

# Maturango Museum News

Preserve, interpret and develop an appreciation for the natural and cultural history of the Northern Mojave Desert.

100 E. Las Flores Ave., Ridgecrest, CA 93555

Open Monday – Saturday 10 am – 5 pm, Sunday Noon – 4pm

760.375.6900 [www.maturango.org](http://www.maturango.org)

Death Valley Tourist Center Northern Mojave Visitor Center

## Museum Director's Notes

*By Debbie Benson, Director*

January is that transition from one numerical year to the next. As such, it is a time to reflect on the joys and sorrows that a year holds within its moments. We face life with the optimism of what the new year will bring but also the reflections of the places and people we have had to let go of in the physical sense. As time goes by, the list seems long but the memories become part of a story that grows for each of us.

The kindnesses and support shown by many to the Museum as a whole and to its individuals are creating a mural of sorts that is part of the Maturango narrative. Many thanks for our past and to our future! Many thanks to the Staff at the Museum who give more of their time and creative thoughts than one could imagine. A heartfelt thanks also to each person who donates monetary support, their time and often endless energies, skills and thoughts. You make a difference in making the Maturango Museum a place to bring families, friends and those needing a place to feel the beauty of what has been created in the past for the future. Keep an eye on the gardens for some new transformative activities!

Wishing you all a Happy New Year with pages to fill of your journey through it. Take Care and Be Well!

**Holiday Gift Giving is Easy with a Gift Certificate  
from the Maturango Museum**



**Children's Hour: "Winds, Clouds, and High-Flying Birds"**  
**Friday January 9, 10:30 – 11:30am**

Young children and their families are invited to help us welcome the new year with a Children's Hour titled "Wind, Clouds, and High-Flying Birds."

Young children of our Indian Wells Valley have likely all felt the force of strong winter winds, blowing fast and fierce! In the featured program, creative actions for kids will accompany stories about wind, storms, and clouds with their imagination-stirring shapes transforming the sky. Birds such as snow geese come to live for the winter in our valley, while other kinds of birds pause only to eat and rest during the autumn as they migrate further south. On their journeys they can be seen soaring high along uplifting currents of air, as naturally as children running along a sidewalk pretending to fly!

Children's Hour, begun by a group of volunteer docents in 2009, continues to encourage both learning and appreciation of books, the Mojave desert and nearby mountains. Each program theme is explored through storybooks, songs, action activities, crafts and natural history exhibits from the docents' collection. Curiosity and questions from children are warmly received!!

We hope to see you for this free, educational and monthly event! Information about Children's Hour can be found on [Maturango.org](http://Maturango.org) or by calling 760-375-6900.

## **Docent Doings**

*By Nora Nuckles, Education Coordinator*

Great news! About 120 people (parents and students) had an opportunity to view programs in the Beth Armogida Planetarium at the Science Night at Vieweg STEM Academy. Terry McGuire, with the assistance of Bob Parker and Ingrid Carroll, showed the programs while Fran Kelty, Sue Parker, and myself kept it organized from the outside. Fran is a master at the zipper which allows participants to go in and out. Sue and I helped pass out the bracelets that permitted entry at a certain time. It does take a group of us to present shows in the Planetarium. We are happy that we have used the Planetarium twice in November and once in December.

Our art docents presented art experience programs to Mrs. Buby's fifth grade at Inyokern and the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grades at Pierce Arts Academy.

The docents presented programs to about 480 people in November! We are always looking for volunteers who love to work with children and adults in sharing knowledge and fun with our community!

We thank Mark Pahuta for showing his Hidden Ridgecrest videos to the residents at High Desert Haven. So, in that way he is also acting as one of the Maturango Docents!

If you would like to consider becoming a Maturango Museum docent, please join us at our next meeting in the Coso Room on Jan. 6 at 10am. If you have any questions, please call me, Nora, at the Maturango Museum, 760-375-6900.

**Mark Pahuta's Photo Exhibit "Ridgecrest"**  
**Opening Reception Sunday January 18, 2pm**  
Still photographs of Ridgecrest and the local area.

Mark received a B.A. in History at Humboldt State University and an M.F.A. in Cinema at the University of Southern CA. A filmmaker and still photographer, he came to the Indian Wells Valley in 1976 for a career of more than 40 years at China Lake in the Film and Video Branch. Many of his photographs are in the permanent collection of the Maturango Museum. The Museum has also published his audiovisual productions, "Between Two Worlds: Rock Art of the Cosos" and "Indian Wells Valley: Somewhere on the Edge of Nowhere. Mark has created numerous video productions for other organizations, including the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce. The Museum has published two books, "Ridgecrest Retrospective" and "High Desert Double Exposure" with Mark as photographer.

Recently, Mark Pahuta's "Hidden Ridgecrest" video series has been very well enjoyed.



**Bob Steele Presents: Chasing Spring on the Pacific Crest Trail**  
**Sunday January 11, 2pm** Back by popular demand!

In 2016, Bob and Susan Steele through-hiked the 2,650-mile-long Pacific Crest Trail with a different goal than anyone else - counting all the birds. Their trek passed through magnificent scenery and diverse habitats, affording the chance to see birds moving northbound during spring migration to summer breeding locations.

With stunning photography and storytelling, this afternoon presentation with guest speaker Bob Steele will take you along the spine of the West Coast mountain ranges, winding from Mexico to Canada, with a keen eye toward natural history, flowers, and birds. Share in the joy and challenge of backpacking 140 days on one of the most famous trails in the Western Hemisphere, and glimpse some of the 200 species of birds and many flowers found along the way.

## Recent Donations

### Donations

Jerry and Sandy Bradley  
Peggy Breeden  
Dan Burnett  
Denise Moliterno and Michael Ford  
Bob and Paula Westbrook  
Ken Wetzel and Patty Wharton

### In Memory of Jim Buffington

Rachel Woodard

### In Memory of Janet Westbrook

Peter Woodman and Susan Moore

### In Memory of Philip N. Rogers

Fran and Sandy Rogers

### Art Gallery

Aubrey Philips  
Helen Baker

### Building Fund

Robert and Paula Westbrook

### Docents

The Estate of Deanna June Glad  
Terry and Andrew Mitchell  
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### Exhibits

Susan Hueber

### Year End Appeal

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Mary Ambre  
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### New Lifetime Members

Peggy and Jay Chun

### New Premium Members

Jennifer Johnson  
Megan Richter and  
Joe Kromphardt

## Free Second Saturday Speaker: Sean Scruggs

### “The Traditional Cultural Landscape and Maintenance of Natural Habitats - A View from a Local Native American Perspective”

Saturday January 10 at 1pm

Eastern Kern County Resources Conservation District (EKCRCD) has invited Sean Scruggs, a Piute native tribal representative from Fort Independence Reservation, to speak on the importance of nature in his culture and how he works with agencies and the local community to preserve and protect the traditional cultural landscape and his ancestral ties to the land and how his people lived in the natural world since the beginning of time according to his tribe's Creation Story. These themes are related to climate change, maintenance of natural habitats and how balance needs to be restored in the world in order to sustain future generations. This is an immersive and informal format with some prepared comments and open for question and answers from the audience.



EKCRCD is starting up a Certified Resilient Backyard Habitat Program here in Ridgecrest to promote eco-friendly, wildlife compatible, sustainable gardening practices. We are planning a series of speakers and workshops as part of this program. All members and public are welcome. Hope to see you there!

**Maturango Museum  
of the IWW**

100 E. Las Flores Ave., Ridgecrest, CA 93555  
Open Mon - Sat 10 am – 5 pm  
Sunday noon – 4pm (except major holidays)

Staff

Debbie Benson, Museum Director  
Maureen Goff, Store Manager/Buyer  
Barbara Bane, M.A., RPA, Archaeology Curator  
Nadia Mohsen, Curation Technician  
Elaine Wiley, History Curator  
Sherry Brubaker, Natural History Curator  
Andrea Pelch, Art Gallery Coordinator,  
Newsletter Editor  
Nora Nuckles, Education Coordinator,  
Museum Assistant  
Linda Saholt, Membership, Donations  
Leslie Layfield, Accounting Bookkeeper  
Heidi Farmer, Accounting  
Addie Reyes, Website  
Barbara Ingle, Museum Assistant

Committee Chairpersons

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Bob Westbrook, Strategic Planning  
Bev Hill, Gardens  
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The Car Wash  
The Pizza Factory  
Red Rock Books  
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and Visitors Bureau  
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Stafford's Pest Control  
The Swap Sheet  
TJ Frisbee Bicycles, Inc  
T&T Alignment, Inc.  
Vaughn Realty  
WACOM  
Warren's Automotive

Members will be receiving an e-mail link to the voting site soon.

### **Maturango Museum Candidates for 2026 Board of Trustees**

#### **Jasmine Carter**

I have lived in Ridgecrest for more than twenty years and have appreciated the Maturango Museum as part of the community. When my children (now 13, 17, and 19) were younger, the museum was a highlight, it was one of the few child-focused activities in town—one of my favorite photos with Santa was taken there years ago. As my family has grown, we continue to enjoy the museum through its community outreach and events, especially the Open Studio Tours.

Professionally, I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker providing counseling services to children, adolescents, and adults through school-based counseling and private practice. My background includes therapy and consultation, grant and proposal writing, and creating workshops and training.

My interest in social work grew out of an early interest in anthropology; both fields share roots in observing, understanding, and supporting people in their world. I also love trees and mountains—I grew up in Alaska and attended school in Wyoming. Though each place is diverse, I appreciate the ‘different kinds of pretty’ each has to offer. I look forward to contributing to the museum’s mission and supporting opportunities for connection, learning, and community engagement.

#### **Rochelle Fulton**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my name as a candidate for the Maturango Museum Board. I appreciate the chance to share a bit about myself and why I would be honored to serve.

I was born and raised in Ridgecrest. My grandparents moved here in the 40s, my mother, father, and stepfather all retired from the base, and at the end of this year I will retire after more than 40 years. I have three grown children and six wonderful grandchildren, and I’ve shared my love of the Museum with both family and friends for many years. I care deeply about this community, and I believe the Maturango Museum is one of Ridgecrest’s greatest assets. I am hopeful and committed to helping ensure that it continues to thrive and grow.

Professionally, my background is primarily in finance, program management, and analysis. I served in several senior leadership roles for various sectors of the organization and major weapon system program offices within NAWC-WD with my final role in the Technical Director’s Staff,

Through these roles, I developed extensive experience in financial management, tracking and reporting, and a strong understanding of the rules and regulations governing the use of funds. I also bring a passion for technology, innovation, and problem-solving. Much of my career involved being part of a leadership team addressing complex organizational challenges, always being a trusted source of knowledge, insight and strategic thinking. That includes navigating the recent impacts of the earthquake and COVID. Collaboration has been a key part of my career.

#### **Josef Lorenz**

Mr. Josef Lorenz is currently the General Manager of Mather Bros Inc, one of the largest ice and water distribution companies in the American southwest. Based in Ridgecrest, California and with offices across four states, Mr. Lorenz oversees all the financial, operational, legal, and merger/acquisition activities of the company. Immediately prior to this role, Mr. Lorenz was a highly successful business consultant, focusing on financial and operational metrics in small to mid-sized, family-run businesses across the US. It was in this role that Josef came to develop his passion for employee and customer empowerment practices as tools for greater operational efficiency and financial performance.

Josef began his career in Alaska in the early 2000s after his undergraduate degrees in economics and mathematics at Indiana University and quickly opened his first of eight companies, spanning the business spectrum from wholesale and supply chain logistics to government contracting and retail operations. He obtained two master's degrees in project management and business administration over the next few years and became an adjunct professor at a local university to teach entrepreneurship and business. He is currently finishing his doctorate degree in business with a focus on employee empowerment as a predictor of firm success. In recognition of his entrepreneurial achievements, he was named Entrepreneur of the Year in the state of Alaska in 2017. Josef has an extensive network of business and educational relationships that he utilizes for tax, legal, financial, and marketing purposes.

As a devoted husband and a father of two amazing adult kids, Josef travels the world in his spare time while continuing to run a small consulting company and teach business courses at an online university. During his time in Alaska, Josef volunteered at Big Brothers, Big Sisters, the Care for Kids Crisis Center, and the Anchorage Pioneer Senior Home. As he and his wife attempt to deepen their roots and ties in the Ridgecrest community, Josef has been looking for opportunities to share his knowledge to aid local nonprofits in a meaningful way. The Maturango Museum's local outreach and mission align well with Josef's passion and experience, hence his desire to serve on its board and make a difference.

### **Pam Smith**

I am interested in serving on the Maturango Museum Board to support education, cultural preservation, and community engagement. I would bring a careful, analytical approach and a strong commitment to decisions that strengthen public trust and expand access to the museum's programs. I have strong experience in board processes and procedures, and strong communication skills.

Pamela Smith was born in Ridgecrest and has lived here her entire life. She has retired from two careers, and currently runs several small, woman-owned businesses. She obtained her BA in Political Science from Chico State University and an MBA in Business Administration from Naval Postgraduate School.

Pamela was the Assistant Superintendent of Business and Support Services for Sierra Sands Unified School District from 2017-2025, where she was responsible for planning, organization, and administration of the Business Office, Transportation, Maintenance & Operations, Construction, and Nutrition Services Departments of the district to achieve district strategic and business goals. Prior to that she worked at Naval Air Warfare Center (NAWC), China Lake, for 37 years. Her final position at NAWC was as the Director, Program & Business Analysis Department, where she served as the senior business and financial manager for competency administration and financial/program analysis. In that position she led a distributed team of approximately 240 Program Analysts, Financial Management Analysts, Administrative Officers, and Financial Technicians who provided financial analysis, business analysis, and financial systems support to a broad range of technical customers across the organization. These positions enabled her to increase her skills in organizational leadership, governance, strategic planning, policy review, financial knowledge, and community engagement.

Pamela has been a member of the China Lake Rotary Club since 2018. She has served as President (2023-24), Secretary (2021-2023), and chairperson of several committees to include Vocational Services and Youth. Pamela has three adult children, all married, and four grandchildren.

## Upcoming and Ongoing Events

- **Children's Hour: "Winds, Clouds, and High-Flying Birds",** Friday January 9, 10:30 – 11:30 am
- **Free Second Saturday Speaker: Sean Scruggs,** Saturday January 10 at 1pm
- **Bob Steele's Presentation: Chasing Spring on the PCT,** Sunday January 11, 2pm
- **Ray Wood's "Singing DAX/Instagram Girls" Art Exhibit** ongoing until January 13, 2026
- **Mark Pahuta's Photo Exhibit "Ridgecrest":** Opening Reception Sunday January 18, 2pm
- **High Desert Teachers Music Association Concert:** Saturday January 24, Sunday Jan 25  
More information will be sent in an e-mail and will be on our website [maturango.org](http://maturango.org)

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