

Asombro Insights

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 34, ISSUE 4, OCT-DEC 2025

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

Kelly Sayanagi
Assistant to the Director

Gabriela Franco
Education Director

William Lukefahr
Nature Park Manager

Natalie Wells
Program Leader

LuAnn Kilday
Science Educator

Bonnie Jean Knighton
Science Educator

Hannah Hurd
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>



The Super Heroes Behind Asombro's Success

About 35 years ago, a group of like-minded people organized themselves with the goal of creating a place for the people of Las Cruces to celebrate and learn about the desert. The group that then called itself the Las Cruces Nature Park donated their time and energy to teaching, fundraising, and all the administrative tasks that are required to start an organization. They found others who shared their vision and built a volunteer corps. The first decade of the organization's existence was entirely volunteer driven. When they did have the means to hire someone, that person knew to leverage all the knowledge and dedication of the volunteers into growth. For three and a half decades, volunteers have remained crucial to Asombro's success.

Asombro's most visible volunteers are those that join our staff as educators in the classrooms, on field trips, and at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park (CDNP). These brave souls are ready for anything, from the most challenging student questions (like "Why?") to teaching in dust and wind! By allowing our staff to connect with more students in one day, these volunteers help us reach more than 20,000 students each year.

One of our favorite Asombro traditions is the monthly volunteer gathering. For one hour, we chat with some of our favorite people while we prepare teaching materials for upcoming

WHAT DOES VOLUNTEERING MEAN TO YOU?

"Volunteering with the Asombro Institute for Science Education is a small way I can contribute to my Las Cruces Community. I experience joy and fulfillment by helping students practice their critical thinking, research, mathematics, communication, and development of an appreciation of the bountiful Chihuahuan Desert. It is an investment that yields high dividends to the education of our young students." - Ken Rayna

"As a graduate student conducting research within the Chihuahuan Desert I find it very rewarding to help young students learn more about the amazing ecosystems around them. I also learn so many new things from our classroom lessons that help me think about my own research differently. I always look forward to seeing students' excitement towards the science around them!" - Juliemar Cuevas-Hernandez



Above: Volunteers talk with a family at an event at the CDNP

Below: Friends of the CDNP receive instructions for trail maintenance.



lessons. They staple, cut, and sort all kinds of materials for students. This simple behind-the-scenes work frees up hours of staff time.

At the CDNP, our Friends group gathers several Saturdays a year to maintain our trails and facilities. They trim plants, repair erosion, pick up litter, and support our park manager in keeping tabs on over 900 acres.

These days, our volunteers donate approximately 1200 hours each year to make Asombro a success. By teaching alongside staff, maintaining trails, working behind the scenes, serving as our leaders on the Board of Directors and more, these amazing people enable Asombro to offer more opportunities for learning, and more memorable and meaningful interactions with students of all ages.

Do you want to join this group of super heroes? Contact LuAnn, luann@asombro.org

Welcome to Asombro!

Meet Asombro's newest team member: Undergraduate Intern **HANNAH HURD**



My name is Hannah, and I am the Fall 2025 Asombro intern from New Mexico State University. I am in my third year of a BA in Horticulture and Conservation Biology in the College of Agriculture, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences at NMSU. I have previously worked for small ranches as a youth leader and with the Girl Scouts of New Mexico Trails as a camp counselor. I am passionate about teaching kids about the world around them and inspiring them to take interest in living with that world, not just in it. As a kid, I grew up in the Jemez Mountains camping with friends and family, exploring the vibrant ecosystems of central NM, then teaching kids about moss and lichen at summer camps in northern NM. Now in southern NM as an undergrad, I have the opportunities to explore all that science and science education has to offer.

When I learned about the Asombro Institute for Science Education through a professor sharing the internship opportunity with me, I was blown away. This is exactly what I want to do, I thought. Seeing kids' faces light up as they learn how the world around them works, as they use critical thinking skills to figure out why this lichen is green but this one is orange, reminds me of when I was a kid exploring nature, then connecting it to science lessons in the classroom and how that has shaped my journey. I hope that by working with Asombro I will help foster this scientific literacy and wonder in kids today.

There's so much to learn at the **CHIHUAHUAN DESERT NATURE PARK**

56501 N. Jornada Road, Las Cruces

Two public events at the CDNP this fall have left us feeling energized (and exhausted), as 150 guests attended our Wildlife Wonders events to learn about the amazing animals that live in our desert! At Wildlife Conservation Day in August, visitors learned about several species of greatest conservation need in NM and the actions being taken to protect them. Special guests included animals from Tortugas Reptile Rescue and teacher volunteers from our summer workshop.

In October, we stayed out late for Desert After Dark. Visitors met a great horned owl from NM Raptors and learned about bat research from NMSU scientist, Dr. Theresa Laverty.

Wildlife Wonders was made possible, in part, by generous support from the Carroll Petrie Foundation and the NM Dept. of Game and Fish's Share with Wildlife Program.



Join us Dec 12th, 5:00-7:30.

Light Up the Desert

Enjoy luminarias, hot chocolate, cookies, and stargazing during a beautiful evening in the desert!



What's New at Asombro's

CHIHUAHUAN DESERT NATURE PARK?

Have you seen the newest amenity at the CDNP? We recently finished construction of our new amphitheater at the upper parking lot! This 75-seat amphitheater will be a great addition to our field trips and public events.

Funding was provided, in part, by a grant to Asombro from the NM Outdoor Recreation Division's Outdoor Recreation Trails+ Grant.



But we aren't done yet. We look forward to adding a mural, hand rail and a shade canopy over the next year. Want to support this work? Contact Stephanie at stephanie@asombro.org or 575-524-3334.



Wonder Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service Dale Emmert

One of the most challenging parts of being an Asombro educator or volunteer is jumping from grade to grade everyday. Not everyone can capture the attention of a 2nd grader and convince an 8th grader to sit up and listen. This is just one of the reasons we love when Dale joins us in the classroom!

With a background as a Spanish teacher, Dale has been a huge help in translating for English language learners, often working one-on-one or with small groups of students to ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate fully.



Thank you so much for all your help in the classroom Dale. We think you're absolutely

Wonderful!

Learn to paint me fundraiser!

Join artist Kay Gross
for a **step-by-step watercolor lesson**
and take home your own Great
Horned Owl painting.
Beginners welcome!

\$50

*supplies and
instruction
included*

Registration required.
Call (575) 524-3334 to pre-pay
and reserve your spot.

Sat, Jan 24th
10:00-noon
Asombro office
401 E College, Las Cruces



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

ASOMBRO BOOSTER CLUB (Monthly donors)

Anonymous (2)
Glennis Adam
Margaret Berrier
Steph & Brandon Bestelmeyer
Edelgard Courtright
Jean Davis
Jean Frizzell
Stephanie Haan-Amato
Niall Hanan
Linda & Will Keener
Anna & John Kimtis
Valerie LaPlante & Kris Havstad
Laura Madson
Debbie McAllen
Sarah McCord
Greg & Mary Miller
Beth Morgan & Mark Sechrist
Valerie Redington

ASOMBRO BOOSTER CLUB (cont.)

Kelly & Richard Sayanagi
Justin Van Zee
James Vorenberg
Michael Weiss
Paul Wells

IN MEMORY OF DR. WALT WHITFORD

Joe Adams
John & Linda Douglas
Heather Gendron
Harold & Barbara Harrison
Susan Hewins
Delores Ludwig
John Ludwig
John Welch & Gayle Trantham
Linda Whitford

TURQUOISE

Arlene Tugel

OBSIDIAN

Boeing
Bob Schooley

JASPER

Cathy & John Boeker
Neil Fuller
Richard Quick

GYPSUM

Kurt & Marcia Anderson
Clifford, Ross, Cooper, LLC
Dale Emmert

QUARTZ

Ed Woods

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 Experimental Range
Jornada Basin LTER
Las Cruces Public Schools
Lineberry Foundation
National Science Foundation
NM Dept. of Game & Fish
NM Outdoor Equity Fund
NM Outdoor Recreation Trails +



Asombro Institute
FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION

PO Box 891
Las Cruces, NM 88004-0891

So Far this School Year...



We have visited

192 classes **4114 students!**

**16 elementary, middle,
and high schools**

We delivered four outdoor
lessons to every class at
Sunrise Elementary!

We've studied magnetic
fields with every 8th grader in
LCPS!

We hosted two Saturday
events at the CDNP!

Sierra Science Magnet students
continued a long-term data
collection at the CDNP!

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

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Quartz (\$15+) | ☐ Obsidian (\$250+) |
| ☐ Gypsum (\$50+) | ☐ Peridot (\$500+) |
| ☐ Jasper (\$100+) | ☐ 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