Every year brings changes to the Asombro Institute for Science Education. Yet 2012 seemed to bring more changes than ever before. Here’s a look at a few of the staff members’ highlights from 2012.

Executive Director Stephanie Bestelmeyer
“The addition of Stephanie Haan-Amato and Anna Keener to our staff and Gil Tellez to our Board of Directors was wonderful! They have all contributed so much already.”

Program Coordinator Rink Somerday
“I was leaving an elementary school when a father held the door for me. He said with a grin, ‘Oh, you’re the one who inspires my kids to be scientists. Keep up the good work.’ We know that students enjoy our programs, but it is with great pride that we accept credit for having our teaching become part of their lives.”

Site Coordinator Paul Harper
“Completing the shrub removal experiment installation at the Nature Park was exciting. I can’t wait to start getting kids out there to collect data and learn about habitat restoration.”

Science Education Specialist Stephanie Haan-Amato
“We had a very successful first semester of Stepping Out for Science Inquiry with 7th grade students at six middle schools. Students learned hands-on about nutrient cycling, soil erosion, phenology, and how humans change the landscape. Our favorite greeting was ‘Yay, the Asombro people are back!’ Fortunately, we heard those words often.”

Science Education Specialist Anna Keener
“I thought a highlight of 2012 was the Nightlife of the Desert event. People were captivated by watching Doug and Laura Burkett with the snakes and Graeme and Jenny Davis with the scorpions and other arthropods captured in light traps.”
On December 6, the halls and classrooms at Monte Vista Elementary School were full of hands-on activities about desert plants, arthropods, mammals, weather, and desert safety. Usually, this means that the Asombro Institute for Science Education staff members are visiting for a classroom or schoolyard science program. However, on this day, it was the 5th graders who were doing all the teaching.

Throughout the fall semester, these 5th graders as well as the 5th graders at J. Paul Taylor Academy had become experts on the desert. With the guidance of Asombro staff and their teachers, they conducted full research studies on schoolyard biodiversity and the Chihuahuan Desert. Then they created hands-on activity stations to teach these topics to younger students at their school.

“We’re sold on near-peer teaching models like this one,” said Asombro Executive Director Stephanie Bestelmeyer. “Look around and you can see the benefits. The older students learn leadership and presentation skills while the younger students get terrific role models just a few years older than themselves.”

Key to the project’s success is the involvement of the 5th grade teachers. They integrated the project with language arts and math, even having students create books showcasing their new knowledge.

The pilot year of the Science Interns Project was funded by the New Mexico Children’s Foundation (Santa Fe). Based on the early success of the project, Asombro will expand Science Interns to eight schools in the 2013/14 school year. Funding for the expanded program has already been provided by the Wolslager Foundation (San Angelo, Texas).
Volunteers

Asombro has the hardest working, most dedicated, talented volunteers on the planet (yes, we are completely biased!). In 2012, more than 100 volunteers donated 2,447 hours total. That’s the equivalent of more than an entire full time position! We are grateful to each and every one of our volunteers. You are the stars of Asombro! Here are the 24 incredible people who logged the most hours last year:

- Donna Yargosz
- John Bunn
- Justin Van Zee
- David Hutchinson
- Brad Cooper
- Tom Packard
- Sally Tellez
- Gil Tellez
- Kathy Groves
- Eria Courtright
- Hilary Dutcher
- Susan Vantress
- Lynn Mulholland
- Karen Gunther
- Kirsten Romig
- Mary Beth Harper
- Mark Sechrist
- Steph Preciado
- Gene Gant
- Jean Davis
- Jim Greene
- Susan McDaniels
- John Anderson
- Thomas Bestelmeyer

2013 events

There will be plenty of reasons to get out to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park in 2013. In addition to being open from 7am - 5pm Tuesdays through Saturdays, the Park will also serve as the venue for several exciting public programs. Check the Asombro website or future newsletters for more details about future events. Here’s what to expect at the Nature Park:

- January 21 - Annual membership meeting was held.
- February 14 - Fall in Love with the Desert nature walk at 10:00 AM
- March 23 - Egg Trek Family Education Event (time TBA)
- May 11 - Desert Walk and Movie Night (time TBA)
- July (date to be announced later) - Nightlife of the Desert
- August 17 - Butterfly Flutterby from 9 AM - noon
- September 14 - Geocache the Desert
- November 9 - Desert Dash 5K race
- December 14 - Luminarias Light Up the Desert

Thank you!

We are grateful to the generous people who donated between October and December 2012.

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- Justin Van Zee
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