



From Left to right: Madison Link, Brandon White, Jennifer Warren, Ellen Snyder, Abby Ruby, Dallas Willoughby, Annie Warner, Eric Welsh



The CNC cabin

Environmental Dream Guides Local Students

by Kelly Tolbert, Recreation Coordinator, City of Prescott • Photos by Kelly Tolbert

Prescott Unified School District was challenged during pandemic conditions to find a safe, healthy way to begin the school year...

The City of Prescott Recreation Services Department owes much of its success to its vital community partnerships. The life cycle of these partnerships can be ongoing, one-time, or cyclical in nature. A recently revived partnership (partially due to COVID-19) between the Recreation Services Department and Prescott Unified School District at the Prescott Community Nature Center has fostered new partnerships with Prescott College, Arizona Serve and G.E.M. Environmental.

G.E.M. Environmental is a Prescott-based scientific charity bringing educational resources to underrepresented students through scholarships, paid internships and field experience within the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields.

It was founded by native Arizonan Eric Welsh. After graduating from



Northern Arizona State University, Eric formed a consulting agency and began working as a geologic consultant with individuals and small companies looking to claim mineral rights or expand operations on existing claims by completing basic survey, mapping and safety assessments on a contrac-

tual basis.

After earning a GeoCorps Internship with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which led to his being contracted as a liaison with the BLM in the Abandoned Mines Land (AML) Program in New Mexico assisting in their inventory and remediation project work as a geologic consultant, Eric decided to convert his consulting business into a nonprofit.

His dream is to support geoscience students in applying the knowledge they have acquired in school to practical industry applications to give them a better chance at landing a job in their area of study.

Prescott Unified School District was challenged during pandemic conditions to find a safe, healthy way to begin the school year, and one solution was to begin using the Community Nature Center (CNC) for outdoor

classroom space. A former Prescott student himself, Eric recalled learning experiences at the same space as a young science student dissecting owl scat. Having such a memorable experience inspired G.E.M. to continue the teaching legacy to students in the natural environment of the Community Nature Center.

During this same time, Arizona Serve — a program of Prescott College — partnered with the Recreation Services Department by filling a state AmeriCorps position to provide support to educators and students using the Community Nature Center. According to its website, Arizona Serve connects passionate people with transformative community projects to fight poverty.

This happened to be an ideal partnership, with adjacent Title IX schools Abia Judd and Granite Mountain primarily served daily. By providing support to PUSD, the CNC, and fulfilling Arizona Serve's goal of having their members develop the skills and experience to become the next generation of leaders working for a more

just society, this partnership creates an ideal balance.

During initial collaboration between G.E.M. Environmental staff and the Community Nature staff, G.E.M. recognized the potential to incorporate use of a National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) work crew, part of the AmeriCorps program, to help with projects at the CNC. Stemming from President Roosevelt's New Deal post Great Depression era recovery programs, the CCC experienced many changes but never went away completely. During the mid-1970s, Dr. Henry Dahlberg — a former PUSD educator and long-time caretaker at the CNC — used a NCCC crew to help maintain many of the features still found at the Community Nature Center today.

Starting mid-November, the Center once again will benefit from a NCCC work crew. Focusing on trail maintenance, improvements, invasive weed species removal, and various other nature based projects, the crew of 10 young males is scheduled to work for approximately four weeks Monday through Fridays. G.E.M. Environmental staff applied for the work crew and is facilitating this partnership for the City of Prescott.

While looking at more ways to fulfill the G.E.M. Environmental founder and Executive Director's vision of preparing students for the industry applications relevant to their education,

the local nonprofit is hoping to build a work crew of their own starting in March 2021. At its inception, the crew would consist of Prescott-based high school students working through the remainder of the calendar year to gain experience while working with local agencies.

Although recent times have proved difficult — challenging at best — it is crucial to lean on partnerships for the success of the organization. Pandemic uncertainty has left many people feeling anxious, uncomfortable in their solitude and coping with general grief for activities deemed unsafe.

These partnerships between the Prescott Unified School District, the Community Nature Center, Arizona Serve via Prescott College, G.E.M. Environmental, and the City of Prescott Recreation Services Department provide a real-life example of how organizations working together can more easily achieve their missions, reach more individuals, and benefit the community as a whole.

For more information on Prescott's Community Nature Center, visit www.prescottcommunitynaturecenter.org. For more information on G.E.M. Environmental and their various generous contributions they are providing to our community, visit their website at www.gemenvironmental.org. They are always looking for volunteers.

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Some rules created by PUSD students for the CNC property