

# Red Hot Children's Fiesta

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Children make animal masks at the Gila Conservation Education Center booth at... (Courtesy photo)

SILVER CITY - More than 2,000 children and parents turned out for the Red Hot Children's Fiesta held last month in "Penny" Park.

This year's fiesta was held in conjunction with the Sixth Annual Gila River Festival, and was the largest fiesta to date, said Kendra Milligan, with the Grant County Community Health Council, which organizes the event.

The biggest draw was "Zoo To You," from the Albuquerque BioPark, and the golden eagle brought by Jim Rogers, said Milligan.

"This was the Fiesta's ninth year, and each time it just gets better and better thanks to all the community pitching it to make it a success," she said.

"Zoo To You," exhibitor, Cheryl Riggs, was impressed by the community participation.

"We never would have guessed so many children would come to see the animals," she said. "It was a great opportunity to visit Silver City and give back to this community since "Zoo To You" was begun by the generosity of Phelps Dodge years ago."

An African armadillo, which rolled into a ball, and a porcupine full of spines, were big draws at the exhibit. Families also were awestruck by the golden eagle brought by Jim Rogers, which gave children an opportunity to see this incredible raptor up close and personal.

"The eagle was so incredible. All the animals were wonderful," said Christine Stites, who brought her children, Cyrus and Julie Ann, to participate in the fiesta. Stephanie Maynes comes every year with her children including daughter, Jocelyn

Provencio, "It's wonderful for the children. The fiesta is the one day we can see what's available for the children in our community."

The fiesta is a collaborative effort of the community service providers and coordinated with the aid of the Health Council. The fiesta is part of the effort to enhance family resiliency in the county, one of the Health Council's top priorities. A community action team works on the fiesta and other efforts to bring families closer together.



"We want to enhance families' ability to communicate and access to services when needed, before a concern becomes a problem," Milligan said. "The fiesta gives families a chance to connect directly with the services available in our county for the benefit of their children."

The Family Resiliency Team meets monthly and welcomes all input, ideas and participation from the community.

Additional volunteer aid for the fiesta was provided by students from WNMU's nursing students, occupational therapy, and criminal justice programs, along with the Juvenile Probation and Parole community service program, and the Town of Silver City Park's Department.

"Without the volunteers the fiesta wouldn't happen. They staff the entrances, decorate, offer aid to the booths, and get the park in tip-top shape before and after the fiesta."

During the event, hundreds of children visited the Gila Conservation Education Center's booth, where they learned about insects, mammals, plants found in the area of the Gila River.

"The Gila is one of the most ecologically diverse areas on the planet," said Program Director Dr. Kathy Whiteman. "Literally thousands of plant and animal species can be found in the Gila Wilderness. Ecosystem services provided through such an in-tact, diverse flora and fauna result in the Gila River having some of the cleanest water found in any river system in North America. The Gila is often used as a baseline for measuring the water quality of other North American river systems."

The Gila Conservation Education Center provides hands-on science education programs for more than 3,000 students in Grant and Catron counties each year. For more information about the group, its programs and volunteer opportunities, call (575) 388-8265, or visit [www.gcecnm.org](http://www.gcecnm.org).

To learn more about the Grant County Community Health Council or the Family Resiliency Team call 388-1198 ext.10.