/Home Cleaning)

"Caring for Yourself While Caring for Your Aging Parents: How to Help, How to Survive"

Claire Berman

In our modern world, dying can be a complicated and, for some, a lengthy process.

The title of this book says it all. (Family/Relationships/Eldercare)

Some other titles include "Reimagining Death: Stories and Practical Wisdom for Home Funerals and Green Burials," "Travelers to Unimaginable Lands: Stories of Dementia, the Caregiver, and the Human Brain" and "The Journey Through Grief."

The library has an expansive list of pertinent books and materials. Ask for this handout at the front desk.

Signed, sealed, retired: Martin Perez closes career as Patagonia postmaster

By Sondra Porter

March 27 is a special date for Martin Perez. Not only was March 27 his last day of work before retirement as the postmaster of Patagonia, but it's the same date he started with the U.S. Postal Service back in 1999.

"I worked in the Postal Service for 27 years and today is my 27th anniversary," Perez said on his last day in the office. "I started March 27, 1999, in the Nogales Post Office. Couple years later, I transferred to the Green Valley Post Office, where I was a supervisor learning for about seven years. In 2007, I got promoted to the postmaster position for a little town called Pomerene."

Although Perez held that position from 2007 to 2012, he explained, "I was never there. I was always doing assignments, details, audits and adjustments and all kinds of stuff in many, many different offices from Arivaca to Willcox to Vail to Sasabe."

His boss, who is now retired, "made me her right-hand man."

Things changed in 2012 when Perez applied for the Patagonia postmaster position and was appointed. "But since I was doing assignments all over other offices, I never came to this office," he said. "I never took over the office until 2015."

One could say Perez was born to the postal service.

"I am from Mexico originally, and my father retired as a postmaster from the Mexican post office service," he said. "It never crossed my mind to work for the postal service in the U.S., but one day, I was on Broadway in Tucson driving by the El Con Mall. It was almost 6 o'clock in the afternoon, and there was a sign on the side of the road – 'Now accepting applications for the postal service.' I turned around at the light."

And the rest is history.

"I'm a person with great faith, and I believe in extraordinary things. Just turning around, that's what opened my life to a great career, a job with great benefits, and then most important of all, the great customers," Perez said.

Perez has been at the Patagonia Post Office long enough to see big changes. In particular, the package volume has increased threefold because of all the online ordering, particularly from Amazon.

He also shared that the biggest challenge he faced when he started at Patagonia was getting the women who had been here to accept him as postmaster because everything had been run without a postmaster for some time.



As Martin Perez reflected on his 14 years as Patagonia postmaster, he thanked his customers and the community itself, saying, "There are a lot of people participating in different things, voluntarily, not expecting to receive anything back and that is greatly appreciated." | Photo by Cynthia Matus Morriss

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"I had to call the co-workers together," he noted, "and I said, 'OK, I understand you guys been running this for a long time like this. I'm not here to make any changes. I'm not here to make your life miserable. I'm here to do my job just like you, so we're all a team, and we're gonna paddle together to get the job done every day. I'm here to give you the tools to do your job and I expect you to do the same.'"

The air was cleared, he said, and they worked well together from that point on.

During an interview with the Patagonia Regional Times on his last day, Perez was constantly being hailed by customers at the office window, wishing him congratulations on his retirement, and acknowledging how much he would be missed. One patron called out, "I never saw you without a smile on your face, Martin. I will sure miss that. Thank you so much!"

No one has been assigned to replace Perez as postmaster, but Albert Gomez, who has worked alongside him, will take over the office for now. Perez highly recommended Gomez to his superiors and encouraged him to submit a letter of interest.

Perez found the last week, and particularly his last day of work, bitter-sweet. He looks forward to retirement, playing his guitar more in a band during

the Spanish Mass at Our Lady of Fatima, and having more time to devote to his wife, two sons and two granddaughters.

At the same time, "I am already missing everything here," he said. "Even today, they surprised me with a little celebration out there. I was in tears this morning.

"I don't think it has sunk in what this is all about."

In his typical gracious manner, Perez asked to extend a personal thank you to the community he served.

"I want to thank every one of my great customers and this community for your times, for your smiles, for your business, sending packages all over to the family members and for everything that you do for this community because (this) is a great community. There are a lot of people participating in different things, voluntarily, not expecting to receive anything back and that is greatly appreciated," he said. "Because you wouldn't get to see that in every other community. Most of the people around the world are against each other, bumping heads. Not here. I've noticed this and that is so great. Appreciate it. I thank Patagonia immensely for everything they have done, not only for me as a member of the postal service but for this community in general."

Borderlands Restoration Network rebounds

By Cody Calamaio

Thanks to a groundswell of support, Borderlands Restoration Network is rebounding after a challenging year. In January 2025, BRN was among the thousands of nonprofit organizations throughout the country affected by the executive order freezing federal grant funding. Forty percent of BRN's annual operating revenue was from federal sources.

"It was a very challenging experience because our organization had accounted for the grants we were awarded in our budget and made staffing and programming decisions based on those numbers," said Executive Director Rodrigo Sierra Corona. "To suddenly not have grant disbursements coming in when you have staff counting on their paycheck to support their families was very frightening."

The initial burst of panic gave way to a surge of passion, as BRN staff members banded together to write letters to their elected officials, reach out to donors, and continue to show up every day, united by a shared determination to keep doing the work they believed in, despite the uncertainty. The board of directors supported Sierra Corona's bold decision to not reduce hours or lay off any permanent staff. The management team worked very hard to keep staff working on funded projects while seeking additional grants and contracts. Community support through annual giving increased significantly.



Borderlands Restoration Network avoided layoffs during a period of grant uncertainty and began 2026 with 30 permanent staff positions. The 2025 staff members are shown in this photo. | Photo courtesy of Borderlands Restoration Network

Even though most of the frozen funding was eventually restored, the abrupt halting of disbursements meant one of BRN's beloved education programs – the Borderlands Earth Care Youth internship program – had to cancel its spring course.

"We had dozens of applicants for the spring 2025 BECY cohort we had to turn away," Sierra Corona said. "Even

though we were able to successfully run the program in the fall, an entire group of young people missed out on the opportunity to participate in this program that is designed to open career pathways in environmental fields and help them connect and care for the land they call home."

After a very rough start, BRN ended 2025 with more income than it had originally budgeted for the year. It began 2026 with 30 permanent staff positions, held the line in education programs, and designed a new conservation program. Borderlands Nursery & Seed increased production, supporting restoration work and retail sales.

However, looking forward, it is not all smooth sailing.

"Both grants and philanthropy are becoming increasingly competitive," Sierra Corona said. "The amount of funding available to do this type of work keeps shrinking while the need keeps growing."

The federal government's policies and financing also remain uncertain. BRN is constantly navigating policy shifts while staying focused on its mission to protect and restore the diverse ecosystems of the Arizona and Sonora borderlands.

"We have always focused on positive, tangible action while addressing the challenges of this region," Sierra Corona said. "We believe that by taking care of our home and landscapes together, we can be united."

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Nature Journeys

Reptile resurgence!

By Vince Pinto

The Sky Islands region of southeast Arizona and the adjoining bootheel of New Mexico host more reptile species than any comparable area in the U.S. The numbers are staggering: 80 types of reptiles, including 32 species of lizards, 43 species of snakes – 10 of which are venomous – as well as five species of turtles. By comparison, the entirety of Europe has only about 151 reptile species.

The heat of May is primetime for our reptiles, as many are “thermophilic ectotherms,” meaning they are adapted to high-temperature environments, relying on ambient heat rather than internal metabolism to maintain high body temperatures. Most of our lizards are strictly diurnal, as are quite a few of our snake species, providing us with a decent chance to catch them sunning themselves to warm their bodies. Other species prowl by night, seeking their preferred prey under cover of darkness. Armed with a decent flashlight, you might catch some going about their predatory business, as prey populations – think rodents, birds, other reptiles and legions of invertebrates – continue to rise after our soaking winter rains.

Let’s look at some common and

obscure species that are sure to pique the interest of any naturalist.

If you find yourself near a permanent or semipermanent body of water, look for the secretive Sonora mud turtle. This aquatic species is well adapted to the arid landscapes of our region, as it is able to live in – and sometimes travel overland in between – streams, ponds, artificial lakes, marshes and even cattle ponds. This small species, which reaches a maximum size of about 7 inches long, is mostly carnivorous. It consumes aquatic insects, snails, fish and frogs, augmenting its diet with a few plants. This species of mud turtle – there are two other kinds in the Sky Islands – can be active by day or night, depending upon daily temperatures.

Turning to lizards, one of my favorites is the diurnal Clark’s spiny lizard. This well-named saurian indeed has pointy scales that help to dissuade certain predators from consuming it. Rather hefty specimens can reach nearly 6 inches in length. This highly arboreal species spends most of its time in trees, where it feeds on insects, maintains a territory against rivals, mates, and attempts to avoid predators such as greater roadrunners, gray hawks and coachwhip snakes.

See REPTILES, p. 22



A Sonora mud turtle in Sonoita Creek State Natural Area. | Photo by Vincent Pinto.

OPINION & COMMENT

Channel your inner child and get the candy



By Cassina Farley

The other day at the grocery store, I was walking down the cereal aisle and I was confronted by a kid begging his mom for a box of Cookies & Creme Cheerios. The mom, who very clearly was not going to buy this cereal, told the boy very sternly to “put it back.”

The begging turned to whining and eventually led to the kid reluctantly putting the cereal back on the shelf. I walked over and picked up that very box and like a complete jerk threw it in my cart in front of the kid and walked off. I didn’t feel bad until I hit the produce aisle and remembered how it felt as a kid to have no control over what my mom put in the cart.

It’s funny how long it takes into your adulthood before you realize the power you have. For years when shopping at the grocery store, I would hear my mom’s voice in my head say, “no, you don’t need that” or “put it back.”

In 2020 I briefly broke free, and during the COVID-19 lockdown I ordered an entire box of Cadbury eggs, and nobody stopped me. Naturally, I came to my senses and gave away the bulk of the candy and eventually that little voice in my head returned.

On a recent field trip with my high school class, we stopped at a food court in South Tucson. For most of us, the number of choices was overwhelming. I made a quick decision and ordered a cheeseburger. I watched the kids wander around gathering food of all different kinds. Hamburgers, pizza, sushi, meatballs, milkshakes and tacos. There were no moms here telling them to pick one or that they had had enough. Realizing that I was the only one listening to my inner mom voice, I followed their lead and jumped up and ordered a falafel and hummus too. Then I went back for a strawberry raspado. Gathered in front of me was an odd assortment of food that I hardly ate but I enjoyed every minute of it.

The other adult across the table from me also ignored the adult in her and had sushi, egg rolls and a chocolate-and-vanilla swirl ice cream cone all at the same time.

I hate that eventually all those kids will acquire that inner voice that shuts them down every time they want to buy a box of sugary cereal. I am also hopeful that that same voice will keep them from making stupid mistakes.

I do, however, encourage them to buy the cereal and the occasional candy bar even though they don’t need it. It’s hard out here in the real world where the only thrills are breaking even on your taxes and paying off your car. That’s why every now and then I act like a kid and buy stuff that I don’t need to prove that I’m an adult and I can do whatever I want – a paradox that the kid at the grocery store will eventually understand. But until then, I recommend he keeps on begging for that cereal.

Cassina Farley can be contacted at cassinaandzachfarley@msn.com.

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Protecting water quality means constantly looking for better ways to do things. At Hermosa, we use innovation and technology to mitigate any potential risks toward the environment. We're building something new here, for the community we live and work in."

- Betty, Environmental Compliance Manager



Learn more



Senior Spotlights 2026

This month, we have part two of our series of profiles of the Patagonia Union High School Class of 2026.



Adahir Alberto Ayon

When it comes to community service, Adahir is a wild card. Need help with concessions? He's got you. What about helping with the town's pool? He's got you there! Adahir has helped his community in many ways. He's volunteered at Bowman-Stradling History Center and at the Patagonia public pool. He has always helped the Parent Teacher Booster Club with concessions. He was a member of the Patagonia Regional Times Board. He also went to Washington, D.C.

Adahir's favorite teachers are Journee Hayes, Nathaniel Porter, Nathaniel Mershon, Michael Young, and Anelie Olivarria. In English, he enjoyed reading the stories and watching movies, which is why Mrs. Hayes is one of his favorite teachers. Not only that, but Mrs. Hayes is very nice and understanding. In welding, Adahir learns about metalworking and how to use the equipment safely. He also gets to spend time with his friends and converse with Mr. Mershon. He also enjoys Ms. Nellie's consumer finance class, where he learns to

manage budgets, savings, investments and credit.

A memorable high school moment was hanging out with friends in Spanish and welding classes, and interacting with players as the team manager during the volleyball and basketball seasons. He especially enjoyed the year when Cynthia Quiñones taught Spanish. His favorite leadership days were Mondays and Wednesdays because he liked spending time with Valentina, Jose and Matthew. He also enjoyed talking to everyone during lunch. Adahir's friends were the highlight of his high school years.

Adahir plans to pursue a career in law enforcement or become an English teacher after high school. In 10 years, he sees himself protecting his community if he chooses to be in law enforcement. If he chooses to be an English teacher, he sees himself teaching English at a high school. Adahir's advice to underclassmen is: "Don't be lazy, behave, and listen to your teachers."

By Valeria Castellanos



Gustavo "Gus" Varela

Gus has been a familiar face on the basketball court, playing for the team for three years as well as continuing his love for the game outside of school –you can probably see him at the park when he has free time.

When asked about his favorite subject, he was very straightforward: none. He does appreciate the teachers who made an impact on him these past four years, Nathaniel Porter, Andres Cuevas and Journee Hayes.

His favorite memory from high school was when he went to Williams, Arizona, for a basketball tournament. The highlight of his high school years are the times he spent having fun in summer.

The plan he has for next year is to figure out what he wants to do with his life. He pictures himself in 10 years with a beautiful family, friends and a happy life. His advice for underclassmen is simple: "Time flies, just have fun and do what you need to do."

By Matthew Yourgules

Matthew Yourgules

Matthew Yourgules is a smart young man and a very funny friend to have. He is someone who will light up the room and will make the whole class laugh just by uttering one simple sentence! He is always down to do anything and everything, and he always wants to go on adventures and try new things. Matt is known for his drip, aka his style. He has his own unique style that sticks out to everyone here

at Patagonia Union High School. Matthew is well known for his jokes at school and he loves to hang out with his friends out in town. Matthew doesn't play basketball, but he is definitely good at it. Matthew's favorite teacher is Anelie Olivarria who, to us, is our finance class teacher. Matthew's favorite memory is all of his freshman year. He called it "One of my favorite years of school".



Gavin Arbizo

Gavin Mathew Arbizo is not only a student, but also one special athlete. He has played high school basketball all four years, and even started on varsity as a freshman. Not

only has he improved throughout the years, but he has shown leadership and led the Lobos to many wins. His voice on and off the court motivates his peers. Sports helped carve Gavin into the man he is today. Even though his high school basketball career is over and he doesn't plan to play at a higher level, his love for the game will never change. You can take the man out of the sport but never the sport out of the man. Outside of sports, Gavin continues to work hard at his job at Red Mountain Foods. This gives him the work experience he'll need.

In school, he maintains good grades and gives it his all. Gavin's favorite classes are history, and English language arts. His favorite teacher is Journee Hayes.

In the future, Gavin intends to pursue a career as a heavy equipment operator. He is an excellent student in auto shop, and even built a jeep. Gavin loves working with his hands and loves the trades. He has gained so much knowledge for

wherever he plans to go, or whatever he plans to do, that Gavin will have success and live his dreams.

As Gavin's time in high school is coming to an end, he has made a lot of memories along the way. Some of his favorite memories were going to the Phoenix Suns arena for his senior year of basketball, which he will remember for the rest of his life. His other favorite memory was when he went on the Williams trip three years in a row. This was only a basketball trip, but it was a moment where he could spend time with his friends.

In 10 years, Gavin sees himself becoming super successful in whatever he does. As he is headed off to adulthood, he leaves this message behind for all of the underclassmen: "Do everything 100% and never give up on your dreams." Even though Gavin is no longer a kid and is moving onto adulthood, you may think the fun is over. That is not the case – his life is just getting started.

By Noah Gallardo



Senior Spotlights 2026



Tallen Simpson



Tallen Simpson has enjoyed his four years at Patagonia Union High School. He has made many friends and has had many opportunities to be in the community. This school year, he had regular jobs at the Patagonia Public Library, the Creative Arts Center, the Thrift Shop, and Borderlands Restoration Network. He helped the library sort magazines and helped keep the kids area clean. He worked closely with Cassina Farley at the Arts Center, helping organize materials, clean up, and build props for the different plays that have happened there throughout the year. He helped sort and hang clothes at the Thrift Shop and helped water plants in the new Borderlands Greenhouse.

He is an avid supporter of all sports at the high school. He kept the basket-

ball team well hydrated by keeping their water bottles filled. He loved any opportunity to hang out with the Lobo. He enjoys playing basketball with his buddies during open gym and participating in all the different activities at school, especially during Morning Meetings in Michael Tackett's class. He has been a class representative in student government for three years and loves participating in restorative circles. He also planted a bucket garden and built a sprinkler system for it. He grew carrots, radishes and green beans!

After graduation, Tallen plans to attend the day program at the Santa Cruz Training Center. He is looking forward to graduation and being in the parade!

By Adahir Ayon



Elizabeth "Lulu" Donnelly

Elizabeth Rose Donnelly, also known as Lulu, looks back on her high school years as a time filled with growth challenges and unforgettable moments. She stayed involved by playing volleyball, softball and baseball, and she also spent time in student government and SkillsUSA. Being part of these teams and groups helped Lulu learn responsibility, teamwork and confidence. Outside of school, she found comfort in hiking through the mountains and exploring new places, which gave her space to clear her mind and enjoy the quiet moments.

One memory that Lulu knows she will never forget is winning the volleyball game against Tombstone this year. That game wasn't just about winning; it was about all the practices, struggles and effort that led up to that moment. Standing with her teammates after the win reminded her how strong friendships can be when people work together toward the game goal.

In the classroom, Lulu connected

most with poetry and science, the subjects that allowed her to express herself while also learning how the world works. Journee Hayes is her favorite teacher and someone who truly supported her, helping make school feel like a place where she belongs.

As graduation is approaching, Lulu is excited but also emotional about leaving behind the place where she grew up. She plans to attend Cal Poly to begin her journey toward a veterinary career, following her passion for helping animals and continuing her education. When she thinks about where she'll be in 10 years, she hopes to be finished with college and moving forward in her career, proud of how far she has come.

Looking back, Lulu would tell underclassmen "be kind to yourself and the ones around you" because high school goes by fast and the people and memories you make along the way truly matter.

By Brianna Majalca



Lenin Huitzilopoztli Albarran



Not many of us are descendants of Aztec warriors and not many of us have the resilience and hard work ethic of a warrior. That resilience and hard work ethic have helped Huitzilopoztli aggressively pursue his goal of going to college for computers and information management. Those same qualities have also allowed him to be a warrior on the soccer pitch, tennis courts and baseball fields.

However, these aren't the only qualities that make a warrior. A sense of selfness, honor for his heritage, and a great moral compass are other qualities that always make it a joy to be in the company of Huitzilopoztli. He is always a person you can count on to be by your side and he always listens to any and everything you say.

Throughout his high school years, Huitzilopoztli has participated in a few different activities. As a member of student government, he started off as representative his

freshman year. He chose to stay out of the Patagonia high school politics his sophomore year. But after feeling that something was wrong within the student body, he took the call to action and returned to student government his junior year as a representative, where he helped out with a lot of different events and proved to be an important member of the student government. Seeking to prove himself even more, he sought the treasurer position because he believed he could help us better use and regulate our money. Outside of the political world, he enjoys expressing himself through the art of acting. He has also found enjoyment in being the Lobo mascot for three years of his high school career.

All in all, Huitzilopoztli is quite the incredible person and any employer would be lucky to have him.

By Skylar Sanchez



Diego Padilla



From the basketball court to the arena, Diego Padilla has spent his high school years staying active and being around his friends. For two years, Diego played basketball, during which he made many memories with the team that he will always remember. One memory that he will never forget is this year's Willams basketball trip. It was a trip filled with laughs and bonding with friends. While sports were important to him, Diego said that the true highlight of his high school career was spending time with his friends and enjoying every day. Those friendships mean everything to him, whether it's in the locker room, the gym, or even those taco shop dinners before practice. Diego eventually found out that his time in high school was going by faster than he expected. His advice to underclassmen is to take it all in and not to take it for granted. For example, for Diego his experience was more than just learning; it was about the people he met and the memories he made with them.

Diego's favorite classes are welding and weights. He enjoyed being active and learning skills that could be used in the real world. Through his time in high school, he was supported by many good teachers that helped him grow. Some of his favorites were Nathaniel Porter, Journee

Hayes, and Alyson Harper. Their encouragement and guidance are a part of why he is the person he is. Diego appreciates how they pushed him to do his best and made him feel supported. With the help of them he was able to gain knowledge and skills, which he could use in the next chapter of his life. High school made it possible for him to create a stable foundation with determination and purpose.

Outside of school he stays busy by working and team roping. He is extremely passionate about it. Team roping is more than just a horse and a rope to him; it's a big part of his personality. After graduation, Diego plans to join the workforce, while still doing what he is most passionate about. In 10 years Diego sees himself with a steady, good-paying job and also traveling around to different places and competing in team roping. He also hopes to have a family that could help support him through his journey of life. He hopes that he can keep improving his skills and build a life built off of hard work. No matter where life takes him, he plans on trying to stay connected with his friends. As Diego closes this chapter up, he wants to leave a message for others: Enjoy your time in high school because it goes by fast.

By Miguel Albarra



Jacob Cruz

Jacob Lamberto Cruz is a 17-year-old student who has been actively involved in school and extracurricular activities. He participated in National Honor Society and student government and plans to attend Northern Arizona University after graduation. His favorite subjects are English and history, and his favorite teachers are Kenny Hayes and Journee Hayes.

One of Jacob's highlights in high school has been spending time with his friends and building strong relationships with them. In 10 years, Jacob imagines himself being financially stable and working toward a secure future.

He was also a dedicated member of the Boy Scouts, traveling to Washington, D.C., twice and attending Rotary Youth Leadership Awards. In his free time, he enjoys watching movies with friends.

Jacob is a hard-working and respectful student who is always willing to help others in class and remains polite to both students and teachers. He especially likes Mrs. Hayes' English class. Jacob enjoys reading books and learning new things. He also enjoys learning history. His favorite memory from high school was his first day at Patagonia High School, when Alyson Harper was very kind to him and helped him feel welcome. Skylar also helped him make friends and they are now close friends.

By Adahir Ayon

Jaxon Yslava was born with natural talent in sports. He has been a wall at the goal while being a goalkeeper in soccer, and being a beast on basketball and tennis courts, since freshman year. While off the field, he became the best politician the school had ever seen, becoming president for two years in a row. Being a star athlete, he continued to stay in shape by taking hikes across Patagonia.

Jaxon is fascinated by history and the stories it has to offer. This love for history was helped by one of his favorite teachers, Kenneth Hayes. He excels in reading and writing stories while in class with his other favorite teacher, Journee Hayes. The most exciting moment Jaxon experienced and will remember forever was being able to play in the Phoenix Suns arena in his senior and final year of basketball for Patagonia Union High School. The experience brought him closer to his teammates, turning them into brothers.

After high school, Jaxon plans to move to Tucson to attend Pima Community College to earn his associate degree. While attending college, he plans to work for Granite Construction. One piece of advice Jaxon wants to give to underclassmen is to participate in everything because it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

By Lenin Albarra



Jaxon Yslava

With her infectious smile and enthusiasm for life, Lola Duerkop is ready to take on the world after graduation! She is a very dedicated student who works hard to make sure she completes all her work. She has enjoyed her time at Patagonia Union High School. She received high compliments from her Python coding teacher, who was so impressed with her coding skills. Although she has done well in coding, her heart is set on a career in education. She plans on following in the footsteps of her mother, aunts and cousin to become a teacher. She is currently preparing to take the paraprofessional assessment so she can earn her certification as a paraprofessional to gain experience working in classrooms. She hopes to attend college to earn her teaching degree. She has volunteered in the pre-K and kindergarten classrooms this school year and has proven to be a wonderful assistant to the teachers.

Lola lives in Rio Rico and enjoys spending time with her family. She loves shopping and going out to eat. Her best high school memories are the field trip to OdySea Aquarium and going to the Santa Cruz County Fair.

By Valeria Castellanos



Lola Duerkop

Senior Spotlights 2026



★ Brianna Majalca

Brianna Majalca is a young woman whose determination and focus define her academic and personal journey. At 18 years old, Brianna is graduating from high school not only as a top student but also as a natural leader. For four years, she was a key player on both the varsity volleyball and basketball teams, serving as captain of both for two seasons. Her leadership extended beyond the athletic courts, as she also served as president of the National Honor Society and vice president of the Student Council.

Beyond her academic achievements in subjects like math, history and English, Brianna possesses a deep sense of service. She divides her time between work and volunteering at a mission in Nogales, Arizona, demonstrating a maturity that prepares her for the challenges ahead. Upon graduation, she plans to attend the University of Arizona to pursue a pre-dental program, with the goal of becoming a successful independent dentist.

While she looks to the future with ambition, Brianna cherishes the moments shared with friends and the pride of having led her volleyball team to their first-ever state playoff game at home. Her message to those who follow in her footsteps is clear: "Don't underestimate yourselves or wait until it's too late to try. Ask for help, believe in yourselves, and cultivate the habits today that will open the doors to your future."

By Jaquelin Benitez Lopez



David Cabrera

If you ask around town about David Cabrera, you'll most likely hear that he's the one in a big white dually truck, and he is also known for his Jeep truck. David plans to work at the mine as a heavy machine operator once he graduates from high school. He also plans to be in as many rodeos as he can get into next year. David likes to go out and enjoys doing his team roping events throughout Arizona and Mexico. David enjoys going out on what we call "rutas," which are off-road rides in side-by-sides or quads, with hundreds of people.

One of David's favorite memories from school is being in auto shop class, learning how to work on all kinds of different vehicles. He earned the Student of the Month award for the auto shop class. He is known for his leadership skills and for showing his classmates new things in auto shop class. David's other favorite memory from school is playing basketball in open gym with all of his friends.

In 10 years, David sees himself owning his own ranch up on the east side of Tucson, near Vail, Arizona, with his horses and his cars. David is one of the most charming men you will ever meet. He is a leader in many ways, and he is great with cars. He is one of the best ropers you'll ever know. He is known for his roping skills and for horsemanship!

By Adrian Gomez



★ Miguel Salvador Albarran

A classmate, a teammate, a friend, a brother. Miguel Salvador Albarran is the extrovert type: He loves doing outdoor activities such as fishing, hunting and off-roading. When it comes to school participation, Miguel has done it all. He played high school soccer for one year, basketball for two, and baseball for four years. He also participated in the

National Honor Society for two years and student government for one year. Miguel's favorite memories from high school were when he had the opportunity to participate in the Williams basketball tournament his senior year and his walk-off win during his final game of baseball his junior year, where the team ended Fort Thomas High School's hopes



of making it to state.

The highlight of Miguel's high school years is all the friends he made and all of his teachers who helped him grow. Miguel liked all his teachers but his favorite subjects were math, English, welding and weights. His plans after high school are to attend college at either Northern Arizona University or the University of Arizona and major in finance so that one day he'll become a financial adviser.

In 10 years Miguel imagines himself living his dream lifestyle. That is, having a good job while being financially stable so that he is able to start a family of his own. Miguel strives to be successful in the future so that he is able to give back to his parents for everything they have sacrificed for him. After four years of experiencing high school to the fullest, Miguel would like to leave this piece of advice to the underclassmen: Don't take high school for granted because that's the start of creating something successful for you. You can either be like many others and just do the minimal as possible or you can strive for more and advance further. Cherish all the memories you can make with your friends and classmates because time does not slow down. It only goes faster the closer you get. Don't let anything get in the way of your success or life – be who you are no matter if someone has a problem with it.

By Jaxon Yslava

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Lobos tennis comes up big despite long odds

By Dave Lumia

There's not a tennis-playing high school in the state of Arizona that is the equal of the Patagonia Lobos.

Simply fielding a team with an enrollment of 70-some students is already a winning achievement. Indeed, only five other schools classified by the Arizona Interscholastic Association as 1A compete in high school tennis – and all five have considerably larger enrollments.

Pair those facts with the Lobos compiling a 7-4 record in dual matches and the bottom line is a remarkable example of punching above their weight. The seven victories included five over Class 2A schools.

"This is by far the best tennis season," said senior Jaxon Yslava, in his fourth and final year on the team. "We were able to get a full boys team, finally we were able to play all six matches and even have an extra. And we're winning some matches now."

David Clovesko-Wharton, in his fifth season as head coach, gives Yslava and fellow senior Skylar Sanchez, in his third year on the team, much of the credit for raising the program's profile.

"They both have motivational superpowers," Clovesko-Wharton said. "Jaxon is more of the social jitterbug on the team. He recruited many players, has the most natural ability. He does mentoring in practice. He's really helped his teammates get better."

"Skylar calls himself the patriarch of the team, more of an organizer. He pulled Jorge (Sotelo) and Lenin (Al-



Jaxon Yslava returns a shot while playing doubles with Lenin Albarran. | Photo by Dave Lumia

barran) onto the team. They are both true-blue Lobo tennis players, and that makes me super proud."

Yslava was also a key contributor to the Lobos basketball team, but while he was in the gym, Clovesko-Wharton was conducting offseason workouts, which were particularly helpful for the team's first-year players. "You can really see the improvement just from those short practices they had," Yslava said.

Patagonia's regular season concluded April 16 with an 8-1 victory over Tombstone, but Yslava and Albarran will represent the Lobos in the state doubles championship for Division III, which encompasses schools from 1A, 2A and 3A classifications.

Albarran is in his first season in tennis (he played baseball for two years), but Yslava said they clicked immediately. "I knew from the first day of practice that I wanted him as my partner because I just saw the chemistry we could have together," he said.

The pair had a 6-3 record, but they'll have to continue defying the odds at the state tournament, which begins Friday, May 1, at Paseo Racquet Center in Glendale. Their first-round opponents are Cody Urias and Aviel Arellano, who are undefeated in 12 matches for Pusch Ridge Christian, the No. 1-ranked team in Division III.

Win or lose, the season will go down as a success – one that Clovesko-Whar-

ton hopes to build upon. While Yslava, Sanchez and Albarran will have graduated, four players are eligible to return: juniors Alex Ruskowitz and Louis Reyes and sophomores Sotelo and Daniel Santos.

"They're already talking about getting more people out next year," Clovesko-Wharton said. "It's a contagious, clique-y thing."

He'll be looking to Ruskowitz, who had a 7-3 record in singles and 8-2 in doubles, to fill the leadership void.

"He's probably our toughest competitor," Clovesko-Wharton said. "He has the sports IQ. He knows how to study the body language, make adjustments on the fly."



Lobos return to state tournament for first time since 2021

Patagonia seniors (from left) Noah Gallardo, Miguel Albarran and Diego Padilla share a smile and an embrace after last week's home finale against Duncan. The Lobos lost the game 16-11, but they concluded their regular season on Monday with an 8-1 victory at Fort Thomas, getting 14 strikeouts from junior Kannon Shore. They are ranked 13th in Class 1A and will take a 9-9 record into the first round of the state tournament on May 2, facing off against Williams.

Photo by Dave Lumia

Glimpses Into Our Past

Rain Valley Ranch

By Alison Bunting

Homesteaders began populating the Rain Valley area, east of Sonoita and north of Elgin, in the early 1900s. The first news report of the Rain Valley Ranch is in 1932, when visitors arrived at Robert Ferris' Rain Valley ranch. Robert, his wife, Edith, and Robert's brother "Buzz" began ranching in Rain Valley after 1920. Edith died in 1935 and a year later Robert and Buzz sold their ranch to Chicago publisher Addison B. Scott for \$40,000. Scott and his wife, Adelaide, built a new home and in 1937 greatly enlarged the size of the Rain Valley Ranch by purchasing neighboring homesteads from Frank Edwin Dalton (320 acres), Dan Mathes (320 acres), Frank Skutt (400 acres) and John C. White (640 acres).

In early 1938, Addison died of a heart attack. His widow, Adelaide, continued to operate the ranch until 1943, when she sold Rain Valley Ranch to William Stuart Symington and his brother Charles. W. S. Symington was president of Emerson Electric Co. of St. Louis and became a member of the Truman administration in 1945. Charles was a radio manufacturer in Detroit.

World War II prevented their active participation in the ranch and, in 1949, the 14,000-acre Rain Valley Ranch was sold to Robert and Elizabeth Townsend for \$175,000.

Robert Carter Nicholas "Bob" Townsend (1914-1995) grew up in Garden City, New York. His father, Edward, was a member of the New York Stock Exchange. Elizabeth Bertha Benziger (1905-1989) also grew up in New York, but by 1930 her father, Alderick Benziger (1876-1956), was raising cattle on the Diamond Tail Ranch on the Wyoming border of north central Colorado. During summer months, the Benziger family hosted young visitors from New York City and Bob and Betty met when he visited the ranch. "New York Tenderfoot Wins Ranch Princess" read the New York Daily News headline when their engagement was announced Jan. 4, 1937. The couple married in March and moved to Marfa, Texas, to operate a ranch purchased by Bob's brother, Edward (1913-1979). Their daughters, Grace, Pamela and Sally, were all born in Texas.



Betty and Bob Townsend in the 1970s. | Photo courtesy of the Wystrach family



A 2017 photo of the Rain Valley Ranch. | Photo courtesy of the Arizona Land and Water Trust

See RAIN VALLEY, p. 22





OFFICIAL NOTICE OF THE

88TH ANNUAL MEETING

May 28, 2026 | Start 7:00 p.m.

Registration Begins 6:00 p.m. | Door Prizes Available

Benson USD | 360 S. Patagonia Street | Benson, AZ

The 88TH ANNUAL MEETING of Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc., will be held at Benson Unified School District, 360 S. Patagonia Street, Benson, AZ, on Thursday, May 28, 2026, starting at 7:00 p.m. for the general business meeting. Registration will begin at 6:00 p.m.

The purpose of the annual meeting is to consider and act on reports of business that may come before the membership. To accomplish this, the following agenda is announced:

- Call to Order
- Report on quorum
- Reading of the annual meeting notice and proof of its mailing
- Reading of unapproved meeting minutes from 2025 and action thereon
- Report of director election results
- Report of Board President
- Report of Chief Executive Officer
- Adjourn

Can't Attend the Annual Meeting?

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Thursday, May 21, 2026

Register 6:30 p.m.

Start 7:00 p.m.

Cady Hall

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Mount Wrightson Trail

By Wayne Tomasi

There is no official Forest Service number for the trail to the summit of Mount Wrightson because no such designation exists. There are several trails that can be used to access Baldy Saddle; however, there is only one trail from Baldy Saddle to the summit of Mount Wrightson and it is the southernmost end of Crest Trail #144. This description is for the section of the Crest Trail from Baldy Saddle to the summit of Mount Wrightson.

Local ranchers, miners and U.S. Army personnel originally called Mount Wrightson “Old Baldy.” The name supposedly referred to the bald head of Capt. Richard S. Ewell, who was assigned to the First Regiment of Dragoons stationed in 1857 at nearby Fort Buchanan. Captain Ewell allegedly heard some of his men talking about Old Baldy. When Ewell asked about their remark, the men pointed at Mount Wrightson and said they were referring to the peak, not his head. On Jan. 8, 1930, the United States Board on Geographic Names officially changed the name to Mount Wrightson in honor of William Wrightson, one-time manager of the Salero Mining Co. and Santa Rita Mines. An 1866 Simon G. Elliott map labeled the peak “Wright Mountain.”

In 1856, William Wrightson, a well-educated civil engineer, served as the editor of the Railroad Record newspaper in Cincinnati. Sometime in 1858, Wrightson became superintendent of the Santa Rita Mining Co. and soon became an influential citizen who promoted territorial status for Arizona, which it eventually acquired in February 1863.

In mid-February 1865, Wrightson was surveying the disputed boundaries of the Baca Float #3 land grant with a group of men, including Gilbert Hopkins. On Feb. 16, Wrightson discovered he had left some important notebooks at their previous camp, so he rode back to retrieve them, accompanied by Hopkins. The following day, when returning to the surveying group, the two men were attacked and killed by Apache warriors, supposedly within 500 yards of Fort Buchanan (previously called Camp Moore and, later, Fort Crittenden).

The Mount Wrightson Trail is steep, rocky and exposed to sun and wind – both formidable adversaries. The trail leaves the south end of Baldy Saddle and remains relatively flat for the first 200 yards. Other than a fallen ponderosa pine, the trail is smooth, unobstructed and easy to follow. Shortly after the fallen tree, the trail veers right around a ridge to the eastern slope of the summit block of Mount Wrightson. The trail passes through a grassy area covered with Apache and ponderosa pines severely burned in a recent fire. Within approximately 100 yards, the trail turns sharply to the right, crosses a grassy slope, and begins an unrelenting climb to the summit.

The trail crosses a saddle, turns right, and begins ascending as a narrow pathway through a series of short and narrow switchbacks along the edge of a cliff where the trail has been blasted out of solid rock. From the beginning of the switchbacks to the summit, the route can be dangerous during the winter months when covered with ice and snow. One of the switchbacks is supported by a sturdy stone wall. Once



Once on the summit, the rewards include a splendid – and completely unobstructed – 360-degree panoramic view of the surrounding area. | Photo by Wayne Tomasi

the path reaches the top of the switchbacks, the route turns left and circles around to the south side of the summit block. This section of trail should be called Jacob’s Ladder, after the biblical ladder that reaches from earth to heaven seen by Jacob in a dream. When the trail is above the tree line, the route is completely exposed to the sun and wind. The surrounding landscape is dominated by huge slabs of fractured granite.

The summit is at the end of a series of short, steep switchbacks where breathing becomes difficult and walking slows to a crawl. Once on the summit, the rewards include a splendid – and completely unobstructed – 360-degree panoramic view of the surrounding area. On a clear day, you can see seemingly forever (actually more like 100 miles). Off to the north are the Santa Catalina Mountains looming high above Tucson. Moving in order in a clockwise direction are views of the Rincon, Galuro, Winchester, Whetstone, Dagoon, Chiricahua, Pinaleño, Mustang, Sierra San Jose (in Mexico), Huachuca, Sierra la Mariquita (in Mexico), Patagonia, Tumacacori, Baboquivari and Sierrita mountains as well as the Canelo Hills. Several other landmarks visible from the summit are Mount Hopkins Observatory directly below you to the west, Baboquivari, Kitt and Picacho peaks to the north. The summit also has unparalleled views of the rocky backbone of the Santa Rita Crest as well as the Sonoita, Santa Cruz and San Pedro River valleys.


An impressive interpretive sign at the summit describes how the Forest Service used the peak for a lookout tower from the 1920s until the 1950s. The sign also describes two fire lookout

towers that once stood on the summit. Today only a small section of the stone and mortar foundations remains. The summit also has two ammo boxes stuffed with notepads containing the signatures of seemingly thousands of folks who have hiked there. Rumors say several people have either run or hiked to the summit over 100 times each.

Weather permitting, the summit is a splendid place to take a break, catch your breath, snap some photographs, enjoy the spectacular scenery, and eat lunch with the resident ladybugs. Unless you’re carrying a climbing rope and hardware, the only choice is to return to Baldy Saddle the way you came.

Wayne Tomasi is the author of “Exploring the Santa Rita Mountains,” which includes extensive descriptions of virtually all of the trails on the east side of the Santa Rita Mountains, as well as lesser-known remote routes. The book is available at the Patagonia Library or it can be purchased from the author.


EDITOR’S NOTE: The February issue of the Patagonia Regional Times included an article by this author on Bathtub Tank and El Pilar. The article is an accurate description of the hike and how to access it. However, to reach Bathtub Tank and El Pilar on the Adobe Canyon Road (FR-234) requires driving through private land where there is no National Forest easement. Therefore, it is necessary to sign a register at the beginning of the private land and state your purpose for entering and comply with a strict set of rules. Visitors are also required to sign out when leaving. If visitors do not comply with these restrictions, future access could be denied.





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ROSIE (cont. from p. 6)

book, that was extremely unusual.”

Ciofalo has written a number of children’s books in the past.

His reflections on the vignette started to spin into storytelling mode.

“I woke up – literally woke up at 3 in the morning – and started to put a story together based on what had happened at the coffee shop,” Ciofalo said.

Three months later, the tale has become “Rosie’s Wonderful Discovery at The Quail Covey,” a self-published children’s book now available at The Quail Covey and Patagonia Trading Post. The character of Rosie is based on Violet, and Berty is Rosie’s little brother.

Ciofalo started writing children’s books when he, his wife, Gretchen, and their young kids were living on a farm in Cañon City, Colorado, where he is from. “We had two children, and a 4-acre farm. We were growing our own vegetables, and I had time on my hands,” Ciofalo recounted. “Gretchen asked me, ‘Why don’t you try to write a children’s story for our kids? I bet they would like that.’

“I had never thought about doing that. And so I said, all right, I’ll give it a try,” Ciofalo continued. “I wrote a story called ‘When You Wish Upon a Pizza.’ Gretchen tried to illustrate it some, and we thought it was pretty good.”

The family ended up moving to New Jersey about a year later. Joe and Gretchen tried shopping the book to

publishers in New York City – and found out how competitive that market is. But Ciofalo kept writing stories over five years when he was a stay-at-home father. Over time, they accumulated in a box in the attic.

Some 35 years later, Gretchen brought one down and had it self-published as a Christmas gift for Joe and the family. After learning the process of self-publishing, they brought several of Joe’s stories back to life in book form.

By 2016, Joe and Gretchen were ready to leave New Jersey winters and head back west. They had visited Gretchen’s parents in Tucson over the years, and first landed in Tubac. After discovering Patagonia during their travels in the area, they decided the town was a better fit for them, with its strong sense of community and caring. They moved here in 2023.

That sense of community is what draws Joe to The Quail Covey every week. In fact, that’s why he put Covey founder Gianna Luna’s name with his on the front cover of “Rosie’s Wonderful Discovery.”

“I think of Gianna as a co-creator of the story, because she brought the Quail Covey space and atmosphere to life, where magic moments like Violet’s and mine spontaneously happen. So I wanted her to have creator credit for the book, too.”

Copies of the book arrived at the Quail Covey in April, as the cafe celebrated its first anniversary. The story



Joe Ciofalo, standing in back, with (from left) Quail Covey owner Gianna Luna, Genesis Murillo, and Murillo’s children Robert, Violet and Lyra in the cafe’s children’s corner. | Photo by Mary Tolena

affirms the success of the Covey’s children’s corner, which was a founding pillar of Luna’s vision for the café. “I needed a children’s space to keep my own kids occupied while I’m here,” Luna said. “It was the first part of the room that we set up.”

“The park and the Covey are the two places in town where my kids can play,” Murillo said appreciatively. “We come here often.”

“I’m also happy that the children’s corner has become a mothers area as much as for kids,” Luna added. With a play kitchen and plenty of toys and books to keep the children engaged, “it’s beautiful that the mothers can just sit and talk.”

The Patagonia Public Library has the book as well. The staff hopes to put it up on the Storybook Walk in the Town Park sometime soon.

Several of Ciofalo’s other children’s books also can be found at Patagonia Trading Post.

Though he had written many children’s stories, Ciofalo says that “Rosie’s Wonderful Discovery at The Quail Covey” is his first with a theme of books and reading. “It’s so important for kids to interact with books and understand that they can be a companion to you, even if you’re alone at a table,” he said. “That’s the message I want to leave with young readers: A book can be your friend.”

SOCCKER (cont. from p. 1)

great unison.”

Mrotek, manager of The Nature Conservancy’s Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, played club soccer at Northern Arizona University and still plays regularly in Tucson leagues.

“I just enjoy the game,” he said. “It’s been a big part of my life for a long

time. It’s helped me meet people from all over the world.

“It’s kind of like a common language. I didn’t know any of these guys until about two, three months ago, and now they’re part of my Thursday routine, meeting all these good folks.”

The current start time is 5 p.m., but it will shift to later in the evening as the summer heat arrives.

Mrotek said a typical gathering begins with stretching, loosening up, “lots of talk, lots of hanging out, but we’re going to set up these cones here in just a little bit and we’ll divide into two teams and actually play a game. We don’t really keep score on anything. Even if your team is scored on, everyone’s like ‘good job.’”

Weaver said the level of competi-

tion depends on who shows up. “Most of the time it’s more of a social thing – get out and move the body. Sometimes there’s some folks who want to get competitive, and that’s fun too,” he said.

“We want it to be accessible – that’s the most important thing. Whether you’re under 10 or over 60, come on out.”



At 63 years old, Jan Koch of Sonoita refers to himself as the “most experienced” of the group. | Photo by Dave Lumia

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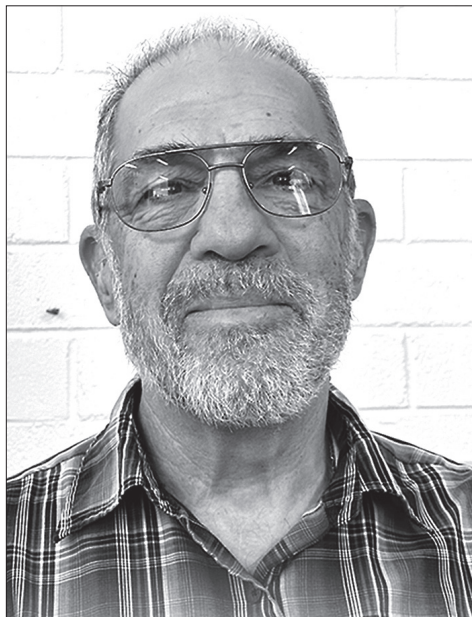



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STARSTRUCK

Follow the stars



By Harold Meckler

This story may be different from when it was first told, or maybe this is just the way I heard it. Even more likely is that it just floated into my mind one windy afternoon while I daydreamed about finding my way to Wrightson Peak using only Polaris, the North Star, as my guide. Regardless, I think it's worth telling because it speaks to many things.

Long ago, two men, elders of their respective villages, stared at each other across the crystal blue surface of the freshwater lake that separated their communities. As they stared, each had the same thought: how much better it would be to have dominion over the entire lake and not have to share it, to be limited to only half.

Each watched the other over many days, then weeks and months. Finally one day, as barely a whisper of night could be heard, their eyes locked. Silently, they moved in unison. They

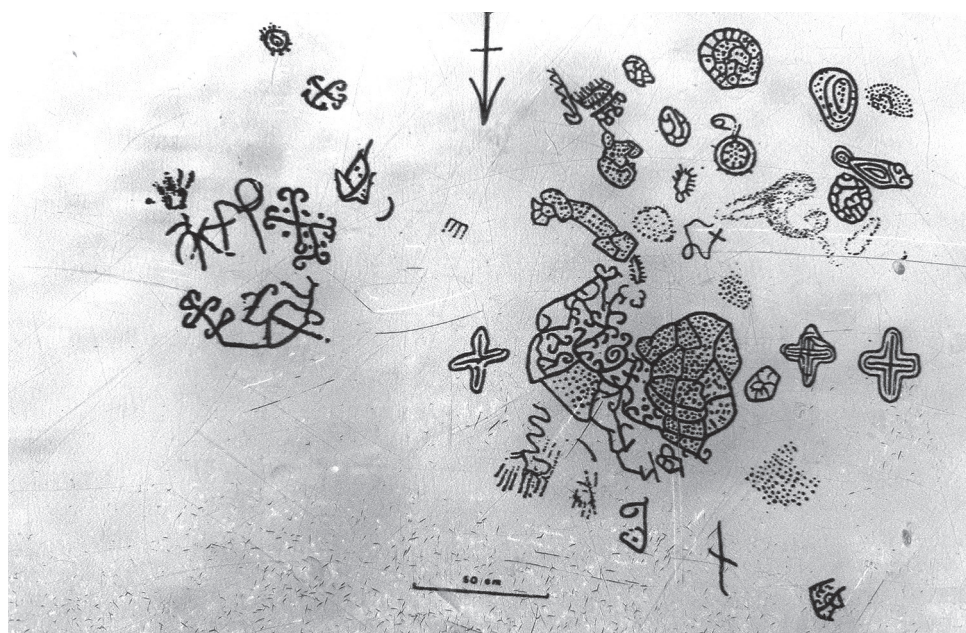
untied their canoes and paddled out to the middle of the lake, determined to decide the issue once and for all.

As fate would have it, however, both had misjudged how quickly evening would come. Suddenly, a battle was out of the question. Instead, some say, it was as if they had suddenly forgotten all that had led them to this spot. Above the lake was a starry sky. Mars and Jupiter shone brightly. The men were captivated by the beauty and began excitedly pointing upward though each was already fully familiar with the constellations and the two glowing planets. After all, they had seen all of this so many times since childhood. Still, they were both awestruck.

No one can remember who spoke first, but they began to share tales of how each had used the night sky to navigate far from their homes and onto the sea. And one finally said, "Let the two of us explore together." The second quickly agreed and added, "I have a most knowledgeable man in my village. Perhaps you have one like him in yours. They can draw us many maps." "Yes," replied the first. "In the morning, let yours come across the lake. On the following day, our mapmaker will come to you."

And so it came to be that the two villages began working together and soon they made their way north, where more wonder awaited. They followed the stars and the planets. These were their guideposts to the future and to understanding a world where gateways continued to unfold.

One thousand or more years ago, the Arawak of what is now Venezuela sailed north into the Caribbean. Like all mariners until our current time



The drawings at Mati, the Simacan Cave on what is now Bonaire. Symbols represent stars, constellations and currents.

of electronic magic, they found their way by using stars as pointers. Among the places they found is the island of Bonaire, some 50 miles away. On its northeast coast they came upon a cave with a wondrous view of the sea and the sky. It became home for a simacan, an ancient astronomer.

It was there that he identified stars, planets and constellations and painted them alongside depictions of tides and currents. All were necessary for travel back to the mainland and to other nearby islands. The Arawak culture soon spread throughout the region. Economies were established over vast distances. Coupled with the Arawaks' limitless determination, the stars led the way for these folks just like they had for others all over the world.

In times of strife – which seem to occur more often than not – our differences become focal points. That's when, more than ever, it's good to remind ourselves what we have in common. And, one of the commonalities that has never known distinction among nations is how studying and using the stars propels everyone forward.

It's forever fascinating to travel to faraway lands in search of new food, colors and lifestyles only to find how similar we really are. On a recent trip, walking through a small town on a small island, my guide asked me to describe how it was different from Patagonia.

We'd looked at several old homes filled with tiny kitchens, bedrooms just big enough for one bed, with walls covered with paintings and mementos. In each, I smiled every time I had to duck while crossing a threshold. "We're all the same," I said, "except we're a bit taller." I learned that even in hardship, the people who had lived here had clearly been resilient. I knew all too well that my family's history was no different.

I stood there and wondered how their lives, as well as my own, would have been different if just a few more people had found a way to meet in the middle of a lake to admire the stars. The key, then, as well as now, is to be willing and able to see and hear the message and then agree to follow it together.

Obituary

Doris Ann Rusch

July 11, 1942 – March 19, 2026

Doris Ann Rusch (née Peterson), born July 11, 1942, in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, to Dr. Dean F. Peterson Jr. and Besse V. Peterson (née Carter) passed away peacefully at home on March 19 in Sonoita at the age of 83.

Doris is survived by her daughter, Jennifer L. (Mark) Wendt, her brothers Dean F. Peterson III and Nicholas (Gloria) Peterson, and sister Linda Peterson.

Doris was preceded in death by her husband of 34 years, Donald H. Rusch, her recent partner, Bill Mitchell, and her sister Lucille Peterson.

Doris grew up in Colorado and Utah. She received a bachelor's degree in biology and geology at Utah State University and a master's in zoology and ecology from University of Wisconsin at Madison. She met her husband, Don, at USU and they married in 1965.

She spent her career predominantly at the Wis-

consin Department of Natural Resources, where she used her biology education in the areas of wildlife conservation and management as well as in the acquisition, restoration and management of thousands of state land acres. She was possibly the first woman to serve as a DNR wildlife manager and her colleagues labeled her a "trailblazer." She was also an early promoter of the Women in Conservation movement. Throughout her years she was an avid hunter, sportswoman and adventurer, traveling extensively around the U.S. and the world.

Doris was a lifetime member of The Wildlife Society and the Ruffed Grouse Society and was an active member of Southern Arizona Quail Forever, a conservation organization.

After retirement from state and county service, Doris returned to her talents as an artist in the field



of wildlife and nature art with her lovely drawing, painting, stained glass, scratchboards and other artistic media. In 2016, Doris moved to Sonoita with her partner, Bill Mitchell, where she resided until her death. Her art has been featured and sold at the

See RUSCH, p. 22

INVOLVED (cont. from p. 7)

• Mountain Empire Rotary Club

rotaryd5500.org

facebook.com/Mountainempirerotary

Rotary International is a global network of community volunteers, with members known as Rotarians, who work together to create positive, lasting change in their communities and around the world, focusing on areas like promoting peace, fighting disease, providing clean water,

supporting education, and growing local economies.

• Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch

audubon.org/research-ranch

For more than 30 years, the Research Ranch has protected grassland ecosystems through conservation, research and education.

• Santa Cruz County Fair and Rodeo Association

sonoitafairgrounds.com

The Sonoita-based association needs

volunteers for many, many different events, as well as for general maintenance.

• Sonoita-Elgin Fire District

sefd911.org

The mission of the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District is to provide the community with high-quality fire, rescue, prevention and emergency medical services.

• Santa Cruz Humane Society

santacruzhumanesociety.org

The mission of the Santa Cruz Humane

Society is to provide compassionate care for Santa Cruz County's lost and abandoned animals, provide them with safe, cost effective medical treatment, and encourage fostering and adoption.

Note: We're looking to include smaller, less well-known organizations, especially in Sonoita, Elgin and Canelo. Please send additions to this list to clarebonelli@gmail.com, including contact information.

List compiled by Clare Bonelli

REPTILES (cont. from p. 11)

That scurry of claws you hear when passing a mesquite or acacia tree is often this species playing hide-and-go-seek. This is among the most familiar of sounds as we walk the trails at Raven's Nest Nature Sanctuary – and also a key reason that we have a visiting pair of gray hawks every year.

A far more reclusive lizard species slinks its way through the leaf litter of woodlands in a few select borderlands mountain ranges. The center of distribution for mountain skinks, and in fact the only place they can be found in the entire U.S., is the extreme southern tier area of the Sky Islands. Canyon bottoms with woods, rocks, leaf litter and logs constitute prime habitat for this often hidden species. A flash of turquoise from the breakable tail is often

the only fleeting hint that this small lizard is afoot. Like many of our smaller saurians, the mountain skink consumes invertebrates. Strangely, this species has been noted to variously lay eggs or bear live young in Arizona.

Finally, we turn to snakes. I have met more than a few Arizonans who are afraid of them. I respectfully point out that they are definitely in the wrong state, given our high biodiversity of these legless relatives of lizards. One of the oddest species we have is the western threadsnake. This nearly blind snake looks as if you simply added scales and two dots for eyes on a large earthworm. I've seen only two in my many naturalist journeys – both at night, as this snake is decidedly nocturnal. One, odd as it may seem, was in a flowerpot in Tucson. The other was traveling in one of our many arroyos

at Raven's Nest under a moonless sky. Clinging to its head scales were a few small and irate ants, clueing me into the most recent meal of this individual. In fact, ants and termites are the mainstays of this species.

As if all this were not strange enough, some small owl species capture western threadsnakes and release them alive in their nests, which some studies indicate results in increased survivorship of their owlets.

We conclude with a rather spectacular species of snake. Like our other *Crotalus* species, the black-tailed rattlesnake is the real McCoy when it comes to backing up its rattling and hissing threats. In a reptilian world rife with bluffers, shams and mimics, take heed when this or any other rattlesnake species is around. Black-tails are one of our larger species and possess

rather long fangs. These facts, coupled with the rather placid disposition of many individuals of the species, make a close encounter quite possible. More often than not, I detect a black-tailed rattler when I am within 7 feet of it, as it reluctantly rattles or silently slithers away. Once spotted, I simply admire the profound beauty of this snake and am reminded that reptiles indeed rule the roost during our warmer months.

Vincent Pinto and his wife, Claudia, run Ravens-Way Wild Journeys, their nature adventure and 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.org.

RAIN VALLEY (cont. from p. 18)

In the late 1940s, Bob and Betty returned to Colorado to help Betty's father run the Diamond Tail Ranch. It was a difficult, isolated life as they were completely snowed in during winter months, so in 1949 the Townsend family moved to Arizona. Bob was hospitalized for six weeks shortly after purchasing the Rain Valley Ranch. Thankfully, Betty was an expert cattle-woman and took over management until his recovery.

They focused on Hereford beef

production, selling yearlings to buyers in California and the Midwest. Grace, Pamela and Sally all participated in ranching operations. A July 2, 1961, Arizona Republic article noted, "the girls ride 40 to 50 miles of fence, nose white-faces at roundup time and carefully doctor the critters when they take to ailing."

Bob and Betty were active members of the community, participating in the Santa Cruz County Fair and Rodeo Association and the Elgin Community Club. In 1977, their eldest daughter, Grace, returned with her family to help

run the ranch. Grace had become a teacher in California, where she met her husband, Michael Wystrach. Four of their six children, Audrey, Andrea, Alex and Amie, were born in California. Twin sons Mark and Michael arrived after their return to Sonoita. Grace and Michael became sole owners of a portion of the Rain Valley Ranch, which they named the Mountain View Hereford Ranch.

In 1987, Bob Townsend sold the Rain Valley Ranch to rancher Don Martin for \$4 million. As reported in the June 22, 2008, Arizona Daily Star, Mar-

tin sold most of the ranch for \$35 million to a group of Texas and California investors who planned to construct a 1,600-home, 5,000-acre development. The development never materialized and in 2026 the Arizona Land and Water Trust announced the completion of the purchase of the 5,500-acre Rain Valley Ranch conservation easement "to avoid development encroachment upon the Fort (Huachuca) and sustain military operations."

Special thanks to Grace and Amie Wystrach, who provided information for this article.



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(520) 375-8159 or
mfish@courts.az.gov

RUSCH (cont. from p. 21)

Patagonia Trading Post as well as the Steak Out in Sonoita. She loved her home in Arizona, and the many friends and connections made there. For a time, she served as a volunteer fire dispatcher for the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District.

Doris' love, strength and kindness will continue to resonate through her family, friends and the countless lives she touched. She will forever remain in our hearts and memories.

Doris wrote a profile about herself

around 2012, which contains some wonderful detail about her life and career. It can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/dorisorusch>.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Doris and Don Rusch Wildlife Fund to honor Doris' legacy in wildlife, ecology, education and conservation. To donate, checks may be made out to "Raymond James Charitable." Please note "Donor Advised Fund #455028 – Doris and Don Rusch Wildlife Fund" in the memo field on the check, and mail to: P.O. Box 23559, St. Petersburg, FL 33742.

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Future of Elgin Bridge still being considered

By Carrie White

The Elgin Bridge is still standing. But for how long is anyone's guess.

Last year, the Patagonia Regional Times reported that the Arizona Department of Transportation's Historic Preservation Team had stepped in to request the bridge be reevaluated in light of a 2027 demolition and replacement schedule. That decision came after Elgin resident Sue Downing made the team aware of the bridge's historical significance.

According to Downing's research, the bridge was built in 1922 at a cost of \$8,000. County engineer J.W. Larimore provided the plans and local contractors Frank Lown and Tom Wood supplied the labor. Those are the same contractors who were used in the construction of the South River Road Bridge outside Nogales, the only bridge in the county included on the National Register of Historic Places.

Also known as the Babocomari Creek Bridge, the span allows for a connection from Elgin Road northward to U.S. Highway 82. The Warren pony truss with alternating verticals is 64 feet in length with a span length of 61.7 feet.

In the reevaluation, the bridge received a score of 47 out of 100 on the Arizona Historic Bridge Inventory, which identifies, documents and evaluates bridges across the state for historic significance. That was more than double the score of 20 received in 2009, when a different company conducted the assessment.

This recent assessment, completed by HDR Inc., makes the bridge potentially eligible for the National Register. HDR is a global architectural and engineering firm based in Omaha, Nebraska. The previous evaluation was completed by FRASERdesign of Loveland, Colorado.

"The Fraser bridge evaluation did not provide a breakdown of the points assigned, so we're unsure how the bridge received a 20," Garin Groff, public information officer for the Arizona Department of Transportation, said. "HDR's architectural historian used Fraser's original scoring system to determine the current score."

Historical significance is a central component of the inventory. In a letter to then Santa Cruz County Public Works Director Leonard Fontes Jr., Daniel Lizarraga of HDR noted that the new score makes it "subjective as to whether or not the bridge should be eligible (for the National Register of Historic Places)."

According to Groff, that distinction does not guarantee that the bridge would survive.

"Many historic structures are removed due to safety and operational concerns and replaced with new bridges," Groff said. He pointed to the recent removal of the Pinto Creek Bridge and the pending removal of the Queen Creek Bridge, both on US Route 60.

HDR is currently finalizing the reevaluation of the historical status, which will include a public meeting.

However, HDR's analysis is not focused on obtain-



Guardrails on the Elgin Bridge today may be different, a result of work done by Tucson bridge engineer Jerry Cannon in 1999, but the structure of the bridge has not been altered. | Photo by Carrie White

ing a National Register designation. Rather, HDR's engineering team will "proceed with the conclusion that the bridge should be considered eligible and documented using HAER documentation to mitigate the adverse effects," Lizarraga wrote, referring to the Historic American Engineering Record, which records America's engineering and industrial heritage.

"Adverse effects" can include anything from incomplete documentation that leads to loss of historical context to the impact that demolition of the bridge and subsequent construction schedule would have on residents.

HDR is completing an alternatives analysis to determine whether there is a feasible/prudent alternative to replacing the bridge by investigating three options: doing nothing; constructing a bridge at a new location/alignment; or rehabilitating the existing bridge. The analysis will take three months.

Bridge engineer Jerry Cannon, who worked on the 1999 Elgin bridge upgrade, said that of the three alternatives proposed by the HDR team, he believes the construction of a bridge on a new location and with a new alignment makes the most sense.

"Do nothing is not a good option," Cannon said, adding that rehabilitating the existing bridge to accommodate contemporary traffic while maintaining historical integrity would be very difficult.

"They just need to put a new bridge in there and leave the old one alone," Cannon said. "Make it (the Elgin bridge) a pedestrian bridge."

Downing is all for that. She has spent countless hours researching the bridge and campaigning for its preservation. In 2022, ADOT put a call out for projects that could be eligible for federal funds through the Off-System Bridge Program. Santa Cruz County applied and the application was accepted with \$3.9 million available for Elgin Bridge replacement.

However, at this point, Downing believes a new bridge at a different location is the best solution. Her hope is that the old bridge, which, according to her research, dates to 1922, will be the centerpiece of a "pocket park."



Built in 1922, the Elgin Bridge cost \$8,000 to construct. In this photo, Rebecca Smith sits atop horse Muleta in front of the bridge in the late 1960s. | Photo taken by Sandy Sanders, courtesy of Re-

"These parks serve as a natural, relaxed setting that highlight adjacent historical landmarks," Downing said. Adding a few parking spaces, picnic tables and interpretive signs would not only enhance historical understanding of the area but also foster community identity, she says.

Constructing a new bridge would leave a major question to be answered: Where could it be built?

It's a simple question with no easy answer. According to the county assessor's records, roughly 32 acres around the Elgin Bridge, including the railroad section house, are owned by Patricia L. Lareau. However, Lareau died two years ago in Apache Junction and it is not clear who may have inherited the property.

When asked whether any of the \$3.9 million could be used in the purchase of property for a new bridge, Groff confirmed that a small portion of the grant is set aside for right-of-way purchases.

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**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PROVISIONAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT BUDGET 2026-2027
OPEN BUDGET MEETING WILL BE HELD ON MAY 20, 2026
FOR ANY QUESTIONS CALL GEORGINA TAVERA, CFO AT 520-732-2156**

The Governing Board of the Santa Cruz County Provisional Community College District shall convene at 2:30 pm, Wednesday May 20th at the Santa Cruz Center, 2021 N. Grand Avenue, Nogales, Arizona to present its proposed budget for fiscal year 2026-2027 for consideration of the residents and taxpayers of Santa Cruz County Provisional Community College District.

Pursuant to A.R.S. §15-1461(J), immediately following the public hearing, the chair shall call to order the special board meeting for the purpose of adopting the budget. Copies of the proposed 2026-2027 budget will be available through a link on the Santa Cruz County Provisional Community College District Website. (<http://www.santacruzcenter.org>) and at the Board of Supervisor's Office, 2150 N. Congress Drive, Nogales, Arizona.

Schedule A		FY26-27 Budget	FY25-26 Budget	Amount	%
I	Expenditures				
A	Current General Fund				
	current	\$ 1,904,705	\$ 1,831,954	\$72,751	4.0%
	unexpended				
	TOTAL	\$ 1,904,705	\$ 1,831,954	\$72,751	4.0%
B	Expenditures				
	Per Student (FTSE)	\$ 7,054	\$ 8,724	(\$1,669)	-19.1%
	current				
	unexpended	270	210		
	projected				
II					
	employee salaries	\$ 538,102	\$ 502,799	\$35,303	7.0%
	retirement costs	\$ 111,365	\$ 110,335	\$1,030	0.9%
	healthcare costs	\$ 73,375	\$ 71,261	\$2,114	3.0%
	other benefit costs	\$ -	\$ -	\$0	N/A
	TOTAL	\$ 722,842	\$ 684,395	\$38,447	5.6%
III					
A	Property Taxes				
	Primary	\$ 1,904,705	\$ 1,831,954	\$72,751	4.0%
	Secondary				
	TOTAL	\$ 1,904,705	\$ 1,831,954	\$72,751	4.0%
B	Property Tax Rate				
	Primary	0.3984	0.4021	(0.004)	-0.9%
	Secondary				
	TOTAL	0.3984	0.4021	(0.004)	-0.9%
IV	Maximum allowable primary tax levy				\$7,086,495
	Amount received in excess of maximum in 2020				\$0

Expenditure Limit \$ 4,105,453

Schedule B		Current funds			Plant Funds		Other (not within Expenditure Limitation)	FY26-27 Budget	FY25-26 Budget	%
	Gen	Res	Aux	Unexp	Retire					
Beginning Balance										
Restricted										
Unrestricted	\$ 7,480,100						\$ 7,480,100	\$ 7,424,860	0.7%	
TOTAL	\$ 7,480,100						\$ 7,480,100	\$ 7,424,860	0.7%	
Revenues										
Student Tuition (none)							-	-		
State Appropriations										
Maintenance Support	-						-	-		
Equalization							-	-		
Capitol Support							-	-		
STEM & Workforce		\$ 190,000					\$ 190,000	\$ 130,000	46.2%	
Property Taxes										
Primary	\$ 1,904,705						\$ 1,904,705	\$ 1,831,954	4.0%	
Secondary							-	-		
Gifts, Grants and Contracts							-	-		
Sales and Service							-	-		
Investment Income							-	-		
State Shared Sales Tax							\$ -	\$ -	0.0%	
Other Revenue (UofA lease & Smart Safe Harbor)	\$ -					\$ 277,588	\$ 277,588	\$ 315,710	-12.1%	
Proceeds from Sale of Bonds							-	-		
TOTAL	\$ 9,384,805	\$ 190,000				\$ 277,588	\$ 9,852,393	\$ 9,702,524	1.5%	
Transfers (none)										
Less:										
Financial Stability	\$ 5,279,352						\$ 5,279,352	\$ 6,063,566	-12.9%	
TOTAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE	\$ 1,904,705	\$ 190,000				\$ 277,588	\$ 2,372,293	\$ 2,277,664	4.2%	

BUDGET Schedule C		Current Funds		Plant Funds			Other	FY26-27 Budget	FY25-26 Budget	%
	Gen Fund	Res Fund	Aux Fund	Unexp	Retire					
Total resources available for budget year(From Schedule B)	\$ 1,904,705	\$ 190,000				\$ 277,588	\$ 2,372,293	\$ 2,277,664	4.2%	
Expenditures										
Inst Support (Admin)	\$ 1,754,766	\$ 190,000					\$ 1,944,766	\$ 2,259,528	-13.9%	
Operation of Plant	\$ 484,238						\$ 484,238	\$ 473,471	2.3%	
Contingency	\$ (334,299)						\$ (334,299)	\$ (771,045)	-56.6%	
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 1,904,705	\$ 190,000				\$ 277,588	\$ 2,372,293	\$ 2,277,664	4.2%	

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PROVISIONAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT • (SCCPCCD)
2021 N GRAND AVE. NOGALES, AZ 85621 • 520-732-2156

KPUP Broadcast Schedule Spring 2026

Mon: By **Carrie White** 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

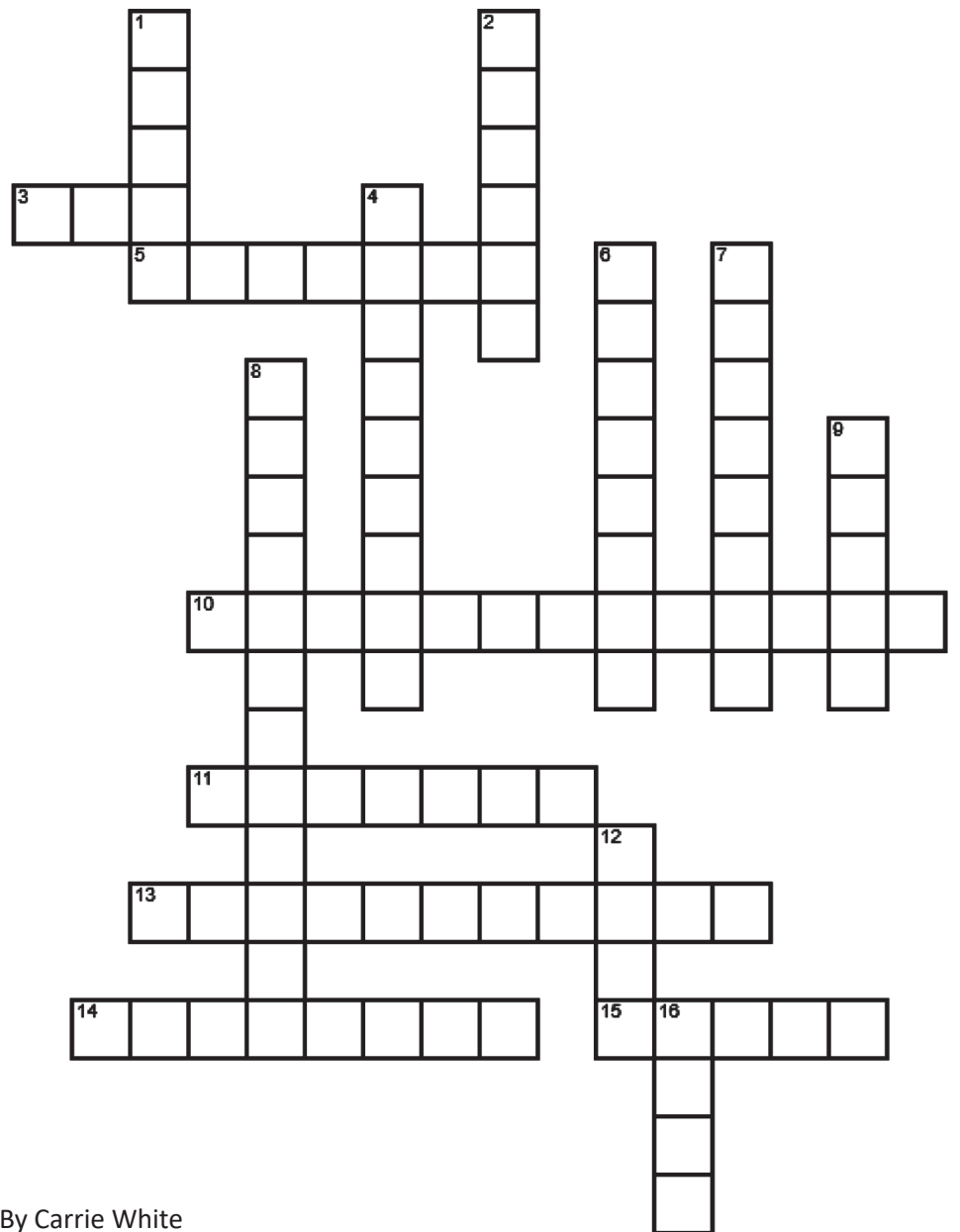
Sat: 12pm to 1pm: eTown - "Educate, entertain and inspire listeners through music and conversation"
6pm to 8pm: Acoustic Café. A bit of country, rock, blues, folk, pop"
8pm to 10pm: Folk Alley "Folk Music Radio from WKSU-FM in Kent, OH"

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.

CROSSWORD

Javelina



By Carrie White

Roughly 250 years ago, javelina made their way to our area. And in 1929 they were designated as "big game."

ACROSS

3. In the wild, I live these many years.
5. This is my approximate height.
10. I can run this fast.
13. This cactus is a favorite food.
14. My "herd" is called this.
15. I rely on this sense to communicate with my squadron.

DOWN

1. This is my most common noise.
2. This is my natural predator.
4. This term describes my dietary preference.
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9. With "pig", this is my closest relative.
12. This name is given to my young.
16. I release this odor when threatened.

NOTICE OF TAX INCREASE TRUTH IN TAXATION HEARING

In compliance with section 15-1461.01, Arizona Revised Statutes, Santa Cruz County Provisional Community College District (SCCPCCD) is notifying its property taxpayers of SCCPCCD's intention to raise its primary property taxes over last year's level. The SCCPCCD is proposing an increase in primary property taxes of \$37,347 or 2.0%

For example, the proposed tax increase will cause SCCPCCD's primary property taxes on a \$100,000 home to be \$39.84 (total proposed taxes including the tax increase). Without the proposed tax increase, the total taxes that would be owed on a \$100,000 home would have been \$39.06

This proposed increase is exclusive of increased primary property taxes received from new construction. The increase is also exclusive of any changes that may occur from property tax levies for voter approved bonded indebtedness or budget and tax overrides. A public hearing on the tax increase is scheduled for Wednesday, May 20, 2026 at 2:30pm at the Governing Board Room, 2021 N Grand Ave., Nogales Arizona 85621.



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LIBRARY (cont. from p. 1)

"You know, when I was told about it being possibly \$200,000, it was kind of like, well, my goodness. But when we got double that, it was a big wow," he said.

The money is being held in a secure account, Linda Shore, director of the library, told the Library Advisory Board during its April meeting. The recently reorganized seven-member board only has power to advise the town manager and library director on operations, staffing and programming. The Friends of the Patagonia Library is a fundraising organization that supports the library but has no authority over its operations.

"The \$400,000 that we received as a donation from Judith has gone into the Library Reserves Account created for library capital improvement that is held with other town funds," Shore told the board. "We have said it will be used for the infrastructure."

While there are potential projects, none are urgent and so the money will be left in the account to earn interest of about 4% for the time being, she said.

The board agreed that the money should be used solely for capital projects, not operations. The board's chair, Sarah Klingenstein, suggested that the fund or the interest it generates could be used as a rainy-day fund for emergency capital projects.

Robinson said the library does need renovations. Some leaky windows caused flooding along one hallway, and the windows are not energy efficient. One project could entail ripping out the rotten lumber, replacing the windows with smaller, energy-efficient windows and installing bookshelves for the books being sold by the Friends of the Patagonia Library, Robinson said.

"Then, we remodel the front by pushing the front out about 4 feet and creating a direct access from outside into the restrooms, so that the library does not have to be open to people who are renting Cady Hall," he added. "So, the first idea is to leave the money in the reserve account, which it's already there making – it's making 4% – and use the interest off the first year's



The \$400,000 left by Judith Whitcomb will be used for capital improvements to the Patagonia Public Library.

income to do design for this project."

Once a project has been picked and a design is completed, the community will be invited to comment, Robinson said. It would be about two years before work might start, he added, saying that the project could cost around \$125,000. But because the money would not be touched for a few years, it would grow thanks to the interest it accrues.

In expressing gratitude for the donation, members of the Friends of the Patagonia Library emphasized that it does not change the need for public support of book sales and fundraising.

"Some may think that now the library doesn't need donations," board member Deb Klosterman said. "We see the \$400,000 as putting the library in a great position, but we will still need to generate separate funds for books and resources. Last year, Friends accounted for 23% of the total library budget. That need will not be changed by Judith's gift."

A former library employee who asked not to be identified said that Judith was a regular visitor to the Patagonia Public Library.

"She arrived weekly balancing a bag of books in each hand to exchange for new ones to fulfill her voracious reading appetite," the former employee said.

Judith, a big fan of Scrabble, attended many evening programs and especially loved the library's bimonthly Music Jams and Adult Coloring program. She also attended a multitude of humanities programs and was a proponent of the library's partnerships with local nonprofit organizations.

Judith's gift of \$400,000 "speaks volumes about her love for this community," said Carolyn Shafer, who, along with Judith, Susan Corl and Gary Romig, owned and managed Creative Spirit Artists Gallery, now called Patagonia Trading Post.

Those who knew her say that she focused on fine art, community-based collaboration and education, often exploring themes related to the American Southwest.

Bonnie Leach agreed that Judith felt strongly about the library, the community and the ecology of Patagonia.

Her gift, Robinson said, "highlights the importance of our library in the lives of individuals."

"When you look at the impact that library had on Judith, it shows," he said. "We often talk about it being the jewel of our town, and I think this shows the truth of that."

For more information about the library, visit www.patagoniapubliclibrary.org/history/history.

Pila Martinez contributed to this article.

Judith Whitcomb, editor and writer



Judith Whitcomb was an editor for the Central Intelligence Agency before retiring and moving to Patagonia. | Contributed photo

Judith Whitcomb was born in New Jersey in August 1938. Her father worked for the State Department, and her mother was on the staff of a U.S. senator. She graduated from Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia, in 1956 and went on to earn her bachelor's degree at William & Mary. She had a distinguished career of over 30 years in Langley, Virginia, working with the Central Intelligence Agency as the editor-in-chief of the agency newsletter. As part of her duties, she presented the Morning Brief for many U.S. presidents. She retired in 1996.

Judith married Dr. Robert Whitcomb in 1982, and the couple lived in Potomac, Maryland. After her retirement, the couple built a home on 69 acres on Adobe Canyon Road near Patagonia, and traded time between there and a place in West Virginia. As years passed, they spent the bulk of their time in

Arizona. They both wrote, publishing one book together in 2005 titled "It Seems Like Only Yesterday." Robert wrote another book, "In Praise of the Spirit," in 2007 and dedicated it "to Judith who has made every Dream possible."

Robert was a renowned research entomologist at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center who identified more than 50 new species of leafhoppers and about 60 new species of microorganisms. Once in Arizona, he became immersed in local birding and ecology, while Judith's interest grew in many different directions.

"Judith started doing all kinds of arts and crafts from paper making to beadwork to needlepoint sewing. She appreciated Patagonia and so many of the people who helped her in later years," her brother Robert said. The Leaches particularly wanted to thank Matthew Hendriks, Jared Krikorian and Mindy Lareau for their help during Judith's long illness.

When the Whitcombs moved to Patagonia, they brought one tradition with them that everyone who knew them still talks about: their distinctive Christmas parties. Phyllis Klosterman remembers them as lavish.

"Judith baked lots of cookies and others brought finger food. The house was decorated in every corner, and there were many decorated live trees throughout the house," she said, adding that guests were assigned parts in a reading of Dylan Thomas' "A Child's Christmas in Wales."

By Sondra Porter

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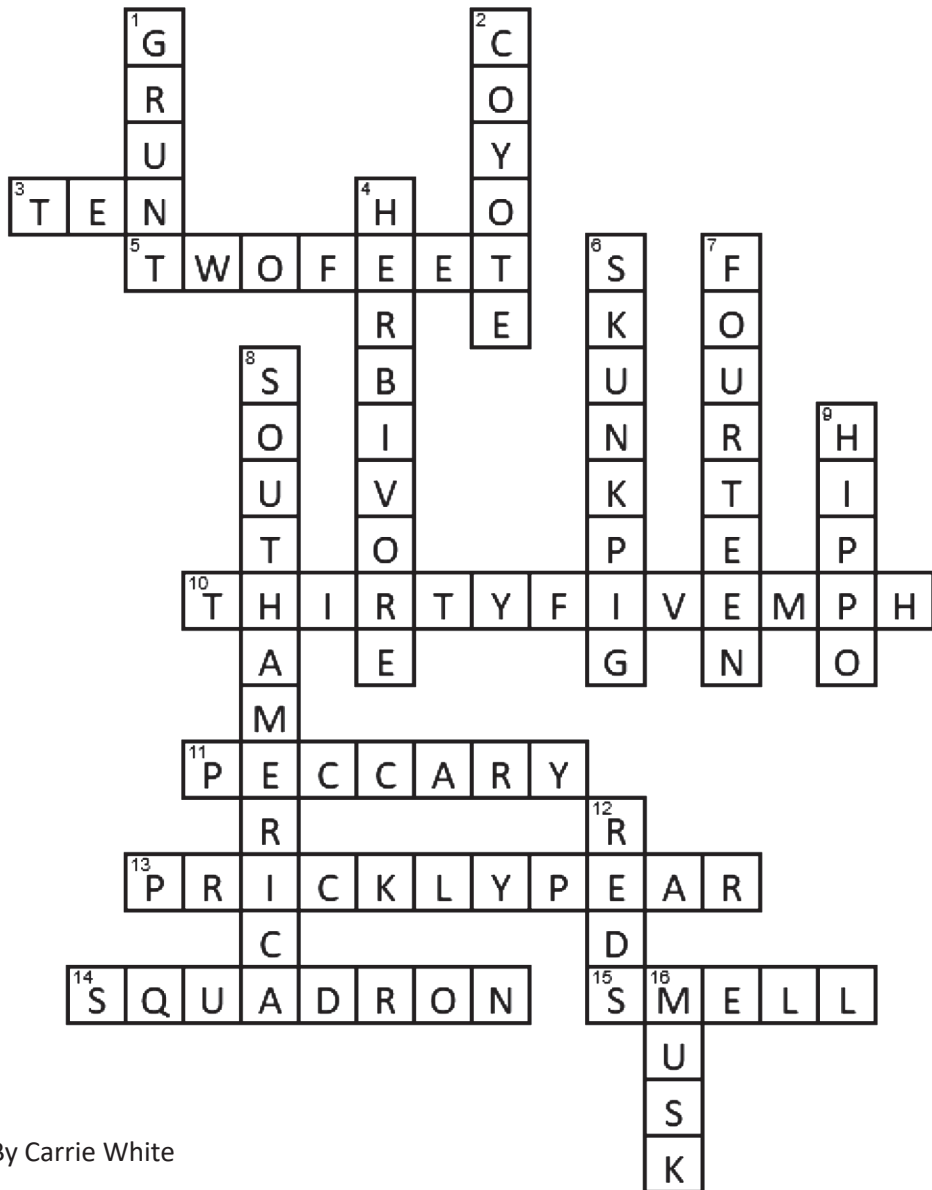
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CROSSWORD

Javelina



By Carrie White

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The Tin Shed Theater Patagonia Creative Arts Assn. May Schedule

May 9, 6 p.m.

SCREENING OF "THE TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE"

Part of the "Patagonia Retrospective: the 1940s."
\$5 per person

May 11, 7 p.m.

CLUB THEATER PRESENTATION OF "SNOW WHITE"

"Giselle"
Free

Dates and Times Subject to Change

*If you would be interested in sponsoring upcoming events,
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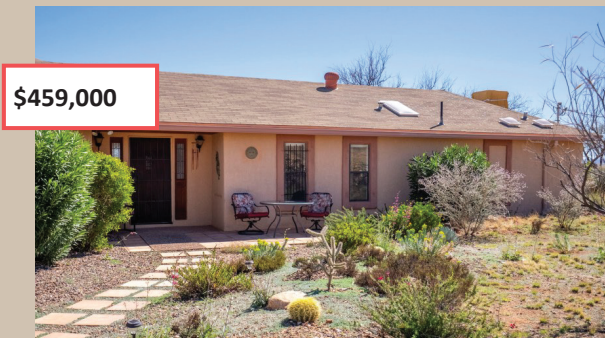
Visit www.patagoniacreativearts.org or 394-9369 for more information.

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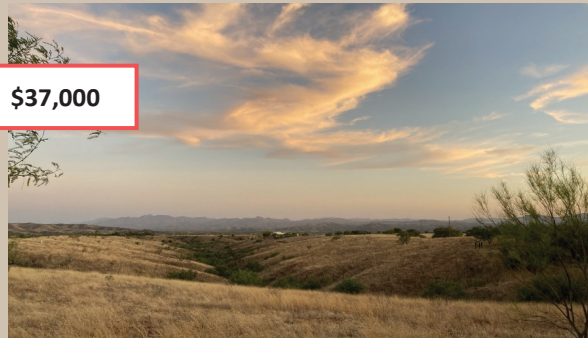


\$459,000

WOW VIEWS! LAKE PATAGONIA RANCH

MLS # 22605799 3 BACA CORTE 4.15 ACRES

Spectacular ceiling in Great Room. 3Bd/2.5 Ba, 1867 sf home w/ Mexican tile, 2 fireplaces, island kitchen, 2 car garage. Solar, lovely gardens. JEAN MILLER 520 508-3335



\$37,000

BEAUTIFUL LAKE PATAGONIA LOT

MLS # 22606569 13 BACA CORTE 4.14 ACRES

Gorgeous views. Several great building sites. Paved road with electricity available at the lot line. Easy access to Patagonia Lake State Park. JEAN MILLER 520 508-3335



\$499,000

CHARMING ADOBE HOME WITH CASITA

MLS #22526424 450 COSTELLO LANE

Split level home on the outskirts of Patagonia, bordering the Nature Conservancy. 2Bd/2Ba, Great Room, large kitchen + Casita. BARBARA HARRIS 602 826-4026



\$88,000

LAKE PATAGONIA LOT WITH WELL—14.7 ACRES

MLS # 22532047 262 CIRCULO MONTANA

Beautiful mountain views, Ready to go with building pad in place and capped private well, Private yet close to shopping and services, JEAN MILLER 520 508-3335



\$594,000

LAKE PATAGONIA CUSTOM HOME

MLS # 22605237 24 ROSETE CT 11.34 ACRES

Dramatic Great Room with soaring ceilings. 3Bd/2.5 Ba with separate office & 2 garages. 2 Private wells, mature landscaping, lovely views. JEAN MILLER 520 508-3335



\$175,000

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

LOST MY LEASE, BUT NOT MY LICENSE!

After many wonderful years in my office at 327 McKeown Avenue, Patagonia, I'll be transitioning to running my business and working from home starting June 1, 2026. With so much of our work done online and remotely, this is becoming the new norm in the Real Estate world. However, I want to assure you that I am still fully active and committed to serving all your real estate needs. My associate, Barbara Harris will continue to work with our brokerage and will be available by phone, 602 826-4026, and email, barbaranharris@gmail.com.

While our office location is changing, our dedication, availability, and personal service remain the same. I am just a phone call or email away and ready to meet with you to at your convenience. So, if you are thinking about buying or selling, or simply have questions about the market, I would be honored to assist you.

Same trusted service. Same experience. New location.

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MAY 2026

