

Winter 2026 - Happy New Year!

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

Dear Volunteers:

Happy New Year! This past year has been amazing for our Museum. We have gotten new sections of the walking path, a new HVAC system, and new Fencing to help secure the property. We hosted various events, from Ancient Technology Day, International Archaeology Day, International Museum Day, PortalFest, and the Indian Market. In October, we reopened with new exhibit spaces and three new exhibits. We were able to revive the Volunteer Monthly lunches and provide more opportunities for you all to gain more knowledge and training. We even got a new publication, which can be found in our Museum Store. We have hosted numerous school field trips and attended many outreach events. None of this would have been possible without all you wonderful volunteers.

I wanted to take this time to thank you all for being so wonderful and welcoming. I know changes are not always easy, and new faces can be scary. I have never experienced a kinder and more welcoming group than all of you wonderful volunteers. From day one, as your new Volunteer Program Specialist, you have all helped me understand our Volunteer Program and provided feedback, which I hope has been used to make the Program grow. From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you all for everything you do here at SVM. Here's to another wonderful year!

This issue:

From the Desk of the Volunteer Program Specialist

PAGE 1

From the Desk of the Director

PAGE 2

What's New in the Volunteer Program

PAGE 3

2025 Recap

PAGE 4

What's New in the Museum

A Mudslingers Update

Page 5 and 6

An Education Update

Page 7 and 8

Museum Store

Page 9

Indian Market

Page 10

Volunteer Appreciation SVM

Holiday Party

PAGE 11

Important Dates

PAGE 12

FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

BY NICOLE ARMSTRONG-BEST

Hi everyone:

I hope you all had a chance to experience the Indian Market and finished your holiday purchasing from the great array of products the artists provided! My jewelry collection continues to grow, even though I really don't need anything else...

As we go into a bright new year – can you believe it is 2026? - I want to thank all of you for your continued support. We cannot get all the work on our plates done without your smiling faces and multiple talents. And if it is time for you to try a new area, go talk to Bill, our intrepid garden volunteer who is now also working in the store. He cleans up well!

In 2019, we hosted an evening gala in celebration of the museum's 90th anniversary. The plan was to hold one every year, but we were derailed by the pandemic and recovering took longer than anticipated. We are now exploring bringing that event back, possibly this April. The previous name of the event is no longer appropriate, after the museum name change, so we have renamed it Harmony: Balancing Past and Present – An Indigenous Sonoran Desert Experience. If you are interested in helping with the planning of this event, please come see me! And of course, we hope many of you will attend. More info coming soon.

Hopefully you have noticed the new wrought iron fencing that has been installed around the whole museum grounds. This was necessary to help us combat the many building material thefts that have recently occurred. I am requesting a new front entrance gate next – automatic open/close would be my preference!

The coming months are our busiest months, so thank you again for being here and helping us take care of the only Ancestral O'Odham site preserved in the City of Phoenix.



Resource Corner

Exploring the Hohokam: Prehistoric Desert Peoples of the American Southwest.
University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

https://search.lib.asu.edu/discovery/fulldisplay?vid=01ASU_INST:01ASU&tab=LibraryCatalog&docid=alma991004245859703841&context=L&searchscope=MyInstitution&lang=en

Religion on the Rocks: Hohokam Rock Art, Ritual Practice, and Social Transformation. University of Utah Press
<https://uofupress.com/books/religion-on-the-rocks/>

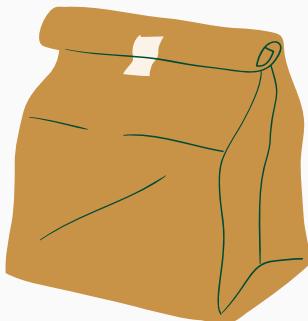
The Hohokam Millennium.
School of Advanced Research Press, Santa Fe.
<https://www.unmpress.com/9781930618817/the-hohokam-millennium/>



What's New in the Volunteer Program - An Update from Amereece

Fingerprinting Procedure

We now have an approved Fingerprint Procedure along with billing accounts. Volunteers who work with our school groups are required to have a Fingerprint clearance card. Volunteers who are required to have a fingerprint card will receive an email in January with instructions on how to complete this process. If you receive this email, please complete this process as soon as possible. If you have not received an email with instructions on completing the fingerprinting process, it means that your volunteer position does not require a fingerprint clearance card, and no action is needed from you. If you have any questions about whether you need to obtain a fingerprint clearance card, please feel free to reach out to me, and I can provide you with that information.



Volunteer Monthly Lunches

Starting this spring, we will have volunteer lunches on both Friday and select Saturdays. The Saturday schedule will be subject to Museum events and Community Room availability. I hope that having Lunches during the week and weekends will encourage more volunteers to attend the meetings and training sessions. I want these sessions to be accessible to all. The schedule for Saturday is intended to allow more volunteers to participate. These Lunches are catered and designed to help with volunteer position training and general Museum knowledge.

Volunteer Board

I am still updating our Volunteer Board in the Museum Office hallway. Several of you have decorated a jar for me to attach your photo to. Not everyone has decorated a jar yet. If you'd like to decorate your own jar, please stop by my desk for one. If you do not want to decorate a jar for the board, that is perfectly fine. My nieces volunteered to decorate some jars for us. I have decorated jars for you to pick from at my desk. I will also be emailing anyone who has not decorated a jar or taken a volunteer photo to arrange for these items to be completed.





2025 Recap

2025 has been a wonderful year at SVM.

Together, you have logged an approximate total of 7,418 hours.

January: 590 hrs.

February: 614 hrs.

March: 591 hrs.

April: 655 hrs.

May: 262 hrs.

June: 289 hrs.

July: 433 hrs.

August: 433 hrs.

September: 529 hrs.

October: 840 hrs.

November: 762 hrs.

December: 1,260 hrs.

That is approximately 2,235 more hours than 2024!

We have had approximately 10,127 total Visitors at the Museum!

January: 1,491

February: 1,543

March: 1,763

April: 1,357

May - September: Closed

October: 1,038

November: 1,712

December: 1,223

None of this would have happened without all of you!



Birthday Shout Outs!

Some of our Volunteers have recently had a Birthday. We would like to wish the following Volunteers a Happy Birthday!

Diana Dean-Spurgeon
Bill Enman

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



Stabilization of the Va'aki - A Mudslingers Update by Brian

S'edav Va'aki is home to one of the few remaining platform mounds in Arizona, and preserving such a large earthen structure is as much of a community effort as was its construction. The process of using Adobe to stabilize the structure is done in a manner that emulates the methods used in the original building of the mound, providing the best and most historically accurate technique to ensure the site's ongoing preservation. For many years now, the group known as the Mudslingers has completed this work, and the activity involved very much lives up to the name. "Puddled adobe", the construction style utilized by the Ancestral O'odham, involves the throwing of adobe during application, with the force of impact being crucial in ensuring proper adhesion, which is a critical component of any earthen architecture construction.





Stabilization of the Va'aki Continued

From mixing the adobe using material at the site, to hauling buckets and water to the throwing itself, our volunteers are putting in the hard work it takes to keep the cultural heritage of the site preserved in a way that allows our visitors to see, up close and in person, the architectural and engineering prowess of the Ancestral O'odham. Similar historical sites around the Southwest utilize more permanent and modern stabilization techniques, which inevitably degrade and remove the essence of what makes a place like S'edav Va'aki special. By preserving the structure in the same way and with the same materials it was constructed, we honor the legacy of the history of the O'odham in the Salt River Valley by rolling up our sleeves, slinging some mud, and maintaining one of the only places left we can connect to the past this way.

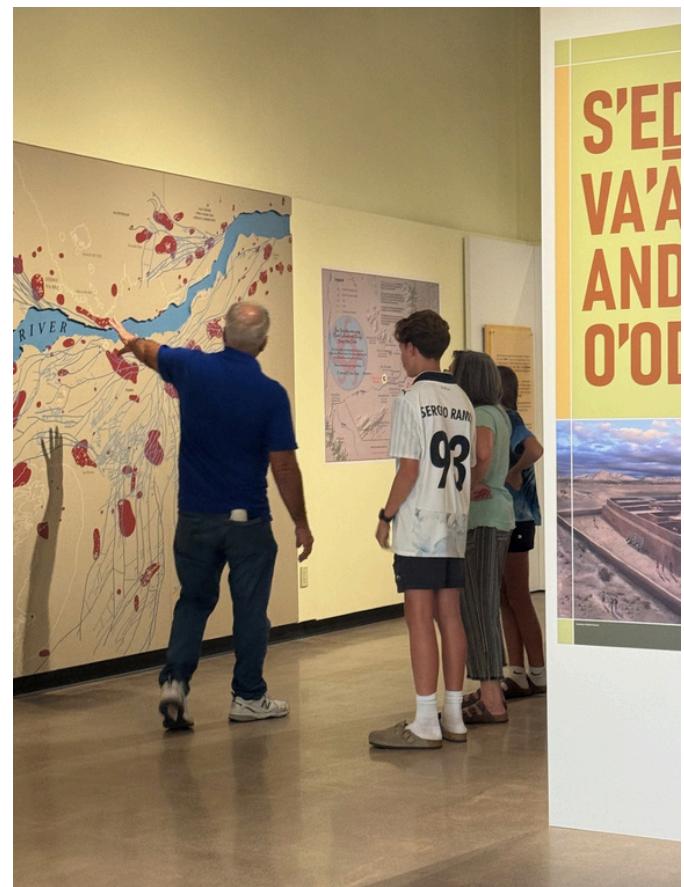




Volunteers Help Make Learning Fun - An Education Update by Adriana

The S'edav Va'aki Museum Education Crew has been busy since our grand re-opening in October! We've hosted many school groups visiting multiple times a week and even a few on weekends, including energetic robotics clubs interested in archaeology. We've painted hundreds of plaster petroglyphs for the school crafts and helped with event days filled with educational information and activities for our guests.

A huge part of how we are able to accomplish all of this is due to our wonderful volunteers. Our Engagement Guide Volunteers have stepped up to give introductions to school groups, as well as present the artifact cart for field trips and on event days. You have painted broken, plaster pieces, which are then given to students so that they can create their own petroglyphs. In addition, our Engagement Guide Volunteers have helped pass out craft materials to school groups, inspired students to be creative, and assisted with cleaning up the inevitable plaster dust mess. The petroglyphs you helped create are also brought to outreaches so that members of the community can participate and learn about the importance of preserving sacred sites.





Volunteers Help Make Learning Fun Continued

All these fun experiences are possible because of you! Not only do we appreciate all your help, but we are genuinely so happy to see you walk through our doors and share a bit of your lives with us. There are some exciting, new developments taking place as well! We will soon be adding new educational activities, which means new opportunities for volunteers. We are also hoping for new outreach opportunities and would love our volunteers to join us, especially if you are interested in bringing your enthusiasm to the community.

The SVM Education Department is very grateful for all that you do. We wish you a lovely end to the year and can't wait to see you in 2026!"





What's New in the Museum - Changes Coming to the Museum Store

Come see the exciting changes happening in the store. Thanks to our wonderful volunteers and the ongoing efforts of the S'edav Va'aki Museum Foundation, we are pleased to announce new and upcoming changes that will expand the visitor experience. We have new products from O'Odham, Hopi, and Navajo artists, and we are proud to display featured logo items, including t-shirts and hoodies, in fresh, seasonal colors. Our newest addition to the store is a lovely, glass display cabinet that showcases our new items and artists "in a new light."

Upcoming improvements in January will involve replacing existing slatwall and removing current wood shelving with the goal of opening up the floor and creating a bright and more inviting space, not only for our customers, but also for our stellar volunteers - Shirley, Diane, Diana, Bill and Julie. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your generosity in making the store shine. Stop by the store, see the new changes, and consider joining our team. It's a great learning experience. We provide training on the point of sale system, store and product management, and personalized exposure of artists and their works. The store is key to the education of the public, and it is a great place to work.





48th Annual Indian Market

The 48th annual S'edav Va'aki Museum Indian Market took place on December 13th and 14th at the museum, attracting hundreds of guests. The event featured main stage entertainment by various performers, including Tony and Violet Duncan, ChiChino Spirit, O'odham Dance Group, Gabriel Ayala, and Gertie N the T.O. Boyz. Food vendors like Sunny Concessions, Tammy & Chris's FryBread, and Chef Mario Etcitty's The Rez, an Urban Eatery, offered delicious treats.

The Ki:him (Village) cultural demonstrators provided interactive experiences in activities like beading, hoop dancing, storytelling, bow/arrow, weaving, basketry, drumming, and gourd art. Native American artists from various locations, including Oklahoma, showcased their handmade items for sale.

Guests had the chance to explore the museum, gift shop, and the Va'aki, which was a hub of community activity for nearly 1500 years. Raffle items donated by artists were awarded to lucky attendees. Mark your calendars for next year's market on December 12 & 13, 2026.

Consider volunteering for next year's market! It's a fun way to meet really nice people and make a difference to the success of the Indian Market. Volunteer positions are available in many areas- Admissions, Raffle, Artist Hospitality, Parking, and more.

Check the foundation website for information and follow the Indian Market Facebook page for updates.



Thank You

SVM Volunteer and Staff Holiday Party

By Amereece

Thank you to everyone who joined the SVM staff for the annual Holiday Party. We had a great time, and I hope everyone enjoys their prizes. We even had several members from the Arts and Culture Department staff join our party, as well as a member from the City Volunteer Team. Our new Community Engagement Coordinator, Stephanie Joyner, called numbers for Bingo, while Nicole raffled off prizes. Everyone brought in a variety of wonderful dishes, and it was truly amazing.

If you could not make the Holiday Party, we still have a few goodie bags left over. The next time you are in the Museum, please see Amereece or Laura for a goodie bag.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED! IMPORTANT VOLUNTEER DATES

January

January 9th and 10th -
Volunteer Lunches /
Archaeology
January 15th -
Desert Watercolor Craft
January 24th
Teen Volunteer
Orientation
January 29th -
Museum Scavenger Hunt

February

February 12th -
We love the Desert
Craft Night
February 13th -
Volunteer Lunch /
Garden and Teen
Program
February 26th -
Museum Scavenger
Hunt

March

March 13th -
Volunteer Lunch / Crafts
and Outreaches
March 14th -
Ancient Technology Day

April

April 18-
Harmony Balancing Past
and Present Event
April 23rd -
Volunteer Appreciation
Dinner

May

May 8th and 9th -
Volunteer Lunch /
Summer Plans for the
Museum
May 18th -
International Museum
Day

WE NEED
YOUR HELP

