



Fall 2026

NEWS FROM THE VA'AKI

Official Newsletter of the S'edav Va'aki Museum Volunteers

From the Desk of the Volunteer Program Specialist

BY Amereece Sterba

Happy Fall! Hopefully we have all survived the heat and monsoon storms. The summer was fairly quiet; we have conducted about eight outreaches and hosted several small groups. I am hoping everyone got a chance to escape the heat and relax a little.

This fall is shaping up to be a busy one here at SVM. We have several outreach events, school field trips, and special events scheduled. The Volunteer Lunch topics have been planned out. Brian will be giving the October Lunch on Ancient Adobe and how platform mounds like ours were created. He will also discuss adobe preservation techniques. I have seen him give this presentation, and it is really fascinating. On November 7th, I have scheduled a field trip for the Volunteers. We will be going to Sce:dagī Mu:val Va'aki (formerly Mesa Grande) in Mesa. Gene has volunteered to give us a tour of the site while we are there. This will be a wonderful opportunity to experience another Va'aki and see how the City of Mesa and the Arizona Natural History Museum are preserving this cultural resource. I cannot wait to have fun learning with everyone this fall.

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FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

BY NICOLE ARMSTRONG-BEST

Hello everyone:

We are so excited to head into our busy season. We have so much going on and as always, we rely on your enthusiastic help to bring Museum narratives alive for our audiences, and ensure our events run smoothly. Hopefully you are excited to explore the changing exhibit, Indigenous Identities (and have contributed a postcard to the discussion). Please plan to join us for the artist lectures – these creative Indigenous artists are amazing. Along with our regular fall events – Veteran's Day Gourd Dance, Portal Fest and Indian Market, we are focused on the continued renovation of the main gallery. If you were not able to attend our Welcome Back volunteer event, you may not have heard about our roll out plans. Basically, the first two sections of the exhibit redo will open February 2027 – Himdag (O'odham Worldview) and Akimel (Water/Canals). Both these sections include large technology pieces which have taken a lot of time to create and ensure work. If you see Caitlin, check her stress level. She is doing great work!

Thanks to the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC) 12% Gaming grant program, we have enough funding from our 2026 grant to continue to work on the build out of the final two sections, Jeved (Land) and O'odham (People), which we hope to be able to install summer 2027. Thanks also to our Harmony cases donors, we are able to purchase the new cases needed for these sections.

We are thrilled to announce that we have also received SRPMIC grant funding for 2027, which will allow us to create a brand-new gallery space, which will house the archaeology story. I am working on raising the funds to actually be able to put an exhibit into that space! We also will be hosting a volunteer discussion to review our plans for this gallery – we welcome your input and ideas.

And finally, plans are beginning for our two upcoming significant milestones – the 50th anniversary of the Indian Market in 2027 and the 100th anniversary of the Museum opening in 2029. If you would like to be involved with any of this planning, please come see me.

I look forward to a busy fall season, and thank you again for all you do to support us.



Resource Corner

Birds of the Sun: Macaws and People in the US Southwest and Mexican Northwest by Christopher Schwartz (2022), University of Arizona Press. [Can be purchased in SVM's Store](#)

The Hohokam and Their World: An Exploration of Art and Iconography by Linda Gregonis and Victoria Evans, University of Arizona Press
<https://uapress.arizona.edu/book/the-hohokam-and-their-world>

Phoenix Underground Archaeology Southwest Magazine (2017)
<https://www.archaeologysouthwest.org/product/asw31-2-3/>



What's New in the Volunteer Program - VPC

New Volunteer Education Manuals

We have spent the past year updating the volunteer training manual. Previously, this document was only distributed to Engagement Guide volunteers. We are now also providing it to Store and Front Desk Ambassador volunteers. We have revised the document into two sections: the main guide, which offers essential information for all front-facing (guest-facing) volunteers, and a supplemental guide that includes additional more in depth information.

We are also working on turning this material into an online training program, which will include modules, games, and quizzes to help make the material easier to digest and understand. We currently plan to launch the online program in the Fall of 2027.

All Engagement Guides, Front Desk Ambassadors, and Store Volunteers should receive a copy of the new training manual soon.

New Promotional Volunteer Videos

In August the Arts and Culture Department at City Hall hosted a media intern Andrie. Andrie was able to spend two days at the museum and filmed five promotional videos. Four of these videos were for the general volunteer program and one was for Indian Market. We will be posting these videos on our various social media websites. I wanted to thank Gene, Marissa, Shirley, Jeff, Rosetta and Jim for volunteering to be in these videos. They have turned out wonderful and will surely help recruit new volunteers.





Exhibit Opening

You are Cordially invited to the Indigenous Identities Exhibit Grand Opening on October 8th.

Private Reception 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm

Public Viewing 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Join us for a ribbon-cutting ceremony, viewing of the new exhibit, catered refreshments, mix and mingle with the artists, and a special performance.

RSVP here: <https://partiful.com/e/xvx1tNkEu5jI7U4ETUOm?c=39XlrDYa>



Birthday Shout Outs!

Some of our Volunteers have recently celebrated a Birthday.

We would like to wish the following Volunteers a Happy Birthday!

Magnus Schuh
Ryan Jones
Jeff Ross
Kristin Rakes
Tricia Amato
Marissa Torres

Please note: We do not include anyone in this list who has not given permission to post about their Birthday.



S'edav Va'aki Museum Reserach Group

Update by Chris Schwartz

Despite a couple of months chock-full of vacation, heat, and action—mostly World Cup soccer (and the US Open Tennis Tournament, which Nicole cares way more about, despite being English)—the S'edav Va'aki Museum Research Group managed to make some solid progress on a series of ongoing projects. Doug Mitchell continues to lead the SVMRG on the La Lomita Community Study, which includes ongoing artifact analysis (primarily ceramics but also flaked stone, groundstone, and special artifacts) and preparation of a synthetic report. He and Laurene Montero have managed to draw in many members of the broader Phoenix-area archaeology community in support of this effort, including (but not limited to) Dave Bustoz, Andrea Gregory, Mike Hackbarth, Gary Huckleberry, Andy Lack, and Mike Stubing. It is a testament to the strength of the local archaeology community that all these folks are willing to donate their time to this project.

On the Phoenix Mapping Archaeology Project front, we continue to expand our feature digitization and quality control efforts. Our GIS experts are working diligently to expand to some smaller-scale and agricultural sites near the La Lomita Site Complex, and the rest of the team is working on reviewing, updating, and enhancing the 6,000+ features that have been digitized for the site of S'edav Va'aki. This is no small effort, and progress has been slow, but it is critical for when we start to look comparatively at patterns in village formation and structure. Already, some meaningful differences are being revealed, and we are particularly interested in taking a more detailed look at the development of the Preclassic components of S'edav Va'aki and how they change as time progresses into the Classic period.



Digitizing the Odd and Edna Halseth Photograph Collection

by Jeri Meeks

I have to say that I'm having a blast looking at this well over a thousand-piece collection of images from 1920-1940, featuring personal and archaeological site photos! It's obvious that archaeology was a family affair back then. There are many photos of men, women, children and dogs lodging in rough cabins and camping in canvas tents attached to cars. The dirt roads were rough, the rivers wide and low desert terrain went on forever, or until it reached the base of the surrounding mountains. Traveling around this vast area could include a Model A or VW Bus, but the more reliable transportation was a horse or horse cart. (There are several pictures of horse carts pulling cars out of trouble.) And it's always fun to see how fashion has changed, the women often wore skirts, the men cotton shirts and slacks with leather belts. And then there was the occasional photo of our group cooling off in the river, with much less on!

Recently I digitized several photos of Ida Redbird creating and designing pots, at the request of a researcher. It was so great to be able to share this documentation of history.

I'm about a third way through the nitrate film negatives that are available to scan, many have deteriorated beyond visibility. This is an amazing project and I'm happy to be part of digitizing these photos for sharing and posterity.



Pee Posh potter Ida Redbird putting slip on a bowl.



Halseth family personal photos, Oak Creek. Man sitting in an outhouse with the door open, woman standing outside, talking to him.

Thank You

Volunteers Make SVM Great!

By Amereece Sterba

I wanted to take this time to say a special thank you to our Garden Volunteer team. They have spent the whole summer “fighting” with the garden. This year, the plants really challenged our team, making them work hard for any growth. The squash would be vibrant and green one day but wilted and sad the next.

The corn, on the other hand, only produced a few stalks despite multiple attempts to plant it. The devil's claw decided not to participate at all. The beans mostly behaved themselves. Despite all the crop drama, our Garden volunteers never gave up, spent many hours trying to understand why the plants were unhappy, and tried various things to make the garden look wonderful. I want to express my gratitude to the Garden team for their hard work and dedication.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED IMPORTANT VOLUNTEER DATES

October

October 1st -

Thursday Night Crafts with Bats

October 3rd -

Mudslinging

October 8th -

Indigenous Identities Opening

October 15th -

Thursday Night Archaeology Cafe
Lecture

October 16th -

Volunteer Lunch - Adobe

October 17th -

International Archaeology Day

October 22nd -

Indigenous Identities Speaker Jeremy
Arviso

November

November 5th -

Art in the Evening - Drums

November 7th -

Volunteer Field Trip Sce:dagi

Muv:val Va'aki in Mesa

November 7th -

Mudslinging

November 12th -

Indigenous Identities

Speaker Nicole Pete

November 19th -

Thursday Night - Craft Gourd
Ornaments

December

December 3rd -

Indigenous Identities

Speaker Ruth Hallows

December 5th -

Mudslinging

December 12th & 13th -

Indian Market

December 17th -

Volunteer and Staff Holiday
Party

December 17th -

Thursday Evening Art in the
Evening Multimedia

January

January 7th -

Indigenous Identities Speaker

Daniel Nex

January 9th -

Volunteer Lunch - Educational
Activities

January 14th -

Thursday Evening Art in the
Evening

January 21st -

Indigenous Identities Speaker

Damian Jim

January 28th -

Thursday Evening POAC Artists to
Work Reception / Showcase

