

# Asombro Insights

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 35, ISSUE 1, JAN-MAR 2026

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Justin Van Zee  
President

Carrie Hernandez  
Vice President

Donna Yargosz  
Secretary

Mark Sechrist  
Treasurer

Gene Gant  
Board Member

Tom Williams  
Board Member

## STAFF

Stephanie Bestelmeyer, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

Gabriela Franco  
Education Director

William Lukefahr  
Nature Park Manager

Natalie Wells  
Program Leader

LuAnn Kilday  
Program Leader

Bonnie Jean Knighton  
Science Educator

Tara Russell  
Science Educator

Ellie Mouchet  
Undergraduate Intern

## CONTACT US

Asombro Institute for  
Science Education

PO Box 891  
Las Cruces, NM 88004  
(575) 524-3334

information@asombro.org  
<https://asombro.org>



## 2025 and 2026 Highlights from Asombro Staff

2025 was a busy year, and we have even more exciting science education in store for 2026. Here are a few highlights from the Asombro staff.

In June 2025, Asombro hosted an Agrivoltaics workshop for middle school teachers. After months of developing, tweaking, and piloting our three new lessons, it was fantastic to see teachers excited to use new content in their classrooms. *-LuAnn*



I'm looking forward to Art in the Park on April 11 (see page 2). Our murals and art installations are already inspired by the Chihuahuan Desert, and I can't wait to see the new and creative ways the desert continues to spark our imagination. *-Tara*

Our staff very much enjoyed developing four new wildlife conservation lessons for 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> grade. In order to address the engineering standards that teachers must cover, we highlighted some of our favorite species of greatest conservation need in New Mexico. *-Natalie*

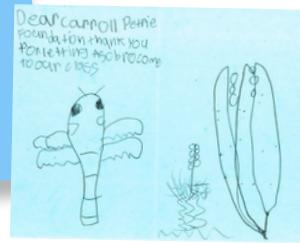


The new amphitheater at our Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park will be great for school field trips and will also serve as a general gathering area for the public and our larger events. *-William*

As a team, we created a new kindergarten lesson this year focused on how animals change their environment to meet their needs. "Who Made This?" introduces students to millipedes, termites, kangaroo rats and more. It was fun to see the kids' excitement as they opened a model burrow to discover a Box Turtle. *-Bonnie*



In 2026, I'm looking forward to growing relationships with schools outside of Las Cruces with a grant from the Carroll Petrie Foundation. I'm excited that 3rd-graders who don't usually receive Asombro visits will become excited about science and nature by experiencing Asombro's lessons about the yucca and yucca moth life cycle. *-Gabriela*



Despite 2025 being a very tough year for nonprofits, Asombro showed great resilience and provided quality education for **19,226** students and **1,925** adults. I'm so proud of our team! *-Steph*

# Welcome to Asombro!

## Meet Asombro's newest team member: Science Educator **TARA RUSSELL**

My name is Tara, and I am excited to be the newest member of the Asombro team. I graduated from New Mexico State University with a degree in Elementary Education and endorsements in 6-8 Science and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

I began my teaching career at the start of the pandemic as a preschool teacher, where I continued building my confidence in the classroom. I became a teacher because I believe the greatest gift you can give someone is knowledge and skills.

Science has always fascinated me, and as I grew older, my love for New Mexico nature deepened. Passion is contagious, and I wanted to pass it on. After a year, I felt ready to take on my own classroom and was hired by Las Cruces Public Schools at Vista Middle School. I started as a language arts teacher and, after a year, transitioned into teaching my true passions - science and agriculture. During my time there, I also coached boys' and girls' soccer and served as an FFA advisor.

As my teaching career progressed, I decided to explore my growing interest in conservation. That path led me to Arizona, where I worked as a State Park Ranger at Roper Lake, further strengthening my love and appreciation for the outdoors and wildlife. Family changes eventually brought me back home, and I became an aunt to my first nephew. Whether in the classroom or in the field, I've always been drawn to exploring nature - hiking, camping, identifying plants and animals, or diving into niche topics simply to learn more about the world around me.

While teaching, I had the opportunity to have Asombro visit my classroom and present hands-on lessons that truly captivated my students. When I saw there was an opening on the team, I was



thrilled to apply. This role brings together all my interests - New Mexico, education, science, conservation, and wildlife.

In my work with Asombro, I hope to inspire as many young scientists as possible and to share a love and respect for our ecosystems and wildlife so they can be enjoyed for generations to come.

## ART IN THE PARK Saturday, April 11

Come celebrate art and nature with Asombro at Art in the Park, a free event at the Nature Park.

Hands-on, family-friendly activities and demonstrations will showcase watercolor painting, fiber arts, and murals, all inspired by the desert.

**Saturday, April 11**

**9 AM - 11 AM**

**Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park**



Stations and demonstrations will run continuously from 9 AM - 11 AM. At 10:00, we'll have an official ribbon cutting for the new 75-seat amphitheater as well as the surrounding permanent art installations.

## Open House & Volunteer Celebration

More than 30 people helped us get 2026 off to a great start at Asombro by attending the Open House and Volunteer Celebration on Monday, January 19, 2026.

Participants chatted with staff and Board members, browsed displays of some of Asombro's new lessons and Nature Park facilities, and helped elect the officers of the Board of Directors for 2026.

Staff members most enjoyed celebrating the volunteers who collectively donated more than 1,000 hours in 2025!



# Wonder Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service *Christine Medina*

**Asombro has been visiting Hermosa Heights Elementary for years and was a frequent visitor in Christine Medina's 2nd grade classes. We loved going to Christine's class as she made us feel right at home, and her students were fantastic.**

**After retiring from teaching, Christine started volunteering at Asombro and began helping with our Desert Stories modules. She wouldn't help just one day, but two or three days, visiting the same classes several times. If you were teaching with Christine, there were always students that had her as their 2nd grade teacher.**



**Christine also helps with events and attends volunteer gatherings, where her attention to detail can't be beat. Thank you for being so WONDER-ful, Christine! We couldn't do what we do without you!**

## PAINTING FUNDRAISER RAISES SKILLS, FUN, AND FUNDS

On January 24, local artist Kay Gross donated her time and talents to host a step-by-step watercolor lesson to raise funds for Asombro.

Ten lucky participants increased their watercolor skills and created beautiful Great Horned Owl paintings. Thanks to Kay's expert instructions, even beginners went home with gorgeous paintings.

Asombro is so grateful to Kay for hosting such a great fundraiser!



## THANK YOU! We are grateful to our generous donors from October 2025 through mid-January 2026.

### ASOMBRO BOOSTER CLUB (Monthly donors)

Anonymous (2)  
Glennis Adam  
Steph & Brandon Bestelmeyer  
Edelgard Courtright  
Jean Davis  
Jean Frizzell  
Stephanie Haan-Amato  
Niall Hanan  
Linda & Will Keener  
Anna & John Kimtis  
Valerie LaPlante & Kris Havstad  
Brenda Lukefahr  
Laura Madson  
Debbie McAllen  
Sarah McCord  
Greg & Mary Miller  
Beth Morgan & Mark Sechrist  
Valerie Redington  
Kelly & Richard Sayanagi  
Justin Van Zee  
James Vorenberg  
Michael Weiss  
Paul Wells

### IN MEMORY OF DR. WALT WHITFORD

Susan Hewins

### TURQUOISE

Anonymous (1)  
Dori-Joe Farm  
Kevin & June Hartley  
Christine Laney  
Arlene Tugel

### PERIDOT

Richard Haas  
Virginia Herrick  
Connie Maxwell  
Raising Cane's Chicken  
Heather Throop

### OBSIDIAN

Susan Philp & Orin Heend  
Greg Okin  
Bob Schooley  
Eric & Kathryn Takeuchi

### JASPER

David Anderson  
JD Barnes  
Leoniece Beatty  
Laura Beaty  
Cathy & John Boeker  
Laura Burkett  
Nancy Chanover  
Robin Cline  
Rebecca Creamer  
John & Terry Doyle  
Gene Gant  
Gerri Gribi & Pete Dignan Fund  
Peter & Dael Goodman  
Robert Gross  
Bambi Harmon  
Sally Harper  
Catherine Kemmer  
Arthur Kruckeberg  
Gerald Lee  
Brian & Melly Locke

### JASPER CONT'D

Eric Magrane  
Christine Medina  
Jennifer Montoya  
Richard Quick  
Rossana Sallenave  
Wolfgang Schwertner  
Mark Sechrist  
Amanda Skarsgard  
John Sproul  
John Steinberg  
Michael & Lisa Taynor  
Susan Vantress  
Gene Ward  
Western Insurance Consultants  
Tom Williams

### GYPSUM

Gena Barela  
Marianne Barnes  
Lawrence Brenner  
Clifford, Ross, & Cooper CPAs  
Edward Frank  
Jean Frizzell  
Diana Howard  
Michael & Diane Lilley  
Robert Grace  
Bob Tafanelli

### QUARTZ

Cheryl Carrier  
Don Dupkus  
David Haeker  
Susan L. Hewins  
Mary Lessman

### QUARTZ CONT'D

Stephanie Lozano  
Paul Lukowski  
Alexis Maranan  
Andrew McDowell  
Inge Peter  
Minerva Rivera  
Alma Rodriguez  
Jacque Schur  
John Zemek

### Grant and Other Funding for Projects Provided By:

American AgCredit Rural Roots  
Carroll Petrie Foundation  
Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico  
Environmental Education of New Mexico  
GFWC Progress Club  
Jornada Basin LTER  
Las Cruces Public Schools  
Lineberry Foundation  
National Science Foundation  
NM Dept. of Game & Fish Share with Wildlife program  
NM Outdoor Equity Fund  
NM Outdoor Recreation Division  
Trails+ program  
Southline Transmission  
USDA-ARS Jornada Experimental Range

PO Box 891  
Las Cruces, NM 88004-0891

## Volunteer with Asombro in 2026

Are you looking for a way to give back in 2026? Asombro needs you! We have many volunteer opportunities to suit diverse preferences and schedules. For example,

- Attend volunteer gatherings on the second Tuesday of most months to do behind-the-scenes work to prepare for Asombro education programs.
- Assist Asombro educators in local classrooms and schoolyards; we're teaching almost every school day!
- Help keep the Nature Park looking great with work days most Wednesday mornings.

Get more details and discuss all the options by contacting LuAnn Kilday at **575-524-3334** or [luann@asombro.org](mailto:luann@asombro.org).



To donate online,  
scan the QR code  
or [click here](#).



**YES!** I want to support the Asombro Institute for Science Education!

<input type="checkbox"/> Quartz (\$15+)	<input type="checkbox"/> Obsidian (\$250+)
<input type="checkbox"/> Gypsum (\$50+)	<input type="checkbox"/> Peridot (\$500+)
<input type="checkbox"/> Jasper (\$100+)	<input type="checkbox"/> Turquoise (\$1000+)

Please make checks payable to **Asombro Institute** or charge to:

Visa    MasterCard    American Express

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_ \*We will call for security code.

Billing Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature as it appears on card: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Check here if you do NOT want to be listed in Asombro publications.

Have you considered putting Asombro in your estate plan? Please contact Steph Bestelmeyer (575-524-3334) if you are interested in learning more.

**Asombro Institute for Science Education**  
**P.O. Box 891, Las Cruces, NM 88004**