

# TIDINGS

*Durango & Cortez Adult Education Center Fall 2021 Newsletter*

## Unsung Heroes

*honoring the stellar educators at the core of adult education*

**“OH! I GET IT NOW!”**

One student’s sudden insight escapes the classroom. “I never understood percentages before,” she marvels and repeats the mathematical process her teacher, Mike Sneed, has just mapped out on the whiteboard.

Down the hall, students in the English-as-a-Second Language class are out of their seats, prowling the room. They point at objects, declaring

what each thing is called in English: *chair, book, cabinet*. When they don’t know the right word, their instructor, Jessica Wood, assists: *projector*.

Since late August, this has been the atmosphere inside the Adult Education Center’s Durango and Cortez campuses. The energy is exuberant. Everyone is delighted to return to in-person learning...most especially the teachers.

Throughout the pandemic, teachers everywhere launched themselves into learning new technologies. They adapted their curricula to multimedia platforms. They taught remote, then in person, then remote again. They got masked. They got vaccinated. They did all this and

more to preserve learning and the far-reaching benefits of an education.

Unfortunately, the Herculean efforts exacted a severe toll: one in four teachers has since bowed out of the teaching profession. Teaching is under siege now more than ever according to research conducted by the RAND Corporation, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers.

In a 2021 national survey, teachers—like healthcare workers—reported higher rates of burnout stress and depression. For instance, while 40% of adults in other professions experienced high stress working during the Covid-19

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*The AEC welcomes new and returning teachers and staff in 2021.*



# From the Director

I LOVE FALL'S SUBTLE CHANGES.

The arrival of cooler air and softer light. Slippers come out of the closet and the farmers' markets proffer roasted chiles and squash. Meanwhile the high country glows golden in preparation for change.

Autumn has always marked a time of preparation ahead of change. In days not so old, it was the time to stack firewood and preserve summer's harvests. Nowadays, we prep for back-to-school, steadier work schedules, and the winter holidays. This autumn, our Center's preparations happily included readying our classrooms for in-person learning. Currently, our Center has 87 students enrolled. We are all masked and physically distanced, none of which stems the wonderful sounds of enthusiastic learning from flowing into the hallways.



*Susan Hakanson,  
Executive Director*

Students at the Adult Education Center in Durango and Cortez are themselves preparing for change. Overcoming barriers like low English proficiency or lacking a high school diploma are major springboards to new careers and self-sufficiency. Data from the Department of Labor show that real wages, not adjusted for inflation, have dropped 20% in the past 40 years for those who have less than a high school diploma. Pandemic-related interruptions have further divested our learners of reliable wages. Despite the choppy economic waters that impact the funding sources our nonprofit school competes for, our entire team is resolute in our goal to serve our students and, in so doing, benefit the wider community.

As we approach our 35th year serving Southwest Colorado, we celebrate the 35 autumns when you—our neighbors and business allies—were always there to help us prepare. Whether it was through volunteerism, recommending our services to those in need, attending special events and graduation, or your generous donations, you have given us both the fuel and sustenance to thrive. We are grateful for your ongoing support.

The next time you trek the high country, please consider every tumbling leaf a golden thank you from all of our students who move on from our classrooms always prepared and forever changed.

Susan 

## Back to School



*These ESL students love returning to classroom learning.*



*Cyd Franken's HSE students can attend in person or online.*



*Above: "You can't see it, but we are smiling about math," says Mike Sneed.  
Below: Masking and vaccinations make learning possible in Durango and Cortez.*





## Heroes continued...

pandemic, 75% of teachers suffered burnout.

The pandemic is proof positive that teachers are a precious resource. Too often, their victories go unsung. Thus we devote this newsletter to honoring our teachers! First, a hearty thanks to the teachers and staff who endure year-after-year. Next, a joyous welcome to the new teachers and support staff, all of whom are professional powerhouses fully committed to shepherding individuals out of poverty and underemployment, into more rewarding careers and self-sustaining opportunities.

### **Mike Sneed, HSE Math/Science**

Mike just moved to Durango from Chandler, Arizona with his wife and son. He taught Junior High science for the last 20 years, 15 of which were at the same school. He enjoys reading and the outdoors. He can't wait until winter when he can get some skiing in.

Mike chuckles, "I am looking forward to teaching math and science to adults and not having to deal with Junior High *drama*."

### **Jessica Wood, ESL Teacher**

Jessica is from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She received her undergraduate degree at Appalachian State University

and took her degree abroad to Thailand to teach English to middle grade students. Afterwards, Jessica returned home to finish her master's degree in TESOL at the University of Pittsburgh. Now she has followed her dream of coming out west to explore! With her two dogs, Jessica enjoys camping, hiking, and finding fresh adventures.

"I am also looking forward to cultivating my teaching practices here at the Durango Adult Education Center," she notes.

### **Melissa Watters, Career Advisor, Cortez**

Melissa grew up in the Chicago area and found her way to Southwest Colorado after vowing to live there during a visit when she was 14 years old. She enjoys hiking and camping and spending time with her very spoiled dog, her very fluffy cat, and her best friend and husband Jeff. Melissa has an extensive background in education and work-based

learning. She has been in education for over twenty years and prior to that she was an environmental scientist and engineer.

As she puts it, "I have always strived to innovate education to make it meaningful and impactful in student's lives."



**James Leonard, HSE Humanities/Social Studies**  
James' upbringing in the Colorado mountains inspired him to study anthropology and sustainability at Oregon State University.

"I am in my first year of teaching and I'm in the process of obtaining a Master's in Education from Fort Lewis College," he notes.

James enjoys weekend backpacking with his friends. He also has a passion for gardening and fermenting food. During the summer breaks you can catch James traveling and volunteering in Central and South America, learning about sustainable

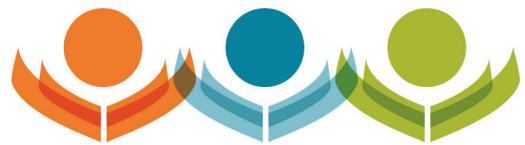
living from local families. During the fall, James enjoys mushroom hunting and visiting Utah's Puebloan archaeological sites.

### **Angie Cohen, Student Services Specialist, Durango**

Out in a dusty old West Texas town, a young girl left home and set out to find green trees and moisture. She traveled far and wide to places like Hawaii, California, Arizona, and Colorado.



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## Adult Education Center

*Serving Southwest Colorado*

701 Camino del Rio, Ste. 301  
Durango, CO 81301

## Upcoming Events

**October 18-28**

Session II Registration Opens

**Wednesday, January 19**

Cortez HSE Graduation Ceremony

**Thursday, January 20**

Durango HSE Graduation Ceremony

**January TBD**

Snowdown Spellebration

Durango's rootin'est, tootin'est spelling bee  
supporting the Adult Education Center

## Our Mission

The Durango Adult Education Center, a caring learning community, fills educational gaps by providing the skills and knowledge necessary for livable wage careers, post-secondary education, and social and economic mobility.



## Heroes concluded...

Hawaii, California, Arizona, and Colorado.

"This was me 30 years ago and I'm grateful to have finally found Durango. I've been here for two years with my little family and they love it here too," Angie says.

Angie has served as school secretary in San Diego and made maps using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for parks, water resources, and utilities.

"Working here at the DAEC, I really enjoy getting to know each and every student that comes through our doors. I am happy to be part of a student's educational journey and helping them in all ways to make their dreams a reality."



Save the dates! The Durango and Cortez Adult Education Center will host **Winter Graduation Ceremonies at 6:00pm, January 19th (in Cortez) and January 20th (in Durango).**

For more details, contact Jenny Mason, 970-385-4354.