Patagonia Regional Times

NOVEMBER, 2026 SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF CANELO, ELGIN, PATAGONIA AND SONOITA SINCE 2009 VOL. 16 ISSUE 9

Patagonia to get new primary care provider, clinic upgrades

By Dave Lumia

If you are old enough to remember Marcus Welby, M.D. — or Doc Mock, for Patagonia long-timers — you're old enough to know that such medical practices don't exist in the modern day and age.

The beloved town doctor with a kind bedside manner who made house calls and knew his patients on a first-name basis is so 20th century, done in by a combination of demographics, economics and healthcare consolidation that has made small-town medical practices difficult to sustain.

Residents of eastern Santa Cruz County, a largely older demographic, which by nature comes with added medical burdens, are fortunate enough to have a fulltime clinic in the community — Mariposa Health's Family Health Center in Patagonia — but the tricky part for Mariposa has been providing the continuity of care that the community needs.

"We want to make sure the community knows and that we recognize it's been difficult over the last seven to eight years without having a consistent long-term strategy for providers," said Amy Taylor, Mariposa's chief executive officer and chief operating officer. "And it's due to recruitment challenges. It's very, very hard to recruit providers to rural places."

This issue is not that doctors have been unavailable at Patagonia's clinic, just that it's been a rotating cast of providers who are there one day, gone the next.

Taylor is optimistic that this concern is about to change with the hiring of a new family medicine doctor whose primary base will be Patagonia.

Dr. Christian Barr will start his new duties in November and be working in Patagonia on Mon-

See MARIPOSA, p. 4



As part of the "Early Actions" agreement, South32 has provided funding to study expanding or reconfiguring the Patagonia's Family Health Center. | File photo



Automotive students identifying parts under the tutelage of Jeff Gudenkauf include (from left) Marco Vasquez, Diego Chavarria, Krishna Agundez, Viviana Pelayo and Charlotte Myers. | Photo by Carrie White

Students learn life/career tools under the hood

By Carrie White

Gone are the days when girls tracked to home ec and boys to auto shop.

This year, Patagonia High School's Automotive 1 class has a girl-to-boy ratio of 7-to-1. That's no accident. Jeff Gudenkauf knows women are more vulnerable when it comes to auto repair overcharges. So even if the ladies don't become mechanics, they'll know when they're getting greased.

"They need a knowledge base," he said. "I teach them what they need to know so that when they're out there and someone tells them they need a new engine, they'll know the difference."

Gudenkauf, who counts automotive technology teacher among his titles, started the program in 2021. The shop, a facility once jammed with exercise equipment, washers, dryers, tables and desks now boasts a laser wheel balancer, Hunter alignment machine, two lifts and industrial-grade tools.

From humble beginnings, the program has progressed to include a hands-on experience in car rebuilding and offering minor car repair services to the public, sans labor cost.

Auto I & II are currently working on — and probably will be for the next couple years — a 1979 Ford Ranchero rebuild. According to the Gudenkauf, there were only 15 such models made with this car's specs. "The guy that ordered it ordered it with specific paint, trim and interior," Gudenkauf said.

Ford Motor Co. and Buena High School in Sierra Vista will be helping with the project. Buena High will be assisting with the body work and paint job. Ford will be assisting with the engine. Patagonia and Buena high schools are members of the Cochise Technology District. The district provides certifications and dual enrollment credits for students.

When not occupied with the rebuild or learning basic skills, the students offer minor car repair services to the public. Make an appointment, purchase and bring in any necessary parts and the students — under Gudenkauf's supervision — will get 'er done. Services include tuneups, brake work, oil changes and diagnostics on cars built before 2025. No engine rebuilds. (To find out more or make an appointment, email jgudenkauf@psd0620.org).

See AUTO SHOP, p. 22

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

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

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SUBMISSIONS

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

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EL PASO COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

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Pleased to meet you

EDITOR'S NOTE

The folks at the Patagonia Regional Times did their due diligence when hiring me as their first full-time managing editor.

I initially interviewed with Executive Director Amy Glass, then with Glass and reporter/board member Mary Tolena.

From there I sat separately with the hiring committee, the board, more reporters, the interim managing editor and even the page designer.

They were thorough. Very thorough.

And I completely understand why.

Since 2009, this publication has been a vital source of information for residents and visitors to Patagonia, Sonoita, Elgin and beyond.

The reporters, all volunteers, take great pride in their community and telling its stories.

They've kept the public informed with hyperlocal coverage, leaving readers better informed about the world around them.

They were looking for the right person for the job. I am honored they ultimately decided that I fit the bill.

I bring to the PRT more than 23 years of journalism experience, 20 of those spent as a reporter and editor at the Arizona Daily Star in Tucson.

For the last three years, I worked in a completely different news environment, as a digital content producer for Tucson's ABC affiliate, KGUN 9.

I come with fresh eyes and a passion for sniffing out stories. I look forward to working with my new colleagues, many who have been writing for the PRT for years, to share those stories with you.



Gerald Gay is the new managing editor of the Patagonia Regional Times | Photo by Robert Carmody.

Please reach out (editor@prtnews.org) if you have ideas to pitch or just want to say, "Hi."

I look forward to hearing from you.

Gerald M. Gay

Our commitment to you: Relentlessly local

Connection. Information. Civic engagement. A local newspaper is more than any one of those. It's the glue that holds us together as neighbors, as communities.

For 17 years the Patagonia Regional Times has been covering you. From the first edition when we celebrated Cici Finley's 80th birthday to coverage of the Patagonia's High School's 2026 girls' volleyball season, it's always been about you.

As we continue to evolve, one thing will not change – our commitment to being relentlessly local. We are your voice here in eastern Santa Cruz County. And we want to continue to be.

Your contributions make this newspaper possible. On November 1, we kicked off the annual NewsMatch campaign. The two-month drive is our major fundraising event of the year as every dollar donated gets matched up to $12,000 received.

Last year this campaign garnered us $39,420.81. I take it down to the penny because every penny counts. It was an underlying premise at this newspaper's founding that everyone should have access to local news. Hence, we do not charge for online subscriptions, and our print editions are free in racks and boxes in Patagonia and Sonoita.

Unfortunately, as a nonprofit paper, we can only receive a certain percent of our budget from advertising. The rest must come from community support, grants and philanthropic investment. We will provide more information on the latter — a new way of giving — during our campaign.

This year we are announcing three non-cash options that may offer tax advantages while helping sustain independent, community-centered news for Elgin, Sonoita, Patagonia and the surrounding area. Those are:

• Appreciated Stock or Securities – Transfer shares of stock directly to the Patagonia Regional Times. You may avoid capital gains taxes and may be eligible for a charitable deduction for the full fair market value.

• Donor-Advised Fund (DAF) Grant – If you have a DAF through Fidelity Charitable, Schwab Charitable, Vanguard Charitable, or a community foundation, recommend a grant directly to the Patagonia Regional Times.

• IRA Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) – If you are age 70 ½ or older, you can direct up to $108,000 per year (2025 limit) from your IRA to a qualified charity. This can satisfy you required minimum distribution (RMD) without increasing your taxable income.

Please consult your financial advisor to determine which option is right for you. Then contact us to learn how to direct your gift.

Right now, the PRT is on a path to sustainability. While newspapers around the country are folding, or experiencing diminished readership, the PRT continues to attract new local readers and national attention for stories ranging from the border wall to mining.

The PRT wants to be around to tell your children's stories and their children's stories. We hope we can count on you for your financial support.

Checks can be sent to Patagonia Regional Times, P.O. Box 1073, Patagonia, AZ 85624. Or you can visit our website, www.patagoniaregionaltimes.org, and click the red "DONATE" button top right.

With gratitude,

Carrie White
Patagonia Regional Times Board President

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Request for transparency on embezzlement recovery

Dear Members of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors,

I am writing as a concerned 16-year resident, farmer, taxpayer, property and business owner of Santa Cruz County to formally request on behalf of Santa Cruz taxpayers a significantly higher level of transparency to include clear, ongoing public communication regarding the recovery of the $38.7 million stolen by former County Treasurer Elizabeth "Liz" Gutfahr. While I appreciate the work done by law enforcement and the court-appointed receiver to date, because of the severity and scale of this governmental oversight failure, our community deserves nothing less than absolute clarity and assurances on how these stolen public funds are being handled, when they will return to the community, and how they will directly benefit the taxpayers who bore the burden of this historic breach of trust.

To begin to restore public confidence, I respectfully ask the Board to provide definitive public answers to the following critical questions:

• **Total Expected Financial Recovery: While th**e court ordered $51.8 million in restitution, official communications indicate that the county expects to recover only $10 million to $12 million total via asset forfeiture, with roughly $5 million to $6 million secured so far through the liquidation of properties, vehicles, and livestock. Is the county aggressively pursuing any remaining third-party funds or unrecovered assets to minimize the multi-million-dollar deficit left behind?

• **Timeline for Recovery & Distribution:** What is the precise timeline for completing the asset forfeiture and receivership process? When can the public expect the remaining anticipated funds to be fully clawed back and accounted for?

• **Taxpayer Reinvestment & Credits**: The stolen funds heavily impacted local school districts and fire districts. While recovered funds are reportedly being funneled back to preserve these public services, how will the county ensure that taxpayers see relief? Specifically, will any portion of these recovered funds be utilized to issue property tax credits or structurally reduce future property tax levies to offset the losses and financial strains placed on property owners?

• **Preventative Safekeeping Safeguards:** Gutfahr successfully circumvented internal financial controls and lax Supervisorial oversight for a decade by subverting a two-step approval process and abusing a subordinate's authentication token. Beyond restructuring roles, what concrete, technical safeguards — such as multi-factor biometrics, independent third-party transaction monitoring, or multi-signature oversight for large wire transfers — have been implemented to guarantee that an embezzlement scheme of this magnitude can never happen again?

The citizens of Santa Cruz County have a right to regular, comprehensive updates regarding this recovery process. I look forward to your timely community response detailing a concrete plan for increased transparency and taxpayer relief. The response should be interactive to the community and therefore might be best delivered via a townhall format.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

David S. Green
Sonoita

Broken hearts

Thank you to Cassina Farley for writing "Heartbreak among the cottonwoods." It was magnificent. Our hearts break with yours.

Carla McClain
Sonoita

A poem by Patra Kelly

The Power of Music at The Patagonia Lumber Company

After the musicians
summon and awaken
their Powers
She Sings
rousing us
with a Voice
filled with energy
and passion,
pulling us into complete
attention
to feel
and dance
enveloped by the powers
of Music and Song
freeing and carrying us
out of our prison
of selfhood
beyond the limitations
of time and place
into the vastness
of Being.

CORRECTION

In the October 2026 edition article titled "Classical music finds a home in Patagonia," we misidentified Ann Caston, a founding member of the Santa Cruz Singers, who helped Christina Wilhelm organize the singing group.

We also incorrectly identified who provided the seed money for the Benderly-Kendall Opera House.

Virginia Benderly provided the seed money, and John Kendall contributed funds to finance the opera house's completion. Lastly, the Santa Cruz Singers did not perform house concerts.

The house concerts were a series of chamber-music performances by professional musicians.









Wake me when it's over

OPINION & COMMENT



By Cassina Farley

In a small town somewhere in New Mexico, I am walking down a narrow street when for some reason I am ushered into the back door of a small restaurant.

The restaurant is clearly a Mexican restaurant, because the pots on the stove were full of Posole and Menudo. I walk around, unsure of why I'm here, but I feel suddenly drawn to the woman at the counter.

She is an older Mexican woman wearing one of those smock style aprons with the embroidery and snap buttons. She is rolling out tortillas and telling me how busy the restaurant is. As she says this, the kitchen fills up with people. Some are grabbing bowls of soup, while others are taking the finished tortillas out of her hands. The lady can barely keep up with the demand.

Somehow, I have stumbled into the kitchen of the best tortilla maker in the area and am amazed by her technique. We start swapping tortilla knowledge, and before long she asks if I could help.

Flattered, I grab an apron, and just as I'm about to make tortillas with the most celebrated tortilla maker in the region, my sister busts into the kitchen to tell me that we have got to go now. Of course I explain that I am about to make tortilla history, and she can't be bothered by that fact because her partner, my brother-in-law, is about to fill in for the local weather man and read the weather on live TV. This is a dilemma, because this has always been his dream. Everyone in the family knows that Jerry is a weather aficionado, his knowledge rivals even the most educated meteorologist.

In that moment I knew the right thing to do. I had to remove my apron and join my sister. Jerry's dream was more important.

We left out the front door and hurried along yet another narrow street that suddenly resembled Tucson. We ran across traffic. We ran back into the Mexican restaurant and out the back door. Eventually we found my family gathered outside of the TV studio where Jerry was to give the weather report.

It was understood that it was our job to coach him through this. I was so proud he had finally made it to the big time. I said it on repeat. I also made sure to tell everyone about my great honor of making tortillas with a famous tortilla maker.

I also reminded them of how selfless I was being by giving up my dream so that we could help Jerry pursue his. He needed this. Everybody smiled.

It was about that time that I woke up.

For the last few weeks I have been taking magnesium for sleep, and the night before I accidentally took twice the dose. I had also eaten a dozen donut holes and had a huge burrito for dinner. I'm not sure that any of it played a part in this dream, because lately I've had several dreams that have been worth repeating. In fact, I have never dreamt so much, which means I'm sleeping, and that is as good as it gets.

Sleep tight.



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MARIPOSA **(cont. from p. 1)**

day, Tuesday and Wednesday. Dr. Carlos Gonzalez will be stationed in Patagonia on Thursday, and Dr. Sean O'Brien will continue with his Friday shift.

The hiring of Dr. Barr and a fixed rotation of providers is one of several initiatives being undertaken to upgrade the quality of medical care in the eastern part of the county, some of which are included in the so-called Early Actions agreement being funded by South32.

For Mariposa, the initiatives, at various stages of readiness, include the purchase of transportation vehicles to provide more convenient access for patients; a mobile health clinic to bring services to remote and underserved areas; and a residency program for training new doctors and, hopefully, introducing them to a community where they want to live and work.

Meanwhile, the town of Patagonia, which owns the building that houses the clinic, is getting funding from South32 to study reconfiguring or expanding the facility to provide additional services that have been identified by Mariposa as high-priority community needs.

"One would be creating more space for behavioral health and care coordination services," Taylor said. "Two would be for creating a dedicated space for pharmacy so that people have a better experience with picking up their medications and potentially purchasing very, very affordable, over-the-counter type of needs that they might have. And then also just looking at reconfiguring the flow of the practice so there's more access for patient visits."

While a full-time pharmacist in Patagonia is not feasible, Taylor pointed out two benefits to expanded pharmacy services. Having over-the-counter products such as pain medications available would be not only an added convenience, but they would be "very, very inexpensive. Better prices than Costco." Second, when customers use the Mariposa pharmacy as opposed to a chain drug store, the pharmacy revenues are plowed back into services such as transportation and community health programs.

"If you're a Mariposa patient," she said, "you should really come to us because you're not paying more money for your prescriptions, but you're paying Mariposa's pharmacy, which then gives us money that we can reinvest in our services, as opposed to a for-profit national chain and their shareholders."

The mobile clinic is another key component. Mariposa is already in possession of the vehicle courtesy of a state grant, but it cannot provide services until it is credentialed by the state, so it has contracted with a vendor to help expedite the process.

Patagonia Mayor Andy Wood and Town Manager Ron Robinson explained that the town's fire department gets frequent 911 calls for nonemergency medical situations such as blood-pressure checks or medication questions.

"Whether they're homebound of whatever reason, they don't go to the clinic for it" Robinson said. "So, what we're trying to do is take the pressure off of the 911 calls, because as the fire chief mentioned, there's possible real emergencies that need to be take care of."

Added Taylor: "If they don't feel comfortable coming into the clinic, we can go to them. We have community health workers who can go to people in the homes, do blood-pressure checks, medication reconciliation work, safety checks. There are a lot of things our community health workers can do to help bridge that gap and hopefully encourage them to become involved in long-term primary care."

The "rural-track" residency program, in association with Creighton University's Phoenix campus, is a longer-term piece of the puzzle. The three-year training program will see two residents assigned to Mariposa each year, doing roughly 60-plus percent of their training in the community.

"Our hope is that every year, at least one will stay so that will help reduce the issues we're having with recruitment," said Dr. Eladio Pereira, Mariposa's chief medical officer. Dr. Pereira said a shortage of family-practice doctors is a nationwide issue, but it's particularly acute in rural areas, despite higher compensation rates than in metropolitan practices.

"I have to remind myself that not every doctor is suited to work in a rural area," Dr. Pereira said. "There has to be a culture fit."

Ideally, the residency participants would live in community where they are training, and to that end, South32 is funding a feasibility study for residency housing.

"If they live here and they fall in love with Santa Cruz County and they fall in love with somebody that's here, the likelihood that they stay is that much greater," Taylor said.

Added Dr. Pereira: "The challenge is how do we integrate them into the community. Not just the medical training, but how they participate in the activities that make them want to be here."

Robinson and Wood praised Taylor for serving as a "catalyst" in addressing the community's concerns.

Taylor acknowledged the need to "be more present in the community and rebuild the trust and lost relationships that we had."

Case in point: Mayor Wood. She said she switched her primary care to a practice in Sierra Vista due to consistency issues: "I don't like the fact that if you don't have a consistent doctor, then every time there's a new doctor you have to re-explain your health history."

Taylor said Mariposa is hoping to earn another chance.

"I think what matters to people who live in Patagonia is that we're going to have consistent providers, and providers who really want to be there and are very dedicated to serving the community," she said.

Help wanted: School board members

By Carrie White

There's nothing particularly sexy about serving on a school board. Information packets to read. Monthly meetings to attend. School events to show up at, a supportive presence. And then there are the obligatory raffle tickets to buy for everything from doughnuts to pizza.

But while the position does not feed the bank account, it does feed the soul, as current board members will attest.

Anthony Fennell, who serves on the Sonoita Elementary School District 25 board, moved to the area with two young children roughly 10 years ago.

"They (his children) were going into the school the following year after we moved here, and I had a very vested interest in the school," he said. What started as a volunteer gig turned into a board member position after a teacher planted the idea of serving. He was appointed to a four-year term in 2021.

Harry Dotson, Sonoita Elementary board president, said his service is one way of giving back to the community. Additionally, "being a product of public education from K through grad school, I believe fervently in the value and the utility of public education in our country," Dotson said.

Such sentiments are no doubt shared by many, but the commitment to act on them has been in short supply in Santa Cruz County in recent years. School districts throughout the county face vacancies heading into 2027, with seats filled by "appointment" rather than election. The county's only district with contested seats this year was Santa Cruz Elementary District (commonly known as Little Red).

Sonoita Elementary, though, is one of the fortunate districts. Nancy Webster is stepping down from her board position, but Josh Taylor has stepped up to fill the lone vacancy when no candidates filed for election.

In Patagonia, Yaritza Cortez (member) will need to be re-appointed to her post on the Elementary School board, with Nancy McCoy serving as clerk and Marilyn Miller as president.

On the High School District side, Ron Pitt will be stepping down after 12 years of serving on the five-member board. That will leave four members on the board from Patagonia. Ideally, the high school board should have three members from Patagonia and two from Sonoita-Elgin to ensure representation throughout the district.

Cynthia Matus Morriss ended her 36-year tenure on Patagonia school boards in 2024. Looking back, she enjoyed the collaboration with local residents and fellow board members. But her heart, really, was warmed by the children. "Being (a) witness to all the little miracles happening in the classroom and seeing our students achieve great things" made the work worthwhile.

Matus Morriss qualified for the high school board because she lives in the Patagonia High School District, which includes Patagonia, Sonoita and Elgin. The state mandates that board members live in their respective school districts in order to serve. Consequently, Sonoita and Elgin residents are eligible for the Sonoita elementary board, Patagonia residents are eligible for the Patagonia elementary board, and all three communities are eligible for the high school board.

Maya M. Donnelly, Santa Cruz County School Superintendent, said she believes the absence of candidates to run for school boards has more to do with time commitment than anything else.

"Usually they (board members) are retired people," Donnelly said. Or people who don't have full-time jobs. "A lot of our boards have members that have been there for quite some time."

Donnelly said it's rare for a seat to go unfilled. Generally, a community member gets recruited and submits a letter of interest to the county superintendent. If the board, superintendent and candidate feel it's a good fit, Donnelly can appoint that person to the seat.



Sonoita Elementary board president Harry Dotson said his involvement on the board is rooted in a fervent belief in the value and the utility of public education in our country. | PRT file photo

With Santa Cruz County — and other rural counties across the state – the school board scenario is vastly different from urban areas. "When I go to Tucson or Phoenix, I see all the signs and hear all the hoopla surrounding (school board) elections," Donnelly said. But not here.

One possible explanation: In urban areas, a school board post can be the starting point to higher political aspirations.

Dan Erickson, Sonoita Elementary superintendent and principal, witnessed that while working in an urban district for nearly 15 years. He also witnessed partisanship, which isn't supposed to happen in a school board position.

Locally, political aspirations and partisanship are pleasantly absent. Both Erickson and Patagonia superintendent/principal Kenny Hayes applauded their respective boards for dedication to students, teachers and staff above all else.

Which brings up the question, what exactly do school boards do?

Turns out a board's role and responsibilities are strictly dictated by state (A.R.S. § 15-341.) Those duties include:

- Setting policies
- Superintendent oversight
- Budget and finances

Board members and administrators interviewed for this story acknowledged that there is a learning curve getting up to speed if you are not familiar with the educational system. But once acclimated — not including school activities — the commitment is about three hours a month.

But here Matus Morriss felt compelled to issue a warning to anyone interested in throwing their hat in the ring: "You get emotional and cry at graduation."

So much to be thankful for: Just look around

By Clare Bonelli

Sometimes thankfulness comes easily — like when someone gives you a box of chocolates or pays for your lunch. Sometimes, you have to look for it. I recently had an exercise in doing just that.

Things to be thankful for: (I do not believe in coincidence)

- that I got up to pee exactly when I did or I wouldn't have seen the tarantula crossing the floor in the bathroom
- that I do not panic easily
- that the light switch was close by
- that Ruthie, the visiting cat, was there to keep an eye on it
- that, on my way to the kitchen to get tarantula removal tools, I saw the pile of cat barf where Mike would have stepped on it in his bare feet
- that the barf was fairly dry and easy to pick up
- that I found the stuff I needed fairly quickly
- that the tarantula hadn't moved much — until I went for the sweep thing, when it disappeared
- that Ruthie enjoyed playing with the rug in the hall when she was supposed to be monitoring the tarantula
- that, after I had some yogurt, the tarantula reappeared on the bathroom wall at just the right height for me to trap it
- that it was easy to catch and put outside
- that it wasn't raining
- that I had "The Book of Joy" to read when I got back in bed to settle down
- that I slept fairly well after that

And then, the next night, that I got up to pee at exactly the right moment to see the wind scorpion in the sink before it disappeared behind the washcloth, where it would have been quite the surprise in the morning.

So much to be thankful for! If nothing else, the breath you just took. Not everyone got to take one.

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Lobos' 4 seniors accumulate 4 seasons of success

By Dave Lumia

Four seasons, four consecutive winning records, three trips to the state tournament. A 52-18 regular-season record — including a 29-6 mark over the past two years.

Not a bad legacy for the senior class of volleyball players at Patagonia High School. And now, after Tuesday's straight set victory over Joseph City, they can also claim the school's first victory in a state tournament game in the 21st century. (State tournament results on the AIA website date back only to 1999.)

The Lobos will try to add to that legacy on Friday when they take on Rock Point in a Class 1A quarterfinal matchup vs. Rock Point at Coronado High School in Scottsdale. Game time is 1 p.m.

Amaya Somoza has been a starter all four of those seasons, but three other seniors — Viviana Pelayo, Karol Balderrama, Losi Estrada — have all contributed to the run of success. At a school with an enrollment of less than 70, every player is needed. And for coach Brenda Somoza, it's been especially rewarding to see the year-by-year improvements.

"They all bring something different to this team," Somoza said. "Amaya's a leader out there, our setter. Karol, she hasn't played too much, but whenever I needed her to play, she's been showing up, getting her serves in. She's smart out there on the court. She knows how to pass or receive."

"Vivi, I just started using her on the back row, and she's been doing awesome playing as a DS (defensive specialist). And Losi I was able to put in on the outside. She came in as a freshman not even being able to serve the ball over the net. And so now to be able to see her as a senior getting some playing time with us is really cool."

Amaya Somoza, Brenda's daughter and team captain, echoed the coach's sentiments.

"It's been really fun watching them all grow and getting to share the court with them," she said.

Coach Somoza, who spent two years as an assistant before taking over as head coach in 2025, said coaching her daughter has been a joy.

"It's been a great experience," she said. "I mean, there are sometimes where it gets a little test, but she's such a coachable kid, and she loves the sport. It's honestly been really easy to coach her."

Amaya will be moving on, but Brenda said she'll be back for more, hoping to build upon the Lobos' foundation of success.

"I love these girls. They give me so much," she said. "They've been putting in the work all summer, showing up in this hot-ass gym, working hard, and it's been awesome. I definitely plan on coaching a few more years. I love it."



Patagonia's four seniors were honored at Senior Day ceremonies on Oct. 24 (left to right): Amaya Somoza, Viviana Pelayo, Karol Balderrama, Losi Estrada. | Photo by Dave Lumia



Coach Brenda Somoza manages a smile while conversing with seniors Amaya Somoza, Karol Balderrama and Viviana Pelayo during a break in the action. | Photo by Dave Lumia

PATAGONIA UNION HIGH SCHOOL 2026 BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

GIRLS AT 5:30 P.M., BOYS AT 7 UNLESS NOTED

NOV. 18	Valley Union (A)
NOV. 19-20	Boyd Baker Classic
NOV. 19	(B): Duncan, 11:45 a.m., at Gregory School (G): St. David, 3:30 p.m. at St. Augustine (G): Joseph City, 6 p.m. at St. Augustine
NOV. 20	(B): Andrada Polytechnic, 8 a.m. at Gregory School (B): Desert Christian, 10:30 a.m., at Gregory School
NOV. 24	Maryvale Prep (H), 5:30 p.m.
DEC. 2	Desert Heights Prep (A), 4 p.m. (G), 5:30 p.m. (B)
DEC. 3-5	Coach Edgar Brown Holiday Tournament TBD at Williams HS
DEC. 8	St. David (H)
DEC. 9	Lourdes Catholic (H)
DEC. 17	Valley Union (H)
DEC. 18	Superior (A)
JAN. 6	The Gregory School (H)
JAN. 7	Cicero Prep (A)
JAN. 12	ASDB (A)
JAN. 15	Hayden (A)
JAN. 20	(G): Empire (H), 7 p.m.
JAN. 21	ASDB (H)
JAN. 22	San Simon (A)
JAN. 25	Andrada Polytechnic (H)
JAN. 27	San Manuel (A)
JAN. 29	Ray (A)
FEB. 1	Lourdes Catholic (A), 3:30 p.m. (G), 5 p.m. (B)



Winding path leads to newest Sonoita tasting room

By Pat McNamara

The opening of Rancho Castillo tasting room on Highway 82 in Sonoita was the culmination of a zigzagging journey that began when winemaker Brett Wagner was barely old enough to attend school.

"Pursuing moving to Sonoita was the goal in my life. I'd always, from the time I was 5, wanted to move to Sonoita," Wagner said. "I'd always thought it was beautiful."

Connecting the dots from then to now and there to here requires more than a few crooked lines.

Wagner, a native of the Vail-Tucson area, began the journey with a stint in law enforcement from age 18 until 27. Then came a stint as a personal trainer — "to get myself and other people in shape" — followed by music and concert promoting, search engine optimization and internet marketing. When asked if he had any formal training in computer science, he replied, "No, I've been lucky to have a lot of friends who have been entrepreneurs who didn't go the whole education route and started from the knowledge they knew and built upon that."

Using that marketing knowledge, he started his own company putting on larger events for nonprofits, at the same time working three days a week at a psychiatric hospital, taking advantage of his experience in behavioral health. But some unfortunate zoning issues with a planned event led to his business folding, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

After that, his goal of winding up in Sonoita became a reality. "I initially saw a job at Flying Leap Vineyards hiring for a head winemaker," he said. As a "hobby winemaker" for several years, he didn't think he would have the necessary experience, but he got an interview and was hired in 2017. This was his start as a professional winemaker in his favorite area. From there he went to other vineyards in the area to hone his skills. He became certified in viticulture through the UC-Davis program, but the majority of his training was on the job, refining the skills he acquired from local winemakers.

He picked up more positions from local vineyards, one of them helping owners Chris and Lori Johnson with Sunset Ride. As it happened, the Johnsons were looking to sell the tasting room side of their business, and serendipity and excellent timing led to Rancho Castillo in the building formerly known as The Coop.

"I was still making wine at my father-in-law's house, and we had a big temperature-controlled storage building on Curly Horse (Road)," Wagner said. "We've been making wine there for the last three years."

The purchase of the tasting room gives Wagner and business partners/in-laws Josh and Kim Dopko a perfect opportunity and place to market their wines. The name, Rancho Castillo, comes from the Dopkos' ranch and vineyard.

Wagner and his wife, Autumn, have created a new menu and plan on expanding the building to incorporate and emphasize the breathtaking views that are along the north side of the tasting room. He also has plans to make a stage area for live music outdoors. They hope to expand the kitchen and make Rancho Castillo a lunch destination and perhaps also include a local bakery with specialty coffees and pastry options.



Partners in the launching of Rancho Castillo winery and tasting room: father-in-law and vineyard owner Josh Dopko, winemaker Brett Wagner and wife Autumn Wagner. | Photo by Dave Lumia

They also plan on expanding the current art gallery as well as displaying many of the gems that the Dopkos have collected from all over the world.

With the help of family and two employees, the Wagners are living their dream at Rancho Castillo. "Our goal with this place is to make it a welcoming, nonpretentious place for all, a place to where you can enjoy the wine, enjoy the food and the view and just relax and have a good time," Wagner said.

Attorney General supports independent water monitoring

The Arizona Attorney General's office issued a statement to Calabasas Alliance acknowledging community concerns regarding groundwater dewatering and water-quality impacts associated with the South32 Hermosa Project, as well as other pollution and public health concerns in Santa Cruz County.

The statement, dated Oct. 26 from William Mundell, Chief Deputy Attorney General, was expressly authorized for public distribution and reads:

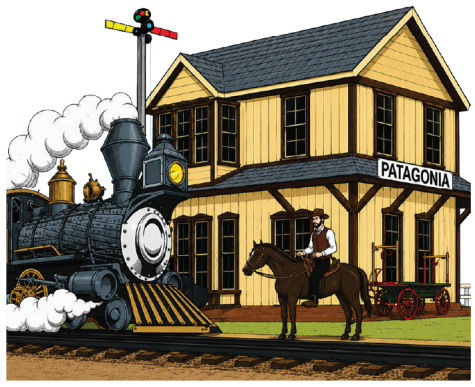
"Attorney General Kris Mayes and her office are closely monitoring community concerns regarding groundwater and water-quality impacts associated with South32 Hermosa project in Santa Cruz County. We support a careful, independent examination of all impacts on the water resources of Southern Arizonans so the appropriate and necessary protections can be achieved. You are hereby authorized to distribute this statement to others, including the media."

The Calabasas Alliance has been working with community members, technical professionals, university and independent researchers who conduct ongoing water and air monitoring programs in the region.

"We greatly appreciate the Attorney General's recognition that community concerns regarding groundwater dewatering, water quality and other pollution risks warrant Independent examination," said Robin Lucky, President of Calabasas Alliance.

"Transparent, science-based independent assessments are essential to safeguarding Southern Arizona's water resources and the health and well-being of our citizens."





TOWN COUNCIL NOTES

Oct. 14 Regular Meeting

• Town Manager Ron Robinson gave rough estimates for attendance at the Fall Festival: 7,500 on Saturday, 2,500 on a showery Sunday, totaling around 10,000 visitors.

• Under Old Business, Ann Gosline gave a short presentation on the request to approve the town-supported wildlife easements, granted by landowners Susan Burtnett, Mark Byrum and Susan Stratman. The long-term maintenance of the easement lands will require more funding than first anticipated, so the net result is that $57,500 will be deposited into the Wildlife Corridors Easement Maintenance Reserve Fund. The proposal also authorizes the mayor and town manager to review and execute the conservation easements and related documents. Gosline expressed strong appreciation for the town's cooperation and support.

• The council approved the conveyance of a portion of the Pennsylvania Avenue right of way on parcels owned by Caleb Smith. Evaluating the land by the standard 63 cents per square foot and adding a $500 administrative fee, the sale price came to $6,931.73.

• Town Resolution 2026-12 was adopted, approving line-item budget amendments for Fiscal Year 2025-26. This approval realigns individual accounts while maintaining the totals which were previously approved by the mayor and council.

• Town Ordinance No 26-05 was adopted, amending the Town Code's Chapter 9, "Health, Sanitation and Environment." The amendment adds Article 9-5, titled "Cemetery," providing regulations for the operations and maintenance and protection of the town's public cemetery.

• The public portion of the meeting was concluded by a vote for the council and mayor to convene into executive session in order to discuss with Town Attorney Mike Massey the ongoing Community Protections and Benefits Agreement being forged with South32's Hermosa Project.

Oct. 28 Regular Meeting

• The council finalized the sale of a portion of the undeveloped Santa Rita Avenue right of way to Charley Farley, at 240 S. Third Avenue. The right of way becomes part of Farley's adjacent lot, and she agreed to pay $1,890 at the going rate of 63 cents per square foot, together with an administration fee of $500, totaling $2,390.



CTE Consultants presented an artist's rendering of the Town Hall expansion, with this view from the McKeown Avenue side. | Photo by Robert Gay

• Jon Tate of CPE Consultants presented conceptual drawings of the Town Hall addition, a space to serve the town judge and the town's law enforcement agreement with the Santa Cruz County sheriff's department. Discussion touched on points like the circulation within and around the addition, the connection of the judge's chambers with council chamber via a door and steps, and changes to the landscape created by a parking area on the Naugle Avenue side. The design ideas drew praise for looking like the original in both materials, roof shapes and exterior construction detailing. Tate stressed the ideas were preliminary and it was suggested there would be more public input.

• A 3,000-square foot portion of the Santa Rita Avenue right of way was approved for sale to William Stack at the standard rate of 63 cents per square foot.

• Upholding the customary practice of scheduling only one meeting per month for the next two holiday-intensive months, November's council meeting will be Nov. 18 and December's on Dec. 16.

• Dr. Michele Girard, an approved Forest Legacy Monitor, was approved to do an annual inspection for the recently approved Forest Legacy Conservation Easement. The contract amount cannot exceed $1,500 annually and payments will come from the interest earned on Wildlife Corridors Reserve Fund's balance, as majorly enhanced by a recent $57,800 payment.

• The council approved a 20% lease increase for the Patagonia Garden Apartments, at 283 Pennsylvania Avenue. This would bring one-bedroom lease amount to $432 per month, and the studio lease to $384 per month. The town's enterprise funds provide $105 per month for each, so the net cost to the lessees would be $327 and $275, effective Jan. 1, 2027.

NOTES FROM SEFD

September 2026

There were 61 responder incidents in August; 36 were medical in nature.

• Firefighter Katie Barker, who recently completed her probationary year, was officially sworn in. Her mother Linda pinned her badge, and her sister was present.

• The Board voted unanimously to approve updates to the SEFD Human Resources Policy Manual to incorporate labor relations policy, modify suppression reserve and volunteer policies, and make some minor changes.

• A new worker's compensation provider was selected, reducing premiums and saving about $30,000 a year.

• Santa Cruz County Treasurer's Office is updating its software systems and is now two months behind payments to SEFD from tax revenues.

• Captains testing will occur in October; three applications were timely received.

• October is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. The United Firefighters of Sonoita are planning an information campaign.

• After the Board meeting, SEFD hosted a celebration marking its 20th anniversary. About 50 community members attended and enjoyed food, beverages, and gifts, along with representatives from eight or nine other fire districts; three hospitals; LifeNet; Santa Cruz County Supervisor John Fanning; and Pima Supervisor Steve Christy — all representing the communities we serve and the organizations we work with.

October 2026

• There were 60 responder incidents in October to include one fire and 31 medical in nature.

• Chief Meredith reported that SEFD recently received July tax revenue from the county but is still awaiting payments for August and September. The delay stems from problems with a county computer system upgrade that began in late June and was originally scheduled for completion by July 18. Treasurer Alejandro Paz said the issue involves the interface between the Finance and Treasurer Departments and currently affects all school and fire tax districts countywide. Once the system is fixed, the county will reconcile accounts and issue reports month by month, distribute overdue funds and resume normal monthly processing. Meredith added that SEFD is drawing from its reserves and may need to borrow money to maintain operations and payroll if county payments do not resume by December.

• As an early action project under the draft Community Protection & Benefits Agreement, South32 is funding a comprehensive, countywide audit of Santa Cruz County's emergency services. Chief Meredith, who has participated in related focus groups, reported that the county awarded the contract to Matrix Consulting and expects the audit to begin in November. The 18-week review will assess all fire departments, public safety and public health services, with the consultants identifying current standards, capabilities and gaps. The findings will be presented to the county and South32.

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Empathy Project looks to expands its inspirational mission

By Sondra Porter

Three nonprofits in Patagonia again demonstrated their commitment to helping kids develop an understanding of the plight of others. The Patagonia Empathy Project kicked off its fall events by honoring Dolly Parton and her legacy on Oct. 15 at the Tin Shed Theater. The Empathy Project was started last spring by a collaboration between the Creative Arts Center (PCAC), Patagonia Youth Enrichment Center (PYEC) and Voices from the Border.

The creative core includes Cassina Farley, an art teacher and director of the PCAC; India Aubry, a co-founder and president of Voices from the Border; and Anna Coleman, founder and director of PYEC. Middle school language arts teacher Kate Peake works with the group by representing Patagonia schools.

At the fall event, a free screening of a documentary about Dolly and her charity, the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL), followed refreshments and a hands-on empathy art project.

"The evening was a success in bringing compassionate people together to support a project that affects all ages," Coleman noted.

The art project was inspired by Parton's song and children's book Coat of Many Colors. Kids and adults made patches much like the ones Dolly's mother used to mend a ragged coat that Dolly wore in elementary school. The patches carried messages about compassion, love and empathy.

The documentary itself shared insights into Dolly Parton's impoverished beginnings and how she chose to give back to her childhood community and promote literacy through the creation of the Imagination Library. Her father was unable to read, and she grew up without access to books in her home. In 1995, her compassion for others drove her to make more opportunities for those in situations similar to hers.

Now her idea of gifting books to kids from birth to age 5 has blossomed into a worldwide opportunity. The project will continue even after her death. According to its website, the Imagination Library is dedicated to inspiring a love of reading by gifting over 3 million free books monthly to children through funding shared by Dolly Parton and local community partners in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and Republic of Ireland.

Farley has a dream of making these opportunities possible for Patagonia kids by becoming a partner with Parton's library, with hopes of expanding to other Santa Cruz locations.



The Empathy Project's leadership team of (from left), Cassina Farley, Anna Coleman and India Aubry at October's event inspired by the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. | Photo by Sondra Porter

"When I was researching the possibility of bringing the DPIL to Patagonia, I looked up via U.S. census how many kids ages 0-5 were in Patagonia, and I think it was the 2025 census that had us at 27 kids in that age group," Farley said. "That was a number that made the whole thing possible in my mind. If we could raise the money for 27 kids, we could easily make it work. There was also the possibility of applying for local grants to cover Patagonia as well as Sonoita/Elgin."

Aubry is equally enthused about not only joining up with the Imagination Library, but also about continuing the Empathy Project in general.

"The Empathy Project will continue to integrate both at the middle-school curriculum level and for the general community as we find ways to bring this project forward in fun and creative ways," she said. "The main goal of the project is to promote programs and events that help children and adults alike care about and better understand the world around us, a simple but powerful concept. Of course, we know that caring and empathetic people become better parents, teachers, leaders, legislators, etc. Another goal of the project is to bring the community together in meaningful ways. The Imagination Library — because it promotes early childhood literacy — ticks all of these boxes, and we're really excited to make Patagonia and the surrounding area an affiliate partner. Making an investment in children in our community is making a commitment in our shared future."

Peake is glad to bring Patagonia Middle School and her English classes into the project. "This year the project provided us another award-winning novel, Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis," she said. "Once we read the book, there will be a general showing of a film by the project." This is the story of resilience and survival by an 11-year-old girl who is forced to support her family under Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

Peake noted multiple benefits to teaming with Project Empathy. "The whole project is inspirational to students, knowing that the town sees what they are doing and is engaging in creating empathy along with students."

More is needed from the community if this work is to continue. "There is still the need for a website and data collection if we want to join the DPIL," Farley said. "We also need a plan to sign kids up and for marketing in our area. … If we are successful, wouldn't it be great to offer the DPIL to the entire county? We can always use more willing folks to help out with all aspects of the project."

Coleman summed up her commitment to the project: "Our young people bring joy and hope to the future. The investment in their future is key."

People interested in volunteering or offering support of any kind can contact Farley at makeart1@msn.com or text/call 520-216-0358.

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Fault slipped, the earth shook, water flow diminished

By Keith Krizan

I have to admit to being more than a little skeptical about a book whose premise is that an earthquake, with an epicenter that was 120 miles away in Bavispe, Sonora, Mexico, could have a continuing impact on the flow of groundwater in my part of the world in southeastern Arizona. How could a little shaking, a momentary release of energy, even a great deal of energy, permanently affect the rate at which rainwater soaks into the earth and recharges aquifers, those great underground stores of wealth, that help to keep the dry West productive.

I guess that I had a lot to learn, and Mary Elizabeth Reynolds had just the book to enlighten me.

The Quake That Drained The Desert is divided into two parts. Part one is composed of a brief history of Southeast Arizona and Northern Sonora by the direct observations of the people who lived through the May 3, 1887, magnitude 7.4 quake, or their stories and lore passed down through the generations, and the investigations done by the inquiring minds of that time and place.

Part two examines the changes in water flow, post-quake, and the impact of the 20th century rush to exploit rich mineral lodes associated with the geology that produces the quakes, and to exploit the abundance of an agriculture built on year-round sunshine and water first diverted from rivers and streams and then pumped from below ground.

The author is a splendid storyteller, and all of the usual suspects of late 19th century southeastern Arizona history are accounted for. Geronimo and U.S. Gen. George Crook. Virgil Earp and his brothers Wyatt and Morgan. Doc Holliday, "Big Nose" Kate and The Cowboys.

We also encounter, in Tombstone, an early adopter of the photography arts, Camillus Sydney "Buck" Fly. C.S. Fly was the author of one of the more iconic photos of the wild west when he snapped four Apache warriors — Geronimo, Yanozha (Geronimo's brother-in-law), Chappo (Geronimo's son) and Fun (Yanozha's half-brother) — all holding rifles in 1886. The photo became especially famous after 9/11, when it was turned into a poster captioned "Homeland Security — Fighting Terrorism Since 1492."

Buck Fly had set up shop, with his wife Mollie, in Tombstone in 1879. The couple built and maintained a boardinghouse and photography studio next to the OK Corral and so had front row seats to the 1882 shootout.

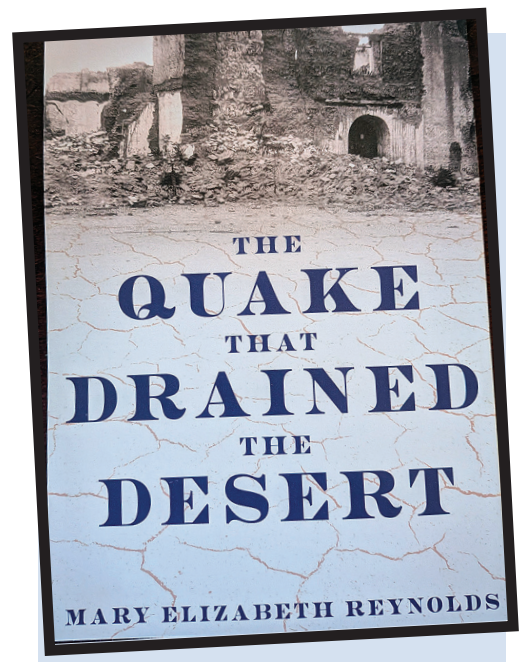
Buck and another Tombstone citizen, the town's physician, Dr. George Goodfellow, undertook a horse and wagon journey to locate the quake's epicenter. Based upon a letter published in Science magazine just a few short weeks after the quake, Goodfellow was commissioned by Capt. Clarence Dutton of the U.S. Geological Survey to observe and document the temblor's reign of destruction.

Along the way to Bavispe, where 42 people had perished and the services of a doctor were probably needed, they likely passed through the quake-induced ruins of John Slaughter's San Bernardino Ranch, east of Douglas.

Fly recorded images of both newly emerged scarps in the mountains along the way and the scenes of total devastation in Bavispe and the collapse of San Miguel de Bavispe Church in the center of town.

The second half of the book looks at the changes in water availability brought on by the1887 quake, where underground changes in faults caused some seeps to dry up even as others were created anew if only briefly.

The post-quake population increase in Tucson, coupled with more pumping for crop irrigation, such as water in-



The Quake That Drained The Desert, by Mary Elizabeth Reynolds. Published by Bison Books, an imprint of the University of Nebraska Press.

tensive cotton, and mineral processing from ever-expanding mine operations, led to a notable change in the water fortunes of the San Pedro and Santa Cruz River drainages.

Overgrazing of cattle led to land that shed its water rather than absorbing it. That began to undercut in the washes so that the breakpoints that had served as the intakes for canals were now far above the slack flow of these rivers, especially on the acres of farmland south of Tucson.

For millennia these fertile soils had fed generations based solely on the annual surface flow of groundwater. Now a combination of changes spurred on by the 1887 earthquake and by technological changes — railroads to ship grass-fed beef to distant markets, and steam-powered pumps to go lower and lower to extract the liquid gold — has led to the subsidence of the earth in Tucson and the scramble to slake the thirst of a burgeoning population.



Author Mary Elizabeth Reynolds will be speaking at the Patagonia Library, 346 Duquesne Avenue, on Saturday, Nov. 7, at 10:30 a.m. Books will be available for purchase and signing.

Restoring the surface of our state so that it might better slow the flow of water across it and thereby increase its chances of being absorbed into an ever-lowering aquifer has fallen to the efforts of private individuals and foundations like The Borderlands Restoration Network. Patagonia's own Zach Farley gets a shoutout for the "Zuni Bowls," made of rocks embedded in streambeds, that prevent the type of undercutting and erosion associated with the rapid runoff from monsoon storms, that he and his crew have constructed for the BRN.

The Quake That Drained The Desert makes a compelling case for these efforts and for the adoption of water conservation techniques.

Maybe the next big quake with an epicenter close to southeastern Arizona will change things for the better and cause our current low-flow washes and riverbeds to once again gush with life-giving water. I guess we will just have to wait and see.

Patagonia Regional Aquatics Center receives financial boost

By Bob Brandt and Clare Bonelli

After successfully managing some financial turbulence earlier this year, some recent developments have given the Patagonia Regional Aquatics Center (PRAC) reason to be optimistic not only about the 2027 pool schedule but about the possibility of having a new facility to replace the present one.

Regarding the outlook for the pool in 2027, PRAC President Beth Lofquist said, "We are thrilled to share two pieces of good news. First, we have received word from South32 that the company has generously awarded PRAC a $30,000 Community Investment Grant, and second, our first ever July swim-a-thon was a huge success, netting over $17,000.

"Together, these two infusions of cash will give us a great head start on 2027. However, we still will need to raise an additional $30,000-$40,000 to fully fund next year's pool schedule. We're hoping our annual fall campaign will get us over the finish line," Lofquist said. "This fall, thanks to a few generous anonymous donors the campaign will feature a dollar-for-dollar match of all contributions up to $15,000. It's your chance to double the value of your contribution."

The fund-raising campaign will run until Nov. 15.

Lofquist also announced two more developments of interest to the community. She said representatives of Santa Cruz County, town of Patagonia, South32 and PRAC met on Oct. 14 to get a briefing on the pool's current funding situation and to discuss the need for and feasibility of building a new pool to serve eastern Santa Cruz County. The consensus among the attendees was that a new pool would likely be needed, perhaps within the next few years, and that planning for that facility should start now. They agreed to meet again in about a month to gather relevant information on current pool usage and explore possible locations and sources of funding to build and operate a new facility.

Also, the PRAC board has begun drafting a strategic plan that will guide the organization for the next five years, and input from the community is invited. The draft plan will be available for review and comment on PRAC's website, www.Patagoniapool.org. The board hopes to complete the plan by the end of this year.

The pool serves all of eastern Santa Cruz County but receives no governmental funding. Its annual operational budget of approximately $100,000 is funded entirely by user fees, grants and donations. Volunteers are responsible for maintenance and operations, and the only paid positions are lifeguards, primarily local youth.

Building an Empire: Book examines life of ranch owner

By Angelina Maynes

In the winter of 1875, Walter Vail wrote home from Tucson after traveling through the Arizona desert. He spoke of intense sun, cold nights and long stretches without drinking water.

Vail eventually went on to launch Empire Ranch, which would later become headquarters to one of the state's most prominent cattle businesses.

More than a century later, Alison Bunting found herself piecing together Vail's story through surviving letters, land documents and previously written histories.

Bunting, a retired librarian, was recruited to organize the Empire Ranch Foundation's archives. As she worked through the records, she became interested in the history of Empire Ranch and the families connected to it.

Her efforts led to the Vail biography, Walter Vail: Arizona and California Rancher, released last year.

The book was originally a project started by Christine Shirley, wife of one of Vail's grandsons. Shirley was a history teacher in Los Angeles. She was unable to finish the biography, due to illness.

Deep in the archives, Bunting came across Shirley's unfinished, typewritten chapters.

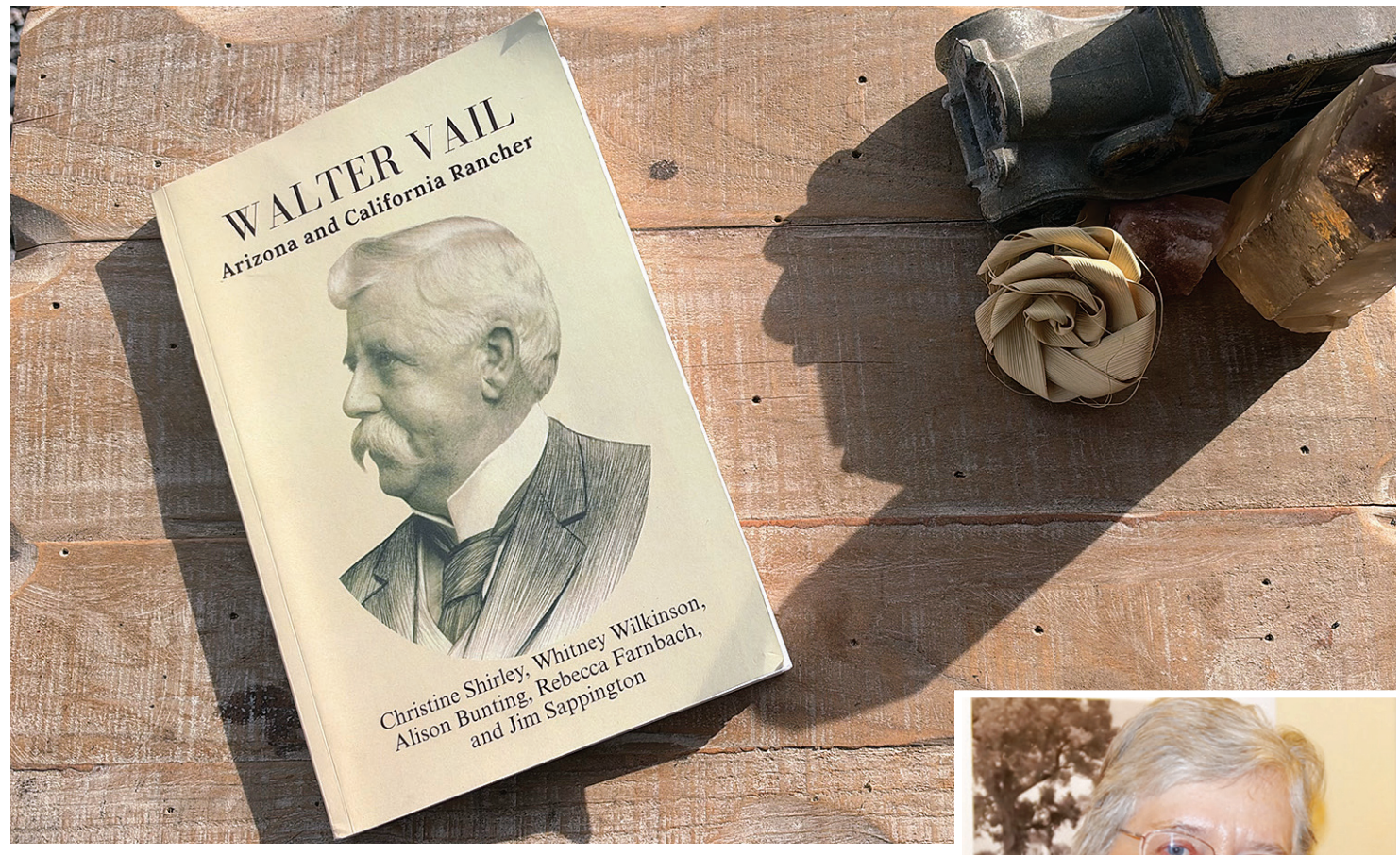
Bunting used optical character recognition to convert the typed pages into digital documents. She then worked with living Vail family members to better understand Shirley's plans for the biography and to help complete the story.

"I could see how she was using the letters to tell the story," Bunting said, "And so the chapters where things were missing or hadn't been quite completed, I was able to add to those."

Before Vail became a prominent Arizona rancher, he had roots on the East Coast, moving between New Jersey and New York as his family grew and employment opportunities changed.

With talk of new opportunities in the West, he began looking for a different future.

Stories of silver and gold drew him to Virginia City, Nevada. From there, he began considering other opportunities, and looked to purchase land in Arizona, where he could raise sheep and cattle.





Above: Historical documents helped tell Walter Vail's story. | Photo by Angelina Maynes
On the right: Alison Bunting. | File photo

Bunting's research into Vail's letters offer a glimpse into his early impressions of Arizona, which were not entirely favorable after traveling through the unforgiving desert. Bunting said she was struck by the way he recorded his experiences.

"I loved how candid he was in expressing what he was encountering," she said. "They also show his adventurous spirit and courage to take on what he did."

The letters revealed that despite the difficult trip, Vail saw potential in the region. He found access to grasslands and drinking water that could easily support livestock, along with potential opportunities for economic growth along a developing railroad system.

In 1876, Vail and Herbert R. Hislop purchased the 160-acre Fish Ranch for $2,000, about $70,000 today.

"What they did, very strategically, is buy up as much land as they could, especially along the banks of the Cienega Creek," Bunting said.

They purchased property from ranchers and homesteaders who were leaving the area. By acquiring land along the creek, Vail and his partners gained access to enough water to sustain their growing herd.

By 1880, the herd had expanded to more than 5,000 head of cattle, and the Southern Pacific Railroad had reached Tucson, connecting the region to broader markets.

Tombstone, which had grown rapidly during the silver boom, became an important market for cattle, and Vail was quick to take advantage of that. He supplied about 1,000 cattle a year to Tombstone. Cattle were also being sent to Indian reservations, where the U.S. government attempted to "settle" with the Apache natives, according to the biography.

In 1885, Vail became president of the Arizona Stock Growers Association, as Empire Ranch became one of the state's leading cattle businesses. Pima County tax records show that the Empire Ranch and Cattle Company owned 61,160 acres of land in 1889, which would later grow to over 100,000 acres.

The letters and family records helped to fill in the details behind that growth, providing a glimpse into the lives of the people who worked the land. Bunting was able to finish the project with the help of fellow contributors Whitney Wilkinson, Rebecca Farnbach, and Jim Sappington.

"It enabled us to really envision what it was really like being in this very isolated area," Bunting said.

For Bunting, the work is part of a broader effort to preserve the stories of the people who shaped the region. She and her husband moved from Los Angeles to the Sonoita area in search of a more rural lifestyle and darker skies for stargazing.

"For me, archives and historical research (are) very exciting," Bunting said. "And it's wonderful when we have primary resources, like the letters that can tell you exactly what happened."

Attending Veterans Day ceremonies at Patagonia Cemetery

The community is invited to participate in Veterans Day ceremonies at the Patagonia Cemetery. Ceremonies are being organized by Patagonia resident Murphy Musick. With the help from community members, the Patagonia Museum and friends, Musick oversees the placing of flags on all veterans' graves at the cemetery.

Those interested in participating are invited to meet at the cemetery at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 10, to "team up and have fun looking at each and every headstone to determine any clues as to their military service," Musick said. "All worn flags will be replaced. The flags look beautiful, and it is surprising how many there are."

Then, on Nov. 11, community members are invited to a ceremony at the cemetery flagpole at 11 a.m. "I think that the cemetery offers a tangible site for reflection upon our past in a very personal way," Musick said. "I would like to invite residents of Patagonia to help Honor our Veterans."

Know a military member?

In addition to our deceased veterans, the PRT has been asked to assist with the daunting task of compiling a list of our community's living military personnel – both active and discharged. If you or someone you know fits that criteria, drop us a line at prtadast@gmail.com so that these servicemen and women can be properly honored. We'll keep an ongoing list in hopes of publishing it prior to Veterans Day 2027.

Citizens study roadkill to document need for safe wildlife crossings

By Robert Gay

Almost four years ago, when Aaron Mrotek became manager of The Nature Conservancy Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, he was startled by the amount of roadkill he kept seeing along State Highway 82.

His first thought was "somebody ought to do something about all this killing," but some months later, as the pace of deaths continued along the highway, a flash hit him: "That someone is me."

What is needed to cut vehicle-animal collisions, Mrotek was clear, is data about these roadkills, lots of it. Perfect for citizen science, he thought. Local wildlife biologist Eric Herman, was excited about the idea. To provide a protocol for data gathering, Herman drew on his extensive professional work doing wildlife surveys and organizing data.

His protocol first specifies the "path of interest" as a 22-mile portion of Highway 82, from Sonoita's crossroads to the Nogales International Airport. The protocol goes on to detail the process of conducting surveys, equipment needed, safety measures and data to be collected.

For systematically archiving and geolocating the photos and data that road surveys would generate, Mrotek recruited Borderland Restoration Network (BRN) computer whiz Randy Moore to develop an app for the surveyors to install on their phones.

These ideas evolved into a two-year research program in what's been called " road ecology." Launched in June 2025, the data gathering phase was preceded by recruiting and training a number of volunteer "Roadkill Rangers." In teams of two, they go out on the highway, survey the whole path of interest, stopping as safely as possible at every death location to record info about it.

Once at a death site, the surveyor photographs the carcass, sends a shot to the survey app, then answers the app's questions about the creature's species (if detectable) and estimated stage of life – whether mature or not. From the phone's geolocation info, the app notes time and date and then pinpoints the coordinates of each stop. This info will allow mapping in the future.

Once the photo and data are entered, a member of the team removes the carcass from the roadway, ideally to about 50 feet from the centerline, but topography and brush sometimes prevent that. A bright orange spot of paint is a sprayed on the body, just to let future surveyors know that particular body had already become data.

The Arizona Department of Game and Fish Department has given the program a permit to move dead animals off the roadway. Eric Herman will use the roadkill data to send the agency an annual report, under the terms of the permit.

At the end of a trip, the gathered information is sent to the cloud as ready for entry on a growing Excel spreadsheet. Net result: the Roadkill Ranger survey process transforms those bodies of flesh into bodies of data.

What has the first year of roadkill surveying produced? In an August 2026 online presentation for volunteers and staff, Mrotek opened with a summary and a map of the findings from a major earlier study by Paul Beier of Northern Arizona University, an environmental scientist who has studied wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity. Beier's research sought alignments of animals movements between the Santa Rita Mountains and ranges to the southeast, routes which cross 82 in the project area.

Beier identified three major areas of possible wildlife crossing, and Mrotek's preliminary analysis showed fairly decent alignment with two of Beier's "clusters."

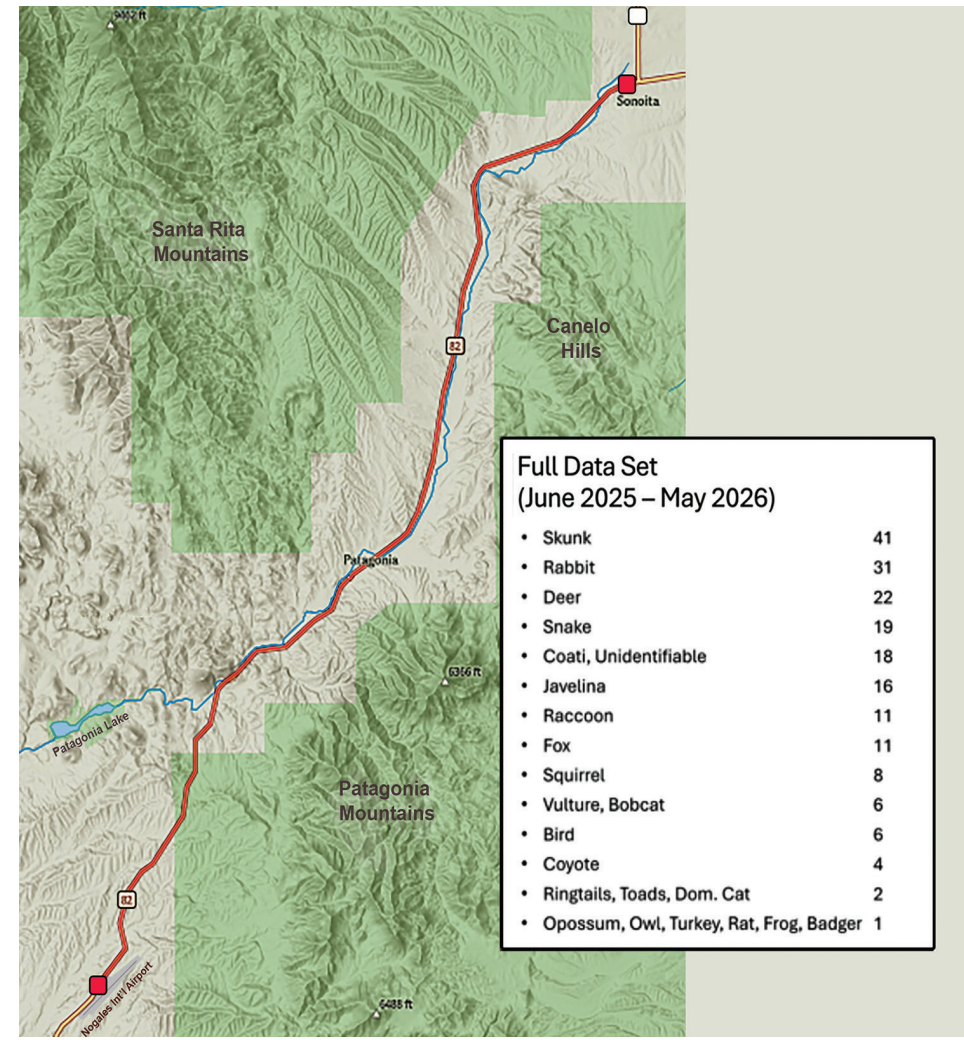
Mrotek delved into many subtleties of the data being gathered, a major one being time of year, with three times the roadkill incidents being reported in the summer as in the winter. Some parts of the road are safer than others, Mrotek explained, such as long straight stretches with good vision and vegetation management. Some species of roadkill might be carried off by predators. And vultures relate to roadkill in several ways: one was seen carrying a snake from centerline to small trees near Patagonia High School; another was hit and killed while feasting on a roadkill creature, and still others will sit on the road eating but fly away safely if a vehicle comes by.

With all this variability in conditions and incidents, Mrotek reminded the group that the program records roadkill incidents but is not a census. Mrotek's suggestion is that the purpose of the field work is for providing data about where crossings actually occur, not for estimating the numbers of various species. And it doesn't count the lucky ones who made it across.

In the project's database, the species officially listed are explained as "simplified" species, because there may be several species of skunk, for example, and the species ID process would have big challenges. Whitetail vs. mule deer is a familiar example of easy-to-identify subspecies, but in entering roadkill data, both are simply accounted as deer.



Robert Gay removes a javelina from Highway 82, one of four carcasses to be removed on this particular surveying expedition. | Photo by Carolyn Schafer



The data of the first year identify 22 species, plus 18 unidentified carcasses. The five most prevalent were skunk (41), rabbit (31), deer (22), snake (19) and coatimundi (18).

For the first year, there were no bears or pronghorns, nor were there any of three regionally known species of big cats: mountain lions, ocelots and jaguars.

Smaller creatures that might get hit or squashed on 82 include rodents like mice and packrats, amphibians like

See ROADKILL, p. 13

The monsoon, the megadrought, and fire season

By Eddie McArthur

The 2026 monsoon dropped about 14 inches of rain on the Sonoita area. Grasses are belly high on a horse. So are weeds. Underbrush in the National Forest is thriving.

Does that mean we are now out of long-term drought conditions? Not even close!

According to a 2022 collaborative study by researchers from UCLA, NASA and the Columbia Climate School, Southern Arizona has been in a "mega-drought" that began in 2000, and is the largest and longest drought in the Southwest in 1,200 years. The period from 2000 through 2021 was the driest in the southwest parts of the country in 800 years. Parts of our county are currently considered just "abnormally dry," but the overall megadrought continues.

We are looking at conditions that could develop into a very dangerous fire season for this area. Possible winter rains from the El Niño may mitigate that to a degree. Without winter moisture, conditions will continue to deteriorate.

Sonoita Elgin Fire District provides fire protection to a 325 square mile area. In partnership with Patagonia Volunteer Fire and Rescue, the two are responsible for nearly 60 percent of Santa Cruz County. Operating in a large area with limited budget, equipment and personnel, these two agencies could quickly become stretched if more than one wildfire developed at the same time. While neighboring agencies will assist whenever possible, they will be facing many of the same conditions.

"This summer's rainfall was a welcome improvement over recent years, (but) Arizona's persistent drought coupled with increasingly unpredictable weather patterns means that we can experience intense fire conditions throughout the year," said Sonoita-Elgin fire chief Marc Meredith.

Along with all the beautiful green grass brought to us by the monsoon are numerous dead trees. In our more forested areas such as the National Forest and many of our canyons, these dead trees stand among abundant "fuel load." Fuel load is defined as the total quantity of combustible material in a specific area to feed and sustain a fire.

The Arizona Department of Fire & Forest Management identifies Santa Cruz County as one of the two highest risk communities for wildfire in the state. We don't have a single type of "fuel load" here. Dense grasses, once dry, are very combustible and produce a fast-moving fire. Brush can carry fire rapidly, especially in hot and windy conditions. Oak and woodland fuels are slower burning but can produce substantial heat and throw off sparks causing spread of flames.

Also important for our area is the increase in average temperature. Increased temperatures result in more water evaporating from the soil. Plants lose water through a process called evapotranspiration. Streams and stock ponds lose water faster. Vegetation can become stressed even in times of "normal" rainfall. And recharging of our aquifers is reduced. A big monsoon may replenish surface water while doing little to nothing for groundwater recharge. The decades of accumulated water deficits remain. This can lead to aridification and long-term or even permanent changes to our climate.

Desertification often follows aridification. Aridification is a climatological change in which a region becomes permanently drier over time. Desertification is the ecological result when once fertile land becomes barren, vegetation dies, topsoil erodes, and the soil loses the ability to hold water. Unprotected dry soil blows away in wind and is washed away by flooding.

Some definitions:



Numerous dead trees stand amid the native grasses that prospered during this year's monsoon, making for a potentially combustible mix. | Photo by Eddie McArthur

• Drought is a period when conditions are unusually dry as compared with historical climate.

• Megadrought is an exceptionally long and severe drought, usually measured in decades.

• Aridification is a fundamental shift toward a drier baseline.

• Desertification is a gradual degradation of land into arid desert due to a combination of natural processes and human activity.

The University of Arizona maintains "Drought View" (droughtview.arizona.edu) with not just a drought monitor, but also noting changes relative to 5- and 10-year averages. The Arizona Department of Water Resources notes persistent warming, with July 2022 through June 2026 as our second hottest period on record. The UA Cooperative Extension shows Sonoita's August temperatures were 3 to 5 degrees above normal.

This is a time to be especially cautious. Maintain "fire wise" conditions around property; be careful of sparks from dragging chains or power equipment; know how you will evacuate yourself and your pets if necessary.

The last year for a major wildfire here was 2017. We need to all work together not to allow this year to become another.

ROADKILL (cont. from p. 12)

toads and frogs, arachnids like tarantulas, and reptiles such as snakes and lizards. All species seen are important indicators of biodiversity, but except for the amphibians, the tabulated local reports don't include these smaller characters.

The ongoing second year of the project will finish in June of 2027. A footnote is that because of the ongoing pavement project for the "south reach" of the survey area, Mrotek recently stopped the roadklll data gathering in that half until resurfacing concludes in mid-November.

After the survey period finishes, all reported death sites will be mapped and the whole survey length analyzed for density of roadkill, clusters of data that are hotspots for designing future wildlife crossings of the highway. The first two years of photos and data will be woven together into a larger, more nuanced picture of the area's wildlife distributions, habitat, water sources, and migration patterns.

The final quilt of understandings will include proposals for regional wildlife care and habitat management. They will be shared with national experts in wildlife habitat, corridors and the design of safer highway crossings. For building safer wildlife crossings, what comes next in a years-long process would be funding, stakeholder inputs, detailed design, permitting and construction.

Once a wildlife crossing is put in use, there would be continued monitoring of the "users," and significant reductions in roadkill are expected to result.

Mrotek knows he's tasking the Rangers with difficult work, and frequently praises their wilingness to do a sometimes messy, even gory, project. "Wouldn't have happened without them," he said.

What's the experience like for the Roadkill Rangers, the ones who find and tally the deaths which result from all that rubber rolling down the road? Since there is a lot of guts on the pavement, the right adjective for experiencing these deaths, whether dried or fresh, big or small, is "visceral."

In a conversation with a local death doula, Holly Stefanski, she pointed at how the roadkill effort can also be understood as part of one's own spiritual path.

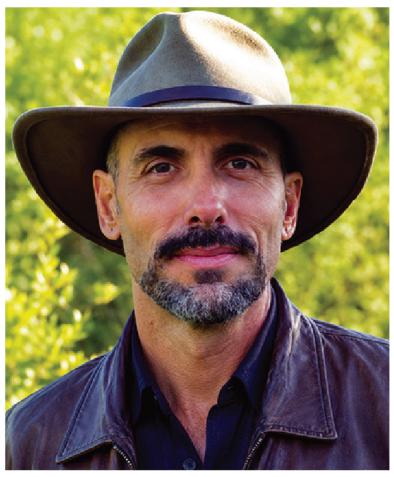
When a human dies slowly, Stefanski's work as a death doula is to hang out with them through that process, supporting for days, weeks or even months with her comforting presence and bits of assistance.

She spoke of the timeless point when the spark stops. "Later, you come back to regular consciousness with an ever-deepening gratitude for the miracle of life." Next day, in an email continuing the thought, she wrote "Every life fragile, fleeting and yet so very crucial to the whole.

My hope is that when we encounter the death of any creature, we hold it in a space that reminds us that ALL of us matter because in the end that is precisely what we have been and forever only be."

Autumn orthopterans

NATURE JOURNEYS



By Vincent Pinto

This November is shaping up to be prime time for observing a wide diversity of orthopterans (grasshoppers and their kin). The combination of an abundant monsoon along with drying autumn weather generally favors a broad spectrum of species, particularly in lower Sky Islands habitats such as deserts, grasslands, and mesquite woodlands. Let's take a close look at a handful of fascinating species sure to excite your interest in this often overlooked or even reviled group of insects.

We begin with a group that is likely familiar to most people — the aptly named band-winged grasshoppers. Many species have a stripe or band on either or both of their fore and hind wings. Capable of short flights, these generally ground-dwelling grasshoppers often burst into the air when we invade their space.

It is then, when they are briefly airborne, that we can admire not only the bands in their wings but also the accompanying colors of many species. Green, turquoise, orange, red, yellow, brown and black are among the hues to be found on their inner wings.

The colors serve several survival purposes. If a predator, such as a greater roadrunner, flushes a band-winged grasshopper, it immediately homes in on those polychromatic wings. Upon rapidly landing, however, the outer appearance shifts dramatically to a cryptic one. Now the roadrunner loses sight of its prey, which easily blends into the background.

Equally as important, the banded wings are used to good effect by males during short display flights intended to attract a mate. If you notice such antics in the wild, stay still and enjoy the show.

At the opposite end of the grasshopper observability spectrum are several species of lubber grasshoppers. They too have a fitting moniker, as "lubber" is an antiquated seafaring term referring to a clumsy or awkward person.

The spectacularly colored and patterned horse lubber grasshopper is an in-your-face species that is hard to overlook. Its size alone commands our attention. As is typical of most insect groups, females are larger than males and reach up to 3.5 inches — fairly gargantuan in the insect world.

They can tip the scales at up to 9-10 grams, making them heavier than most North American hummingbirds, as well as kinglets and bushtits! Unlike these birds and many other grasshopper species, the female horse lubber is utterly flightless.

That duty is left to the males, though not all of them. Only about 10 percent of males are capable of short, clumsy flights, during which their bright red inner wings are in full evidence. This time, however, the red is a warning color, telling predators to back off. Horse lubbers consume a broad spectrum of plants that translate into distastefulness to most species seeking to consume them.



The plains lubber's wings are of no use for flying, but they do serve a warning to predators of the species' foul taste. | Photo by Vincent Pinto

Loggerhead shrikes have solved this problem by impaling horse lubbers on a spine and allowing them to "cure" over a number of days, effectively dissipating the offensive chemicals from the dead grasshoppers.

Rapacious southern grasshopper mice, living up to their billing, quickly dispatch horse lubbers, discarding the toxic bits while consuming the rest. The red inner wing color of males once again does double duty, enticing females to mate.

The plains lubber grasshopper, a member of the same subfamily, is not quite as colorful or behemoth. Still, this chunky species easily catches our eye as it lumbers along the ground. Spook it and it will hop, despite its tank-like build. Look closely and you will soon see why. The wings on both genders are vestigial stubs — relics of when, once upon a time, they indeed could take to the air.

Plains lubbers are attractively patterned in brown, blue, black and red. The red is mostly confined to their otherwise nonfunctional wings and again heralds the foul taste of this species to predators. Atop their bad taste, plains lubbers also pack a kick that Bruce Lee himself would be proud of and which no doubt dissuades at least less persistent predators. If it doesn't, then perhaps vomiting in their face will. As with many other grasshopper species, plains lubbers "spit tobacco," or regurgitate their stomach contents, in order to repel attackers.

If all of this was not enough to make the plains lubber a veritable superstar among insects, consider that it also eats other grasshoppers — including its own kind. Recently, I also saw one dining on a dead lizard. If you decide to pick up a plains lubber, you may well find out the efficacy of its jaws. Unfortunately, space is not ample enough here to expound upon the joys of finding and observing orthopterans in the wild. I will, however, leave you with a cautionary tale. One is unfortunately quite familiar on a planet besieged and highly altered by humans — plummeting biodiversity. At Raven's Nest Nature Sanctuary, we host a myriad of orthopteran species that wax and wane not only with the seasons, but also with the annual vagaries of weather.

One such species is the differential grasshopper. Back in 2009, this species had an outbreak year where it was supremely abundant. Upon stepping amid their ranks, they flew in such numbers that ducking was often a good strategy. Whatever the reason, I have yet to see another differential grasshopper since that year — anywhere.

So the next time you feel an urge to curse that grasshopper eating your flowers or edible garden, be thankful it's still there. It's a sign of the resiliency of Nature.

Vincent Pinto and his wife, Claudia, run Ravens-Way Wild Journeys LLC, their Nature Adventure & Conservation organization devoted to protecting and promoting the unique biodiversity of the Sky Islands region. RWWJ offers a wide variety of private, custom-made courses, birding and biodiversity tours. Visit: www.ravensnatureschool.org



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Vigilance is key in guarding against New World screwworm

By Pat McNamara and Gerald M. Gay

When a PRT reporter was assigned a story early last month on the possible spread of New World screwworm to Arizona, the overall message was to stay vigilant with your pets and livestock, but don't let it stress you out.

While cases of the parasitic blowfly had been reported in New Mexico, Texas and Florida, Arizona was, at the time, screwworm-free.

That all changed last week.

On Wednesday, Oct. 28, the Arizona Department of Agriculture announced that the state had its first case of screwworm, found in a canine in neighboring Cochise County.

The dog had a wound on its back "heavily infested with maggots consistent with NWS characteristics," the news release said. Follow-up testing confirmed it. A second case has since been detected in a horse, also in Cochise County.

State Veterinarian Dr. Ryan Wolker's message echoed what Patagonia resident and retired federal veterinarian, Steve Finch, told our reporter earlier in the month: That plans for the arrival of screwworm had been in place for some time.

"Because of the extensive outreach, coordination, and surveillance already in place, Arizona producers, veterinarians, and pet owners know what to look for and how to report suspected cases," Wolker said. "That preparation is allowing us to move quickly to protect animal health in the state."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the New World screwworm (NWS) is a fly that lays its eggs in an open wound, body openings such as eyes, ears, nose or mouth, or possibly the umbilicus of a newborn animal.

The eggs hatch into larvae that feed on living tissue.

The larva is shaped and acts like a screw that you get at the local hardware store. It screws into the living tissue, breaking down that tissue and causing a condition called myiasis. Without treatment, the infestations can be fatal.

Primarily a species of the tropics and warm climates, these insects have not been a big factor in most of the US livestock industry. However, with factors such as climate change, the increased movement of animals, and gaps in veterinary surveillance, the affected animals can spread this scourge. Birds, pets and even humans can all be infected.

Dogs and cats are vulnerable because minor injuries can attract the flies. Pet owners are encouraged to check their animals for wounds and monitor for any foul odors or tissue damage. The affected dog in Cochise County is under veterinary care and the Arizona Department of Agriculture is working with the vet and the owner to gather more information, the news release said.

"Federal response actions from (United States Department of Agriculture) will include establishing an Infested Zone, increasing animal surveillance, and conducting outreach to local partners," it continued.

The news release said the AZDA is advocating for the release of sterile flies in the area to help suppress the fly population.

The practice goes back to the 1960s, when a technique was developed to sterilize male fly larva as pupas. The sterile flies were then distributed by air over the affected areas to mate with their female counterparts.

The technique proved effective in eradicating the screwworm spread. It was continued with the cooperation of Mexico and countries throughout Central America.

Plans for a sterile fly dispersal facility in Douglas are in the works, the news release said.

The AZDA said anyone with pets or livestock should remain vigilant, especially if any unusual wounds are discovered on their animals. They are asked to call the AZDA offices at 1-602-542-4293 or email diseasereporting@azda.gov.

Hunters and outdoor enthusiasts are asked to call Arizona Game and Fish at 1-623-236-7201 if they see the same type of wounds in local wildlife.

John and Florence Oliver

GLIMPSES INTO OUR PAST

By Alison Bunting

John Oliver (1889-1945) was born in Columbus, Miss. He served as a Lieutenant in the U.S. Army from 1916 to 1918 and was stationed along the Mexican border as part of the force assigned to protect the U.S. from Pancho Villa. In January 1920 he was living in El Paso, Texas, working as an auto mechanic. In April 1920 John and his partner, Delevan Foltz, bought an auto repair garage in Nogales.

Florence Zander (1898-1985) was born in Wyoming and grew up primarily in the Bellingham, Wash., area, where she graduated with a teaching degree from Bellingham Normal School. In 1920 she moved to Arizona with two of her sisters, Inez (1903-1984) and Rosalie "Rosebud" (1906-1945), and Florence began to teach at the Red Rock (San Rafael) one-room school.

John and Florence most likely met at one of the dances in the San Rafael Valley; they married on Dec. 1, 1923. They lived at Fort Huachuca, where John was the manager of the Post Exchange farm, a position he held until 1925. Florence taught at the Canelo school. Their daughter Elizabeth Jean "Betty" was born in 1924.

In 1930 the Olivers moved to Reseda, Calif., where John managed Runnymede Farm, one of the largest chicken raising facilities in the country. Their son John, Jr. was born in California in 1932.

In 1938, the Olivers returned to Arizona when John. Sr. was hired to run the store and boarding house in Washington Camp. Florence began to teach at the Lochiel School, eventually becoming the principal. When John Sr. developed heart problems, the family moved to Nogales and Florence began to teach third grade at the Elm Street elementary school. In 1944 John returned to Mississippi and entered the VA hospital in Biloxi. John Jr. accompanied him and attended the Gulf Coast Military Academy. Florence resigned from teaching and enlisted in the Women's Army Corps (WACs), where she trained as an occupational therapist and served at the Kennedy General Hospital in Memphis, Tenn. Betty Oliver, who had been attending Arizona State College in Flagstaff, enlisted in the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) and served at the U.S. Naval Hospital, Corona, Calif.

John died in Biloxi on December 12, 1945. Florence was discharged from the WACs in 1946, and she and John Jr. returned to Nogales. Florence resumed teaching at Elm Street Elementary, eventually becoming the principal. John Jr. graduated from Nogales High School. Florence retired in 1968 and ran, unsuccessfully, for Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools that same year. In her retirement she was active in the American Legion and Disabled American Veterans. Florence died in 1985, age 87.



Florence Zander and John Oliver wedding photo, 1923. | Courtesy of Bowman Stradling History Center

Betty Oliver married William P. Gatlin in 1947; they had two daughters and a son. Betty taught for many years at Globe and Phoenix; she currently lives in Tucson. John Jr. married Patricia Holbrook in 1956 and raised two daughters and a son. John retired from a career with the U.S. Forest Service in 1987; he and Pattie live in Elgin.

SOUTH32

BRIGHTER FUTURES TOGETHER

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."

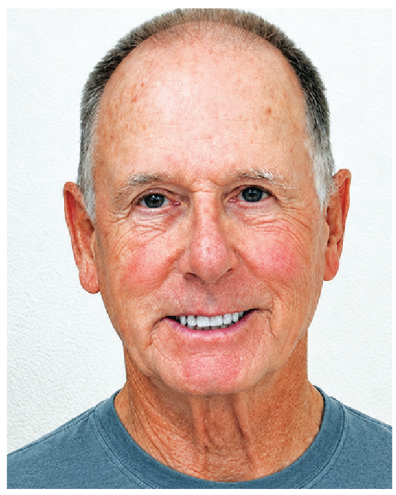
- Betty, Environmental Compliance Manager

Learn more



Armour Spring Trail #71

TAKE A HIKE



By Wayne Tomasi

Armour Spring Trail #71 is an isolated spur trail with no direct access to either end. It can be reached from several trails on either side of the Santa Rita Mountains. The following description originates from Florida Saddle using the Crest Trail.

The one-way mileage from Florida Saddle to the east end of the Armour Spring Trail is 0.3 miles, and Armour Spring is 0.4 miles from the trail junction. The trail ends where it junctions with Four Springs Trail #940 on McCleary Saddle. Although the Armour Spring Trail is only 1.5 miles long, accessing it can involve several miles of rigorous hiking with considerable elevation change, regardless of what trail you use.

The origin of the name Armour Spring is unclear, although an archaeologist from the Coronado National Forest speculates the spring is named after Armour Scholefield, who was the first full-time Forest Service Ranger in the Santa Rita Mountains.

There is no evidence, however, that Ranger Scholefield discovered or ever visited Armour Spring; however, he was known to have ridden his horse throughout the Santa Rita Mountains from late 1904 until November 1906, when he died of pneumonia at the age of 26. He worked until he was too sick to continue and died soon after. His parents founded the Scholefield Ranch near Mount Fagan in the 1880s, and both Scholefield Spring and Scholefield Canyon are named after the family.

Armour Spring is located above and slightly east of the head of the southwest arm of Florida Canyon, directly below the north face of peak 8853 (aka 88 Mac). From the Crest Trail, the route to Armour Spring and McCleary Saddle is well defined, relatively clear of debris and easy to follow.

The Armour Spring Trail is short, lightly traveled and leads through a large stand of Douglas fir to an intermittent seep at the base of a house-sized boulder. The trail from Armour Spring to the McCleary Saddle shows signs of human construction and is in remarkably good condition, although I doubt anyone could have ridden a horse across the steep and densely forested slope.

From Florida Saddle, hike south up a steep grade on the Crest Trail approximately three-tenths of a mile to where it junctions with the Armour Spring Trail. A steel sign at the junction states "Armour Spring 0.4 miles," and an arrow points west across a steep slope where only someone with a wild imagination could envision a trail.

Follow the arrow and after approximately 0.2 miles of easy walking, the path rounds a barren boulder-clad corner with magnificent views down Florida Canyon and the first clear views of McCleary Peak. Shortly after rounding the corner, the trail begins an abrupt descent on a series of short, extremely steep switchbacks. The trail shows definite signs of extensive construction but minimal maintenance. The route continues undulating across a steep slope, crossing several minor drainages and passing over slew of fallen trees and boulders.



A sign marks the location of Armour Spring, otherwise you might not notice it. | Photo by Wayne Tomasi

At the bottom of a steep grade, the trail dips and passes below a high, rocky ravine forming the base of a magnificent cascading waterfall. I first visited the area in March, and the falls were frozen, partially covered with snow, and had a steady flow of water running out the bottom. Although a spectacular sight, the waterfall is probably dry much of the time and most people pass without taking notice.

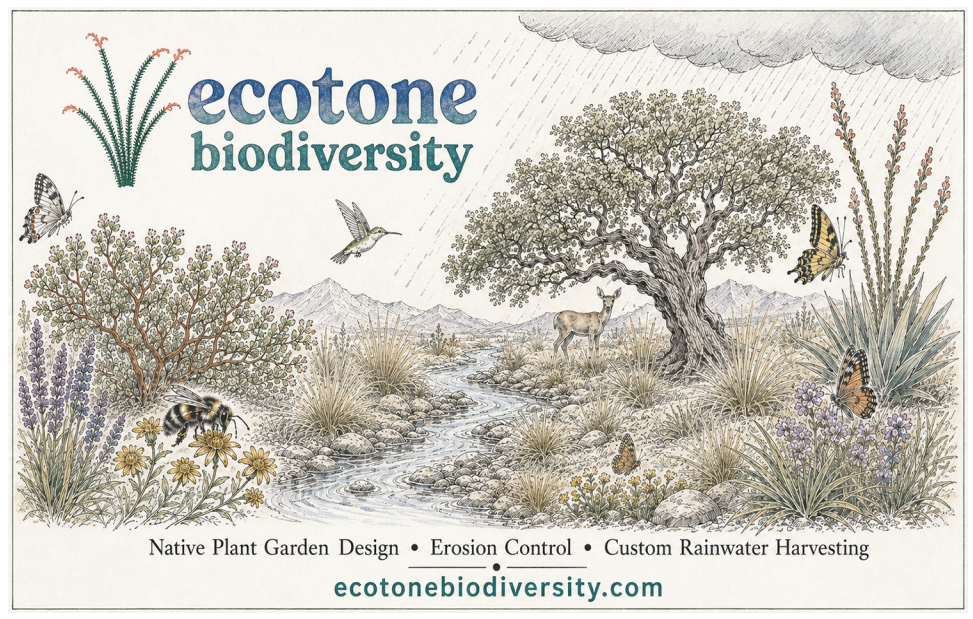
From the waterfall, it is a short distance to Armour Spring, which is somewhat anticlimactic after seeing the waterfall. A sign at the spring marks the location, otherwise you might not notice it. The seep is at the base of an enormous boulder. I was told to look below the seep for a small, circular metal water basin and a drinking cup. I found neither, possibly because the tank is buried in mud and someone may have taken the cup for a souvenir.

The Armour Spring Trail originally ended at the spring but now continues west to McCleary Saddle, where it meets the Four Springs Trail that originates from the west side of the range. Until recently, this short section of trail was a crude footpath. However, the route was improved when the Forest Service constructed the Four Springs Trail and now some people consider this short length of trail and the Armour Spring Trail an extension of the Four Springs Trail.

The trail contours around the adjacent slope, up a low-grade, and then levels off on a narrow, moderately exposed ledge. The trail remains relatively flat until reaching a 90-degree turn to the west, where most folks pause to take photos of the magnificent views of Florida Canyon, Florida Saddle and McCleary Peak. From the corner, the trail contours around the head of the deepest part of the west arm of Florida Canyon and then begins its final ascent to the saddle south of McCleary Peak.

Four switchbacks in the final ascent become shorter as you gain elevation. Although no sign is posted on the saddle, it marks the jumping-off point for a bushwhacking route to the 8,637-foot summit of McCleary Peak, where the views are spectacular. The Four Springs Trail continues west from the saddle, eventually ending at Kent Spring on the east side of Madera Canyon.





Pegasus, Pisces, chaos and climate

STARSTRUCK



By Harold Meckler

If you look hard enough, while consciously dispatching all possible contrivances, the night sky usually provides endless comparisons to life on Earth. But not always. Chaos in space births dichotomies that promote awe in the observer. Here, however, the dichotomy of climate change and our uneven approach to fighting it is anything but awe-inspiring. Still, advances in astronomy show that we can find our way forward.

So, it is not an accident that Pegasus and Pisces are our topics for November, because what we've learned from them should teach us that we have the knowledge to find solutions for our own most pressing issue. Discoveries within each of the constellations have confirmed our ability to understand and accomplish more than we could have ever imagined.

In October 1995, astronomers discovered the first planetary system containing a star similar to the Sun. The star, 51 Pegasi, was found to wobble, the result of the gravitational pull of a nearby massive object. When its shifting lightwaves were studied, it was determined that a planet, a gas giant half the mass of Jupiter and called 51 Pegasi b, orbited at a distance of just 5 million miles. The planet circled its star in a mere 4.2 days. The astronomers had the tools and the knowledge to peer some 300 trillion miles into space to make this remarkable discovery.

Now, on to Pisces. Just two years ago, scientists zeroed in upon one of its many stars, a red dwarf. With even better machinery than their colleagues used 30 years earlier, they caught the dimming of the red dwarf's light, caused by something passing in front of it. That something was an earth-sized planet, Gliese 12b, an alien world with a mean temperature of 107 Fahrenheit. Spend some time in Phoenix and 107 does not seem otherworldly. Further study has shown that the planet has an orbit of just 12 days. Still to be discerned is whether it has an atmosphere and, whether it might be like that of Venus or, perhaps, like ours.

In November, under our dark skies, look just south of directly overhead. There, you'll find The Great Square of Pegasus and, a bit further south, the Pisces Circlet of Stars. They have been neighbors forever, as different as can be and yet equally complementary. The four bright stars of Pegasus stand in stark contrast to their six faint sisters just below. And yet, it's all good. It is, to borrow from the title of one of my favorite books, "The Way It's 'Spozed' To Be." This dichotomy is an excellent example of the unspoiled beauty of randomness, even if it is the work of chaos.

Generally, I believe that chaos is not to be feared, whether in space or on Earth. Of course, there isn't much we can do about the unfolding of the universe. Chaos in space is unquestioned and accepted. It's a little different here, where chaos can equate to death and destruction. However, we have shown over and over that we can find the communal desire and genius to mitigate against it. In the inherent challenge that is chaos, we often grasp the stark choice all of us face: we can submit or we can rise up to take protective steps not just for ourselves, but for everyone. That is when we see humanity at its best.

It's all so random and yet so amazing. Astronomers keep extending our understanding of the very essence of creation. But here on the ground, chaos seems to be gaining on us. A recent article in the New York Times highlighted how the melting snow and ice in Switzerland have attracted archeologists looking for long-hidden, ancient artifacts. Fires have wreaked havoc in Indonesia. The California coast is preparing for expected flooding and erosion caused by the super El Niño weather pattern. Nearly all polar ice loss, and it's considerable, is due to warming ocean temperatures. Quite recently, thousands were killed in Nepal following the collapse of a glacier. Scientists believe that global warming was to blame. There are just too many examples to explain away as being the natural ebb and flow of things. We are undoubtedly helping to create this chaos.

As I wrote this in early October, I wondered how the midterm election will play out. We can, and should, continue to debate much about daily life but, for me, the debate over whether climate change exists and the threat it poses should have ended long ago. We know why it's gotten this bad and we know the steps needed to slow it down and to, eventually, start to fix the damage it's already caused. We've looked far into space and made miraculous discoveries. We can certainly use that genius right here.

Fighting the chaos of climate change requires the same tenacity as finding planets orbiting far distant stars. It comes down to a matter of political will. Maybe we can't dodge or prevent every climate-related calamity. But we should consider all that we've already done to give us a chance to get to tomorrow. We can see the power of collective action against our own worst instincts, as well as the toughest battles that nature alone brings our way.

In space we see how dichotomies, upon inspection, are the results of the natural progression of an ever-changing universe. On our own planet, the dichotomy of knowing how to address climate change, yet failing to do so at the necessary level, has to disappear. Chaos in space brings wonder; the chaos we, on Earth, continue to foist upon ourselves, destroys it.



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Romanian Rotarians experience southern Arizona hospitality

By Sue Archibald

From Romania to Southern Arizona, Rotary friendship took center stage as visiting Rotarians spent several days discovering local history, culture and communities while building friendships with their American counterparts. As part of a Rotary Friendship Exchange with District 5500, a team from our area visited Romania for 10 days last May. The second part is they visit us. The Romanian visitors explored Sonoita, Sierra Vista, Bisbee and Tombstone, experiencing the hospitality and unique character of southern Arizona along the way.

Their visit began with a potluck welcome supper hosted by local Rotarians and their families. The evening offered an opportunity to share food, stories and laughter while welcoming the guests and beginning new international friendships.

The following day, the Romanian Rotarians traveled to Bisbee, where they explored local museums and visited the historic Old Cochise County Courthouse. They also met local county judges before enjoying lunch at the Legion restaurant. The group then traveled to Sonoita, visiting the Fairgrounds and local museum. They visited Rotary Park, learned about the community and



Visiting Rotarians from Romania gather for a group photo outside the Sonoita Fairgrounds. | Photo by David Pardee

preparations for the upcoming fair and asked questions of residents involved in making the event a success. The day concluded with a barbecue dinner at Twisted Union Winery.

The next day brought a trip to Hereford visiting a Rotary service project, then on to Tombstone, where the visitors enjoyed the town's activities and dressed in period costumes. That evening, the group gathered at Doc's Watering Hole for dinner and dancing. The Romanian Rotarians then continued their Arizona journey to Tubac and Tucson. Their visit created lasting memories and new friendships, highlighting Rotary's ability to connect people and communities across the world.

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These activities threaten to permanently alter a landscape known for its extraordinary biodiversity, wildlife corridors, and precious water resources.

PARA and the Center for Biological Diversity are challenging the U.S. Forest Service's approval of this project in federal court.

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Stand with PARA in defending the Patagonia Mountains.









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Check it out at the Library

Silly or serious, the kids' books are all right

By Sarah Klingenstein

"It's called Captain Underpants? Really?"

Back in my years as an elementary school reading teacher, I reacted to this new series of books for kids with concern (read: horror). How could a book with potty humor and a hero in whitey-tighties bring any good into this world? Well, I soon learned that kids loved the book and its sequels. THEY WERE DEVOURING THEM (I had to like that)! Dav Pilkey's hero's antics really hit their elementary-aged funny bones.

Mr. Pilkey soon came out with Dog Man, a graphic series about a hero who is part dog and part man and who fights villains while modeling values such as bravery and kindness. I like that, too.

Our Patagonia Public Library carries many series that kids love, both silly and serious, classic and new. As the Laura Ingalls Wilder Little House books were to earlier generations, now it's the next Babysitters Club or Dork Diaries book that excites them. We all love to follow a favorite character into their next adventure.

Here are a few very popular book series to entice your kids or grandkids away from their screens for a bit:

Light Reading / Graphic (Comic) Novels:

We used to call them "comics" but now they are more complex. I'm trying to accept them.

The Babysitters Club by Ann M. Martin — A group of friends rely on one another to solve the daily and not-so-daily dramas of babysitting.

Geronimo Stilton by Elisabetta Dami — A mild-mannered mouse adventures in faraway places, both real and imagined.

Novels

Teachers and professors are growing concerned that their students can't focus on longer texts or understand them. You can help your child by encouraging them to read both "regular" books as well as graphic novels.

Artemis Fowl by Eoin Colfer — Twelve-year-old Artemis Fowl is a millionaire, a genius, and above all, a criminal mastermind.

A Series of Unfortunate Events by Lemony Snicket — "Three youngsters encounter a greed and repulsive villain, itchy clothing, a disastrous fire, a plot to steal their fortune, and cold porridge for breakfast." (from Book 1).

Diary of A Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney — Whatever you do, don't ask Greg Heffley how he spent his summer vacation. "An excellent choice for reluctant readers" says School Library Journal.

Ivy and Bean by Annie Barrows — Meet two best friends who never meant to like each other.

Dork Diaries by Rachel Renée Russell — A female heroine counterpart to the "wimpy kid" and like Kinney's books, has an interesting format — not a graphic novel but with lots of illustrations and fun graphics.



Your friendly neighborhood librarian has lots of suggestions and inside info on what kids' books are flying off the shelves. | Photo by. Linda Shore

Reading aloud to any age

Even if your child can read, keep enjoying great read-alouds together. The time is a strong investment in family closeness and brain development.

For older elementary school kids, of course, there's the powerful and rich Harry Potter series. Reading the I Survived series by Lauren Tarshis with your child helps you both understand dramatic historical events, such as the attack on Pearl Harbor and the destruction of Pompeii. (This series has both graphic and regular text versions.) The Little House books still hold up for their depiction of pioneer life from a child's point of view. (Parents may want to read ahead and decide how to handle Wilder's portrayal of indigenous people.). Parents and younger kids will enjoy the Beezus and Ramona books of Beverly Cleary, and the Junie B. Jones series by Barbara Park, with their comical depictions of everyday life and characters kids can relate to. The Magic School Bus series by Joanna Cole and its DVD/streaming counterpart are lots of science fun.

These are, of course, a drop in the bucket. Learn what your child has read and enjoyed at school. And for more suggestions, ask our experienced library staff. They know what books come off the shelves and sail out the doors.

Halloween 2026







A blustery, rainy evening couldn't frighten away any of the monsters, vampires, creepy costumed munchkins (or fairy princesses, for that matter) from Friday night's Community Halloween Party at the Sonoita Fairgrounds. Here's a sampling of the sights and frights. | Photos by Dave Lumia

COMMUNITY CALENDAR



Saturday, Nov. 7

- Spirit World 100, 7 a.m.
- Cowboy Festival at the Empire Ranch, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 8

- Premiere of Trail Blazers, Tim Shed Theater, 2 p.m.
- Butter Quartet, Benderly-Kendall Opera House, 3 p.m.

Tuesday, Nov. 10

- Veterans Day celebration, Elgin School, 1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, Nov. 11

- Veterans Day community gathering and flag ceremony, Patagonia Cemetery, 11 a.m.
- Patagonia Union High School and Patagonia Elementary School Districts joint governing board meeting, 4 p.m.
- Regular meeting of Patagonia Town Council, 6 p.m.

Saturday, Nov. 14

- Sonoita AVA New Release Festival, Sonoita Vineyards, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Wednesday, Nov. 18

- Regular meeting of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, 9:30 a.m.

Sunday, Nov. 22

- Solistas de Sonora, Benderly-Kendall Opera House, 3 p.m.

Tuesday, Nov. 24

- Patagonia vs. Maryvale Prep girls basketball, 5:30 p.m.
- Patagonia vs. Maryvale Prep boys basketball, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Nov. 25

- Regular meeting of Patagonia Town Council, 6 p.m.

Thursday, Nov. 26

- Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner, Sonoita Fairgrounds, 1-3 p.m.

Friday, Nov. 27

- Poetry Reading by Erica Swadley, Global Arts Gallery, Noon-3 p.m.

Friday, Nov. 27-Saturday, Nov. 28

- Patagonia Art Walk 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Tuesday, Dec. 1

- Sonoita Elementary School District governing board meeting, 5 p.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 2

- Regular meeting of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, 9:30 a.m.

Sunday, Dec. 6

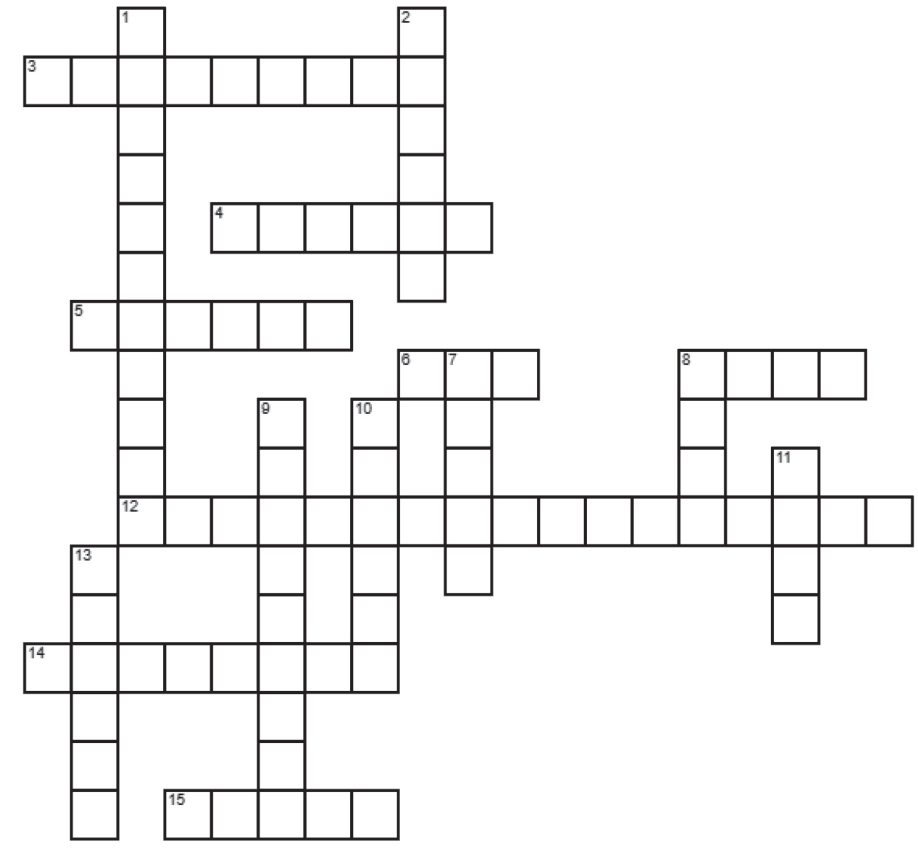
- Flux Duo, Benderly-Kendall Opera House, 3 p.m.

Submit your community or nonprofit announcements to editor@prtnews.org.

CROSSWORD

Gould's Turkey

In honor of Thanksgiving, we highlight Gould's Turkey, which, by the early 1900s, had been hunted to near extinction. Efforts to re-establish the bird began in 1977, and today there are about 1,5000 living in Southern AZ.



Numbers used in this puzzle are spelled out without hyphens. No apostrophes are used in the answers, nor are there spaces between answers with more than one word.

ACROSS

3. The only other state in the U.S. where I can be found is WHERE?
4. As a male Gould's Turkey, I can weight up to HOW MANY pounds?
5. After facing near extinction, 250 members of my clan were brought to Arizona from WHERE?
6. As a baby Gould's Turkey, I can fly at HOW MANY weeks old?
8. As a male Gould's Turkey, I can live HOW MANY years in the wild?
12. This U.S. President, while a voracious hunter, stepped in to save my specie.
14. My closest relative is the WHAT Turkey?
15. My favorite place is in WHAT?

DOWN

1. Once my eggs have been laid, incubation takes HOW MANY days?
2. My offspring are called WHAT?
7. Access to WHAT is the most important factor in flock growth?
8. I am one of HOW MANY subspecies of wild turkeys native to North America.
9. In addition to Merriam's Turkey, the WHAT Turkey is one of three subspecies found in Arizona?
10. Segregated by sex, THIS is what our male and female groups are called.
11. I have the longest WHAT of all the turkey subspecies?
13. As a female Gould's Turkey, I can weigh up to HOW MANY pounds?

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AUTO SHOP (cont. from p. 1)

Airam Hoyos, a junior from Nogales, is enrolled in Automotive 1 this year. She likes changing tires. While she isn't sure if becoming an auto mechanic is in her future, she likes "learning new things. My papa and uncles are auto mechanics," she said. Plus, she's keen on graduation with ready-to-go certifications — a leg up on the workplace ladder.

One student who was propelled into a job out of high school thanks to Gudenkauf's classes is Oskar Gomez. Gomez graduated from Patagonia High in 2023 and is a mechanic at P-Town Auto and Offroad in Patagonia. He said he learned a good foundation in the auto classes. He also learned that working for a dealership wasn't for him. For one, he said, dealerships limit the type of car a mechanic works on. Also, the scope of a mechanic's work is limited. Brake guys do brakes. Belt guys do belts.

"In a small town you can actually look at the car in depth and get to know the customer and what is needed," Gomez said. Working with people as well as cars is a plus for him.

Which brings us back to something else Gudenkauf is teaching — ethics.

"We had a car come in and the window wouldn't roll up," Gudenkauf said. The car owner had been told by another mechanic — not in Patagonia or Sonoita — that she needed a window regulator - $450 parts/labor.

"I said before we get started, let's check the electrical," Gudenkauf said. Turns out the plug had come disconnected from the window switch. The part that had been bought by the customer was returned through Amazon. The labor: no charge. Well, if anyone wants to bring the mechanics cookies, those are appreciated.

Gudenkauf's path to his current Patagonia post — auto guru, history teacher, Career and Technical Education Director — was somewhat predictable. He was age 16 when he got his first car — a 1968 Chevy Impala SS. His uncle Rick gave it to him. It didn't run. Fix it.

Entering the Army after graduating Nogales High School, Gudenkauf was assigned as a mechanic and tow truck driver. When a Reduction in Force came under President George H. Bush, Gudenkauf returned home to work in the family printing and towing businesses. By this time, he and wife Barbara had two sons. At the appropriate time he took his oldest, Aaron, to Bob Holler's Junkyard in Nogales and pulled out a '87 Monte Carlo SS. It was gutted and rebuilt. Trophies.

Later, son Joshua got a 1970 Ford Mustang Boss 302 that had been damaged by a falling tree. "I paid $400 for the car, took it to my shop. Fixed the roof," Gudenkauf said. Joshua then took over: "all the mechanical work, pulled the motor, did the paint, did everything. He still has that car to this day. It's sitting at his house in Sonoita."

And here we come full circle. Learning, both by book and hands-on, the 1979 Ford Ranchero student rebuild will — hopefully — be sold through the prestigious Barrett-Jackson auction in Scottsdale. Other project cars — seven to be exact — have been sold through county auction. The benefit of a Barrett-Jackson sale would be more money back to program coffers.

"In the 1980s and to about 2010 we forced so many to go to college," Gudenkauf said of the value of the CTE programs.

What was forgotten was that trades are important too – people to do plumbing, electrical, HVAC and work on cars. He looks at the program as providing a career path for youth more interested in the latter.

"If you go out and look at older garages, you're going to see that most of the people running them are in their sixties and seventies and they're ready to retire," Gudenkauf said. "But there's no one to take over because we lost a whole generation of mechanics. Everyone's got a college degree."



Oskar Gomez found a job out of high school at P-Town Auto & Offroad in Patagonia after taking Automotive I & II at Patagonia Union High School. | Photo by Carrie White



A 1979 Ford Ranchero is being restored with the help of the Ford Motor Co. and Buena High School in Sierra Vista. This model was one of only 15 produced with the same specs – paint, trim, interior.



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JANUARY SCHEDULE

Nov. 8, 3 p.m. — Butter Quartet
The Butter Quartet is a period-instrument string quartet based in the Netherlands, known for their vibrant, historically informed performances of early string quartet repertoire. The ensemble consists of Anna Jane Lester and Chloe Prendergast (violins), Isabel Franenberg (viola), and Evan Buttar (cello). They have since built a reputation for integrating research into late 18th- and early 19th-century performance practice into their interpretations, and for commissioning and performing new works for historically setup instruments.

Nov. 22, 3 p.m. — Solistas de Sonora
Formed in 2015, the Solistas de Sonora Wind Ensemble was inspired to promote chamber music and create new audiences to experience this unique expression of art. This captivating quintet of instruments: clarinet, oboe, flute, bassoon and French horn will perform a delightful array of traditional and contemporary works by composers from Hungary, France, Mexico and the United States.

Dec. 6, 3 p.m. — Flux Duo
The Flux Duo performers are Daniel Linder (piano) and Don-Paul Kahn (saxophone). Their program will feature American masterworks from three generations, including a newly composed piece for alto saxophone and piano: Aliyot Ascents by Yotam Haber; Romance for Alto Saxophone and Piano by William Grant Still; Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano by William Albright.

Prepaid admission: $35 adult, $17.50 student.
At door (if available): $40/$20.

Visit www.scfpapresents.org for more information

The Tin Shed Theater Patagonia Creative Arts Assn.

NOVEMBER SCHEDULE

NOV. 8, 2 P.M.

DOCUMENTARY: TRAIL BLAZERS
Join us for the premiere of Trailblazers, a documentary that tells the remarkable story behind the origins of the Arizona Trail. In 1982, two brothers set out with two mules to walk across Arizona. Their quest to trace the history of the state helped inspire what would become the Arizona Trail—a National Scenic Trail linking deserts, mountains, canyons, and cultures. The film weaves together vintage footage and present-day interviews with Bruce Babbitt, former Arizona Governor and U.S. Secretary of the Interior, and Kevin Fedarko, author of The Emerald Mile and A Walk in the Park.

Suggested donation: $5

Dates and Times Subject to Change

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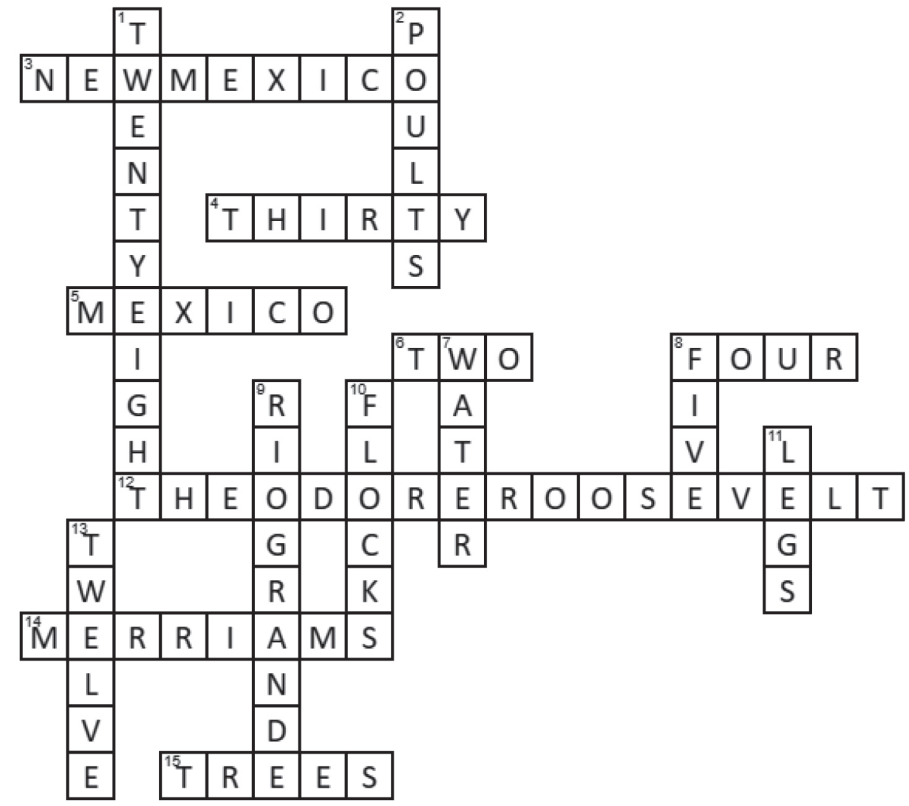
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CROSSWORD

Gould's Turkey



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