

River Wranglers continue mission during pandemic

By Tina Carlsen
Carson River Wranglers

A long piece of shimmering blue plastic weaved through the grass and glinted in the sunlight, mimicking the Carson River.

A dozen curious students from Fremont Elementary School worked on "building" the Carson River's watershed by placing a card representing a place in the watershed at the proper location. Their Carson High School mentors, meanwhile, waited patiently and every so often nudged them with hints until all the cards were in their proper place. Everyone stood back to admire the completed model Carson River watershed.

These were pre-pandemic times for the River Wranglers. Created in 1994 to educate the public on water quality issues, the group incorporated into a 501(c)(3) non-profit in 2000. Their mission is to inspire youth through hands-on learning to explore, conserve and understand the importance of rivers in Northern Nevada's Great Basin watershed. The non-profit trains high-school students on aspects of the watershed, such as the water cycle, water quality and watershed conservation.

At Conserve the Carson River workdays (one of several River Wranglers programs), the high school mentors are assigned a group of elementary students,

and together they rotate through the activity stations during a field trip to the river.

"There is something special about students teaching students," says Linda Conlin, founding executive director of River Wranglers and emeritus board member. "The elementary students relate more to the high school students, and it is empowering for the high schoolers."

The pandemic has changed everything.

"We had to reinvent ourselves," says Darcy Phillips, River Wranglers executive director. "We increased our online presence and social media interactions, starting with short videos showcasing locations along the river."

The non-profit hired a teacher to help create virtual versions of the hands-on activity stations, ensuring they conformed to state standards.

"I've had incredibly positive feedback from other teachers," said Rachel Leach, a River Wranglers board member and teacher at Silver Stage Middle School. "Our goal is to make their lives easier while providing education on the Carson River watershed."

This is all accomplished with Phillips, a part-time AmeriCorps volunteer, and a volunteer board of directors who live throughout the watershed. The organization is working on positioning itself for the next 20 years, with an eye



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toward long-term fundraising.

"We have lots of great ideas here," said Dan Kaffer, a retired resource conservation professional and River Wranglers board member. "We envision a fall festival next year focusing on cottonwood habitat and conservation issues, and we are working on engaging individual donors as well."

The group would also like to increase its corporate and business sponsorships.

"I'm convinced once they know more about us and the amazing work we do, even more support will follow," says Tina Carlsen, a retired ecologist and River Wranglers secretary. "I'm really looking forward to the day we can once again get out into the broader

community." No doubt all of us are looking forward to the day we can once again get out and more fully enjoy what the Carson River watershed has to offer.

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