

Meet the Board

BOARD OFFICERS 2018-2019

Bill Balassi, President
Yolanda Homann, Vice President
Jo Fairbanks, Treasurer
Yolanda Garcia, Secretary

BOARD MEMBERS 2018-2019

Joan Escapule
Brian Hanson
Dave Hutton
Laurel Ladwig
Craig Marshall
Patti Plagge



Bill Balassi
President

Bill Balassi has been a volunteer at the Rio Grande Nature Center since 1994. Over the years, he has led interpretive walks and twilight hikes, volunteered in the Nature Shop, shared his spotting scope with visitors in the Observation Room, served on the Friends' board, and lined up bands to provide music (for free) at the Friends' annual Herbfest. He holds a Ph.D in English from UNM and taught English for more than 20 years, followed by a second career as a technical writer and project management professional, retiring in 2014. Bill enjoys cooking, hiking, making music with friends, and spending time with his family, especially his three grandchildren.



Yolanda Homann
Vice President

A computer operator employed at GTECH, Yolanda has been with the Friends of the Rio Grande Nature Center since its inception in 1984. She volunteers "behind the scenes." Yolanda is a self-proclaimed neighborhood activist who provides balance to the Board of Directors by voicing neighborhood concerns.



Jo Fairbanks
Treasurer

Now retired, Jo was on the faculty of the UNM Masters in Public Health degree program and director of the Public Health Outreach Education Program. A New Mexico resident since 1965, she has intensive experience in academia and as a public health practitioner throughout the state. She has co-authored two public health textbooks and conducted research in health disparities. Jo has previous board and supervisory experience and has been a Nature Center enthusiast and volunteer for many years.



Yolanda Garcia
Secretary

“I started visiting the RGNC when I moved here from California in late 2001,” says Yolanda, “after retiring from a defense contracting company in data management. I immediately knew I wanted to volunteer here and I attended the volunteer training class in 2002. Upon completion, I started working in the garden but when summer arrived, I decided I would move indoors and have been working at the front desk and in the Friends’ office ever since.”



Joan Escapule

“I have been an east mountain resident since 1993,” says Joan. “I took the volunteer training class in 2017 and have been working at the front desk and joining as many twilight hikes as have been available. I spent many years volunteering at several east mountain schools and was the east mountain AYSO chapter referee administrator for six years. Having a place where people of all ages can interact and learn about nature is a mission that I am very excited to be a part of.”



Brian Hanson

Brian Hanson volunteers for Albuquerque Open Space as well as for the Rio Grande Nature Center. He has led the plant restoration team at the Nature Center since November 2015. He has a passion for observing wildlife and establishing native vegetation. After receiving a BS degree in wildlife biology in 1974, Brian has enjoyed the outdoors and been deeply involved in report writing and contributing to conservation through various venues. Brian retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a fish and wildlife biologist after 30 years, mostly in New Mexico.



Dave Hutton

A physicist with extensive experience in nuclear physics and high speed electronics development, Dave Hutton is a retired science and engineering manager from Honeywell in Albuquerque. Dave is a former president of the Friends and a member of the Friends’ research committee.



Craig Marshall

I was born and raised in Los Angeles and have a master's degree in civil engineering from Purdue University. After graduation, I worked in heavy and highway construction where I have held positions of design engineer, project engineer, estimator, project manager, and area manager for firms in Illinois, Texas, and New Mexico. I also worked overseas on projects in Australia and Estonia. I am a hiker, backpacker, and, in another life, was president of the El Paso Climbers Club. Since volunteering at the Nature center, I have worked in the Nature Shop, fed hummingbirds, helped at festivals and the macro count, and spent a lot of time at the front desk.



Patti Plagge

Patti Plagge has been an active volunteer in the RGNC native plant garden for over four years and thoroughly enjoys the garden. Retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as budget chief for the refuge program, Patti worked for the Department of the Interior for over 30 years in various programs, including the refuge system, fisheries, and administration. She loves birdwatching and gardening in her yard and at the Nature Center. "I am honored to be part of the Friends' board," she says.