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directions

fall 2018

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

“Wisdom Nuggets” from Two ANCA Emeritus Members

Charity Krueger, Retired Executive Director of Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm, Reading, MI
& Dick Touvell, Retired Executive Director of Chippewa Nature Center, Midland, MI

Traveling south two hours or driving east two hours, we met on the campus of the University of Michigan (Charity’s alma mater). Of course, a tour of the campus was a given by the proud alum, including standing on the exact spot at the Student Union steps – where at 2:00 a.m. October 14th, 1960, President John F. Kennedy delivered his historic announcement for the formation of the Peace Corps. What a perfect backdrop for two



Copyright Derek Stoner

*Asland birders from a Professional Leadership Institute.
Look no further, wisdom ahead!*

ANCA Emeritus and retired Executive Directors to begin brainstorming on how we might still contribute to the profession (a request of Jen Levy, Executive Director of the Association of Nature Center Administrators).

One outcome was a facilitated session at the 2017 ANCA Summit entitled “How to first *survive*, but eventually *flourish* when dealing with extraordinary personnel issues and/or situations!” We asked eight other EDs to join us and discuss explosive, real-life, and

(continued on page 4)

ANCA Headquarters:

mail • P.O. Box 464
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email • info@natctr.org
phone • 435-787-8209

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Founded in 1989, the Association of Nature Center Administrators is a private non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers.

Serving more than 630 members, ANCA is the leader in the profession.



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Director's Notes

Jen Levy, Executive Director of the Association of Nature Center Administrators, Logan, UT

Greetings from the ANCA Office! Fall is in full swing here in northern Utah, and we are celebrating an incredibly successful Summit. When the ANCA Board voted to approve Quinta Mazatlán World Birding Center in McAllen, TX as the 2018 host site we knew attendance might be low due to the travel distance to south Texas, the change of dates from August to September, and the heat and humidity of the TX Rio Grande Valley. We approved the site because we were so impressed with the location and looked forward to bringing ANCA to



an area rich in culture and nature education opportunities. The 'gamble' paid off and 170 ANCA members (including more than 70 first-time attendees) traveled to the RGV in September making it one of the top 5 highest attended Summits. Many people have asked what attracted so many people this year. Was it the change of dates to September? The program lineup? The birding? The cultural opportunities? The food? The answer is YES! All of the above. We Dreamed Big and checked many things off our Bucket Lists. I am grateful to our hosts, Quinta Mazatlán World Birding Center and the RGV Nature Partnership, for their hard work and professionalism.

Feedback from Summit attendees has been overwhelmingly positive, with many comments on the high quality of the programs and the opportunity to interact with peers. Recognizing that a majority of our 630 ANCA members are not able to attend the Summit, we asked attendees to share some of their best take-aways. You can read some of them on [Page 6](#) and I encourage you to continue the peer-to-peer sharing and learning in our [Google Group Discussion Forum](#). In addition to the rich conversations and problem solving, several members have shared Summit resources there including Irvine Nature Center's rental program documents and the "How to Reach Birders" presentation from VisitMcAllen.com.

ANCA Emeritus Members continue to attend and participate in the Summit, and I am grateful for their wisdom and investment in the profession's future leaders. In our cover article, "Wisdom Nuggets," Charity Krueger and Dick Touvell share lessons from a Summit session they facilitated in 2017. This year, Bob Mercer facilitated a discussion on how to prepare for retirement and he shares the common threads on [Page 12](#) for our *From the Field* article.

The ANCA Summit is not only valuable to our members; we have a significant impact on the communities we visit. Colleen Hook, Manager of Quinta Mazatlán, shared that, using figures from the Chamber of Commerce, the Sum-

mit had a \$95,200 economic impact on the city of McAllen. We had the opportunity to showcase McAllen to nature center leaders across the US, Canada, Mexico, and China. We also offered pre- and post-Summit birding trips on Wednesday and Sunday throughout the area. The Summit is hosted annually at an ANCA member center and we are now in the process of exploring and securing future sites. If you are interested in hosting and showcasing your nature center and community, please email me at jenlevy@natctr.org.

We have some exciting news to share! Utah Nonprofits Association has awarded ANCA the Advocacy & Civic Engagement Badge. The [UNA Nonprofit Organizational Credential Program](#) provides nonprofit organizations a path for developing capacity in nine areas critical to nonprofits. Utah Nonprofits Association only awards badges to organizations that have proven best practices and earning this badge is indicative of focused and committed work by Caitlin Fader, ANCA Marketing and Development Assistant. Currently, we do not



have an Advocacy Program, but we plan to develop one to offer support for the advocacy efforts of nature center leaders who are facing issues in their communities. Also, we want to be more involved in evaluating the big issues facing the nature center field and proactive in ensuring nature center leaders' voices are represented in making legislation moving forward. In the past we have written letters and shared calls to action about issues that we believe are relevant to our community – IMLS and EPA funding, the status of the Johnson Amendment, and more recently, support for Texas Parks and Wildlife Departments' request for consideration of alternatives to the proposed border wall. If you know of an issue deserving of our attention, please reach out.

Once again, I miss being surrounded by ANCA members and look forward to August when we will meet again in Cincinnati. I will leave you with one of my favorite pictures from the Summit and remind everyone to stop and dangle your feet in the water – we all deserve quality time with friends!

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615-352-6299

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Caitlin Fader – Marketing & Development Assistant
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Photo from Archbold Biological State Ecology Summer Camp. Go get your goal!

uncomfortable situations that we have lived through. This included issues like terminating a well-loved but toxic staff member, sexual misconduct charges, embezzlement/stealing by employees, team members undermining your leadership, board members misconduct and conflict of interest, and more. The discussion brought to the surface many raw emotions as the topics were explored. The one consensus, however, was the critical message, **Nugget #1: Be proactive in addressing personnel issues.** This wisdom nugget, echoed by the fifty participants, would have saved a lot of “heart-burn” and disruption of our organizations’ positive energy and community interface. Sure, it’s easy to say “don’t let personnel situations evolve, saying they will take care of themselves,” but reality teaches us it doesn’t usually happen that way.

Later at the 2017 Summit while attending a discussion on goals, we were reminded of **Nugget #2: If you want something to become a reality, you better create (and write down) – yes, a GOAL!** A famous quote by President Abraham Lincoln stated, “The best way to predict your future is to create it.” 150+ years later, this idea continues to support the fact that, no matter what the situation, a written GOAL has a much better chance of becoming reality especially if the goal is formed with input and consensus

from staff and board members. We both learned this lesson many times throughout our careers. For example, in the case of Chippewa Nature Center, its’ Nature Preschool would not have happened without staff member Rachel Larimore’s vision and the inspiration and support provided by Dr. Margaret Ann (Ranny) Riecker, former President of The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation. Also, the Board of Trustees made it a reality by writing it as a priority goal for everyone (staff, board, and community) to rally around.

Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm’s staff and board utilized an action planning process in order to obtain their vision for Aullwood’s future. Goals were created by staff/board during facilitated discussions and were to be accomplished in a six-month timeline. These written and measurable objectives were assigned to staff/board members and reflected the steps that were needed to obtain the center’s vision. This Action Plan spanned a three-year period with sequential objectives that were either accomplished, discarded after research as being unrealistic, or moved forward by six months or more. By using this written document that was updated and changed as objectives were met, Aullwood staff/board accomplished far more cutting-edge education, research, conservation, and land management projects than were expected. Author Joe Vitale reminds us that a “goal



Javier de Leon, Park Superintendent of Estero Llano Grande State Park speaking at the 2018 ANCA Summit. Communication skills are an essential staff skill!

should scare you a little, and excite you a LOT” which is what transpired with CNC’s Nature Preschool and Aullwood’s Future Action Planning, as both these wishes became realities. **Nugget #3: Recruit staff members who possess some of industry’s most sought-after skills;** this will ensure that you as the ED build the best team possible to obtain your Nature Center’s objectives. When reviewing resumes or interviewing candidates focus on these winning qualities –

- **Customer service** – The ability to create friendly, welcoming and VIP experiences for each visitor who participates in on-site and off-site programs is very important.
- **Communication skills** – Oral, written, and electronic media approaches to sharing environmental messages are vital to the mission of Nature Centers.
- **Entrepreneurship** – Thinking outside the box and being willing to take risks and embrace change, as well as seizing opportunities, will move your Nature Center forward.
- **Flexibility** – Remembering that every job is important whether it is setting up tables for a meeting or creating an innovative collaborative program... prioritizing and adapting to the organization’s needs is imperative.
- **Sales experience** – We all need to engage, sell and involve our community in the important mission of Nature Centers.

Looking to the future as Presidents Kennedy and Lincoln did years ago, we share these three wisdom nuggets - being proactive with personnel issues, creating written and visible goals, and recruiting staff, board members, and volunteers who possess the best possible skills to engage our communities in conservation and education actions. We offer these nuggets for consideration as reminders for our professional colleagues, as we all strive for an enjoyable and rewarding future, filled with minimum “heartaches” and great successes. Or as one of Charity’s favorite rockers, Jon Bon Jovi, once said, “Remember there are three P’s – passion plus persistence reveals possibilities.” 🌿

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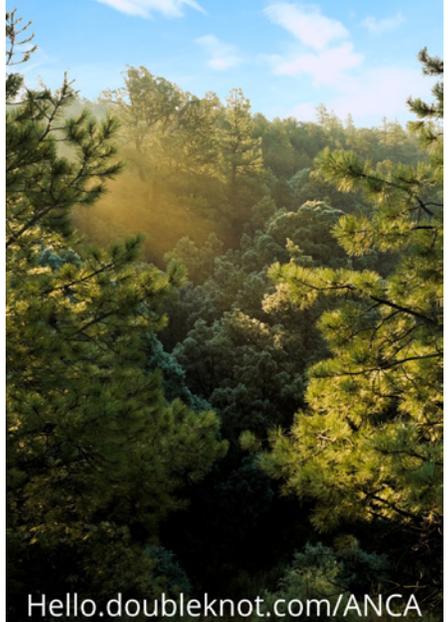
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Ideas and Resources from the 2018 Dream Big Summit

Jen Levy, Executive Director of the Association of Nature Center Administrators
Logan, UT

One of the highlights of the ANCA Summit is the sharing of ideas and resources. In his ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award acceptance speech, Bo Glover mentioned 'stick parking' as an idea he picked up at a previous Summit and immediately implemented at The Environmental Nature Center. He used it as an example of the many ideas he has picked up over the years - some simple, some complex - and all extremely effective at solving challenges we all face. Here are a few take-aways from the 2018 Dream Big Summit!

"My number one take away came from the all-day session on building the board you want. He (David Allen) listed several great ideas, but the one that really stuck with me was to ask each board member to make an annual donation of at least \$1,000, and give them a can to put \$20 in each week to reach that \$1,000 for those that may struggle to get to that level. He also said for us to then honor that gift by letting them know we would not be asking for any more during the year, we would not nickel and dime them and make multiple asks. They would each get one free ticket to the events as they would then be expected to work the events. Their job would be to find and introduce themselves to three preidentified individuals, introduce themselves, then ask if they have met the ED, if not, find the ED and make the intro. He also suggested we practice the elevator speech in a board meeting, which sounded fun, but then not.



Stick Parking at Dillon Nature Center.

I thought these were easy, highly doable ideas that may improve the overall relationship with board members." -Jeanne Gural, Executive Director, Woodford Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge.

"During the full-day workshop on Board Development with David Allen, I took away the concept of recruiting board members based on representing communities (geographic, ethnic, socio-economic) that we serve rather

than trying to fill the 'matrix' of professions. In addition, David also recommended the concept of 'cluster recruiting' which is bringing on 2-3 board members who all represent the same community to build depth in that area and also deepened the connection of that cohort of individuals." -Jenn Wright, Executive Director, Grass River Natural Area.

"I attended the panel discussion on development goals for your city on



Stick Parking at the Environmental Nature Center.

Friday morning. The importance of partnerships and relationships was emphasized by all of the panelists because without influence, knowledge will be lost. If we want our knowledge and expertise to be useful, we need to be very strategic in the partnerships we seek.”
-Jen Levy, Executive Director, ANCA.

“So many valuable take-aways from this year’s summit. Many will take time and development before implementation, like changes to our facility rental policies, integrating inclusive language into our programming, and diversifying our board. But there were some take-aways from the session about staff morale led by Jenn Wright that I implemented immediately. The session had some good suggestions on how to talk to staff, where to talk to staff, and how to have more fun with staff. The importance of giving affirmations to staff was discussed and these clever post-it notes from <https://knockknock-stuff.com/> were suggested as a fun way to do that. I’m now using them. Oh, and I have also attached a picture our new stick parking barrel.” -John Gallagher, Superintendent, Dillon Nature Center

(continued on page 8)

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Staff Affirmations.

“I took so much away from this year’s conference. Here are a few:

- Practice your pitch out loud and more than once in front of real people who will give you critical feedback.*
- Find champions for each cause and strategic goal you set. This can be staff, board, or other volunteers, but a champion is key to success. You can’t be the champion of everything.*
- Planning to plan is just as important as the final development of your (strategic plan, marketing plan, business plan...).*
- Nature Centers are becoming community spaces.*

- Be clear about your expectations for board members up front, during recruitment.

- And my favorite: Change is difficult and takes time - don’t give up! Patient, sustained implementation is key.” -Whitney Lash-Marshall, Executive Director, Baltimore Woods Nature Center

After attending the half-day workshop, Dreaming Big and Getting the Grant to Implement It with IMLS, Cory Christopher of the Cincinnati Nature Center established the ANCA Grant Collaborative Google Group - We are a group of nature

center professionals helping each other write, review, and submit grant proposals. Instead of seeing other centers as competitors, participants in this group appreciate the value of collaboration, and agree to provide honest and constructive feedback to their peers. You can search in Google Groups for ANCA Grant Collaborative and request to join.

Have something to add? Still looking for an answer to a question or challenge? Please share your best take-aways and questions in the ANCA Google Group. [Go here](#) for information on joining. 🌿

Summit Firsts

David Ellis, Vice President of Sales and Marketing at DoubleKnot, 2018 Dream Big Summit Supporting Sponsor and ANCA Business Partner, Saratoga, CA

The ANCA Summit at the Quinta Mazatlán World Birding Center in McAllen, Texas was my first ANCA conference, and I can honestly say that it was an exceptional experience. I've attended dozens of trade shows and professional conferences in my career, and the ANCA Summit stands out for all the right reasons. From providing a participant directory with everyone's names and photos to setting a schedule that allows adequate time for learning and for socialization, everything about the conference was extraordinarily planned and executed. Commendations and congratulations to Jen Levy, Caitlin Fader and ANCA as a whole for a conference that was remarkable from start to finish.

I was struck by ANCA's outstanding efforts to deliver professional development for people in leadership positions, providing opportunities to explore and expand their roles, improve their operations and further their organization's mission. In fact, building and sustaining leadership teams was a big focus throughout the Summit, ranging from sessions for new executive directors to workshops on recruiting effective board members.

Generating revenue was, unsurprisingly, an important and multifaceted subject. I listened to discussions and workshops on topics ranging from the best strategies for cultivating major gifts; increasing revenue from facility rentals; the benefits and drawbacks of free admissions; and tracking qualitative and quantitative data for grant reporting and proposals.

Other lively debates centered on the role of technology, especially so-

cial media. Nature centers are working hard to strike a balance between urging visitors to disconnect from electronics and encouraging them to promote their participation and activities through Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Yelp and Snapchat as well as other emerging services and sites. (Excuse me while I ask a teenager what's next.)

A special highlight of the Summit was co-presenting a workshop titled "Improving the Visitor and Staff Experience: Strategies for Planning and Evaluating Technology Solutions" with Ruth Lundin, who recently retired as President of the Audubon Community Nature Center after a lifelong career

of extraordinary leadership. Ruth graciously shared her expertise and experience with me and the participants and I'm honored to have had the opportunity to work with her. Participants posed many good questions about best practices for database management and strategies for data segmentation. (If anyone would like to co-present a session on data management and analysis with me at next year's Summit, please let me know!)

Thanks again to Jen, Caitlin and all of the attendees for an exceptional experience. I'm truly looking forward to the 2019 ANCA Summit! 🌿



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Reflecting on 2018 and Looking Ahead to 2019!

Cory Christopher, Director of Center for Conservation & Stewards at Cincinnati Nature Center, Milford, OH

The 2018 ANCA Summit reaffirmed my belief that the Summit is the most beneficial and welcoming professional conference that I have ever attended. It also made me wish there were Chachalacas in Ohio, but that's an entirely different discussion. See, coming from academia, I have been to dozens of conferences, many of them exceptional and most of them well-funded, but none of them have ever made me feel a part of the organization more than the ANCA Summit. As someone who still considers himself a

rookie in this field (and likely always will), being a part of a group of people with shared passions and endless enthusiasm has been essential to my success. The fact that most of those people enjoy good beer helps.

When I reflect on this year's Summit at Quinta Mazatlan, the first feeling that comes to mind is gratitude. There, a couple hundred people were gathered to help *me*, or at least it seemed that way. From the Habitat Management & Re-Vegetation field trip to the IMLS discussion about grant writing, everyone

was not only engaged for their own sake, but they were there to support each other. They were sharing bug spray and sunscreen, assessment protocols and Best Management Practices. If anyone felt competitive, it certainly didn't show. This sense of togetherness extended into the networking socials, where dozens of my barelegged colleagues and I shared ideas while dangling our legs in the swimming pool. It was during that social respite, with wet pant legs and a beer, when I realized that I was surrounded by advocates. We were a motley bunch on



Lotus pond at Cincinnati Nature Center. Anyone interested in dragonflies can spend hours here!

the surface, but it was clear that we were all of like mind. In other professional organizations, this kind of collaborative spirit is too often the exception, but within the Summit, collaboration is the culture. Again, good beer helps.

In all seriousness, this year's Summit was absolutely gorgeous, the food was ridiculously good, and I managed to check off a few birds from my list. And although I am quite biased when it comes to Nature Centers, I have to admit that the 2018 Summit has set a high bar for the 2019 Summit at Cincinnati Nature Center. I have been asked to manage the programming of the 2019 Summit, which includes everything from workshops and facilitated sessions to field trips. I am also hoping to add a couple new program types, including book discussion groups and trailblazer breakfasts. I am completely confident that we have the skills and woo (yes, woo) to make the 2019 Summit a success, but what I can't yet put my finger on is how to foster the feeling of one-ness and we-have-each-others-backs-ness that I have felt at other Summits. How does one go about planning a program for that? My gut tells me I'm wasting my time trying, that there is simply something about the people of ANCA that organically leads to collaboration. Are we simply more open to new ideas than other professionals? Maybe it's because our most important client, dear Mother Nature, has never allowed us to stay stagnant for too long – and she certainly doesn't do as she's told.

It is in this spirit that the 2019 Summit is themed simply, "Evolve." Before we decided on that theme, we threw out a variety of other possibilities. Some tried to capture the geological diversity of Cincinnati, and others tried to leverage our German heritage. In the end, what we realized is that our Center has been going through its own evolution as of late. We are currently putting the final touches

on our long range plan, which has included re-writing our mission and vision. We have asked ourselves tough questions about who we are and what we want to become, and we have struggled with how we will get there. Our staff and board have agreed that our focus will become helping people take conservation action. We want to change the way human communities connect to, and coexist with, the natural communities surrounding all of us. We have recognized and are embracing the necessity of staying relevant, of evolving within the context of our communities, both natural and human. I hope that you will all be able to benefit from learning about our challenges, our successes, our setbacks, and our leaps of faith.

I say this genuinely; I have never been so proud to be a part of an organization than I am right now, as

my colleagues and I open ourselves up to critique, innovation, and failure. We are creating a safe place for each of us to evolve. We have recognized the importance of staying relevant in a region that refuses to stay still. Our goal for the 2019 Summit is to give you a glimpse of what the Queen City has to offer, how Cincinnati Nature Center has evolved, and how we as a community of nature centers can support each other's evolution.

To prepare for the [2019 Summit in Cincinnati](#), my advice is simple. Bring your water bottle and wear comfortable shoes. Embrace bean-less chili made with cocoa and served on spaghetti with cheddar cheese (trust me). Read up on your Ordovician fossils. And come prepared to help ANCA and all of its member centers develop a desire for continual evolution. 



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From The Field:

Retirement Basics

Robert Mercer, Retired Director of Silver Lake Nature Center, Yardley, PA

It is very important that everyone start thinking about their eventual retirement! A critical step is to spend time with a financial advisor while you are still young enough to implement a plan! Do you have a pension or retirement plan? Is it adequate? Knowing early helps insure you can afford retirement.

At the 2018 ANCA Summit, a group of retirees and people looking towards retirement met to discuss what happens. The session started out with the assumption that everyone has already taken care of the personal financial planning and organizational planning. The session's driving question: "How should one prepare themselves mentally and what to expect when one retires?" There is a good side and a challenging side to every change and retirement is a major change. Some common threads were revealed.

One: Retirement results in a loss of identity. Once one announces their retirement, they become a "lame duck." Once they walk out of the door, they no longer have (and should not have) any more control over what happens at their former center. One needs to be ready to let go; to let the organization go in new directions, even if it seems like the organization is headed for failure. With this mental and physical separation comes a mental relief from the day to day anguish of operating a center. While one may offer the new director guidance, the new director rarely asks. They want to set their own agenda.

Two: Many of the retirees mentioned that retiring resulted in better health—lower blood pressure, loss of weight, more time to exercise, and opportunities to get outside. It is an op-



ANCA Emeritus Member Bob Mercer retired from the Silver Lake Nature Center in 2016 and has been travelling the country ever since!

portunity to travel and see the world (if you can afford it). A caution also mentioned was that retirement could mean more time spent watching television or hanging around the house. Resist!

Three: Retiring allows one to decompress from the challenges of work, but this is fleeting. With the

lack of a schedule, one can get to all of those projects around the house, but they are done too soon and no longer rewarding.

Four: Retirement can be a time for working on familial relationships. It can also be a strain on family relationships as the couple now spends an

inordinate amount of time together. I used to joke that our center gained many volunteers shortly after their spouse retired. Behind a joke there is a grain of truth.

Five: Retiring often means a loss of the thrill of being a part of a team. Retirement often results in a loss of connection with work friends, memories, your brand, and the profession; a whole social world disappears almost overnight.

Forewarned is forearmed. To combat the above losses, retirement needs to be viewed as a time to reinvent oneself, to pick and choose what you do each day as opposed to being driven by the organizational mission. One key piece of advice might be: Do not retire **from** something, but **to** something. Find a cause you can support. Learn new skills. Help out other organizations. Get involved. Build new friends and relationships. Work to stay in touch with your old friends. Stay involved in your professional organization, like ANCA.

If one takes the above approach to retirement it is not uncommon to hear people say, "I am busier now than before I retired." One participant cautioned that it is advisable to say "no" to requests for your time the first few months. Take that time to focus in on what you want to do for the next 20 or so years.

From the small poll of those present, none regretted and all were happy with their decision to retire, despite the changes to their lifestyle. All found ways to cope with the changes in relationships wrought by retiring.

There are two eventual choices. Retire when you are ready or be retired. Make a plan for both eventualities. Think about what you want to do. Gird yourself for the above losses and gains. When you do retire, work to make every day special, it is a gift! 🌿

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"Thanks for all the input, everyone. I love knowing that you're all out there ready to help me with answers."

- Katie Watson, Pajarito Environmental Education Center

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We are thankful for the support and expertise of our Business Partners. These companies are invested in the future of nature center leaders through ANCA and we hope nature center leaders will, in turn, consider these businesses when they are in need of resources.

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