

**BORDERLANDS THEATER PRESS RELEASE  
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**BORDERLANDS STANDS WITH SAGUAROS TO CELEBRATE BELOVED  
DESERT ICON FOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CENTENNIAL**

TUCSON, AZ—Borderlands Theater announces “I Stand with Saguaros,” the first act of a three-act engagement of theater and activities celebrating the saguaro cactus in partnership with Saguaro National Park.

“I Stand with Saguaros” is a public campaign to befriend, support, and connect with the saguaro, icon of the Sonoran Desert. Participants are invited to stand with a saguaro for an hour (or less) in Saguaro National Park, in celebration of the National Park Service’s 100<sup>th</sup> year. Members of the public can join musicians, poets and writers, interfaith communities, and others in standing with saguaros every weekend in the Park from April 16 through May 31.

**THE CAMPAIGN**

Part participatory theater, part meditative nature experience, “I Stand with Saguaros,” aims to connect urban residents, out-of-town visitors, and youth to the saguaro cactus, awaken a deeper understanding of local geography and ecology, break down notions of "border" between humans and nature, and foster a greater stewardship of and sense of belonging within the Sonoran Desert.

Participants are invited to stand (or sit) with a saguaro cactus in the Park for an hour (or less) and then encouraged to share their experience via social media, using #IStandwithSaguaros. Group stands are organized throughout the duration of the campaign and feature anchor groups including musicians, poets & writers, and members of Tucson’s faith communities (See below for dates and groups). All stands are free and open to the public. People can also stand individually or organize their own group events.

“I Stand with Saguaros” is the first series of events in a larger project called “Standing with Saguaros,” which received funding by National Endowment for the Arts “Imagine Your Parks” Initiative to support projects engaging people through the arts with memorable places and landscapes of the National Park System.

**PROJECT RELEVANCE**

- Understanding the saguaro cactus: More than just icon, the saguaro cactus holds significance for the Tohono O’odham people who consider it an ancestor that gifts fruit every summer for the ritual rain ceremony. The cactus feeds and shelters dozens of desert creatures. Recently scientists have found its spines hold a record of climate data. While traditional outdoor activities often consider the park as "scenery" or "playground," this project aims to inspire a deeper understanding of the saguaro cactus and the many ways it contributes to the desert ecosystem.
- Fellow community members: Earlier this year, an act of vandalism in Saguaro National Park in which several saguaros were chopped down was met by [extensive media coverage](#) and a loud public outcry. Many commented that the assault on the cacti felt like an assault on family members. The saguaro becomes the beacon that calls people together to consider themselves as a species among species, members of a community that includes plants and animals.
- Health benefits of nature: Scientific research reported in the [New York Times](#) (“How Walking in Nature Changes the Brain,” Jul. 22, 1015) suggests that spending time outside can impact our brains in ways that can improve our mental health. Anxiety, depression, and other mental illness tend to afflict people living in urban areas at a higher rate than those living outside cities. This project offers opportunities for city residents to spend time outside in nature.
- Supporting the protection of public lands and significant species: Saguaro National Monument was designated by President Herbert Hoover in 1933. It became a National Park in 1994, and now protects over 91,000 acres of the Sonoran Desert, including the saguaro cactus along with barrel, cholla, and prickly pear cactus, and also endangered or threatened species such as lesser long-nosed bad and the Mexican spotted owl.

- Drawing Hispanic and urban audiences to the Park: The project also aims to support two current initiatives of Saguaro National Park to bring new audiences into the park as well as expand the park's outreach range into urban areas. Specific audience expansion is aimed for Tucson's Hispanic community, a community traditionally served and represented by Borderlands Theater.

## PROJECT ORIGINS

The project was conceived by guest director, Kimi Eisele, a multidisciplinary artist in Tucson, who explored how to dance a duet with a saguaro in a pilot project funded by the Tucson Pima Arts Council. In that project Eisele stood with a saguaro for an hour. "It was the simplest kind of dance," Eisele said. "I stood there and looked around and looked at the cactus. It was profound."

Eisele teamed up with Borderlands to expand the project and incorporate live dance and theater performances.

Marc Pinate, producing director of Borderlands Theater said the project opens up doors to consider stories of the Sonoran Desert in new ways.

## SCHEDULED PARTICIPANTS AND PARTNERS

Partnering and collaborating organizations include:

- **Saguaro National Park** will host saguaro stands and live performances, promote the project, connect project artists to saguaro experts, and provide content ideas for The Saguaro Minutes.
- **Ha:San Preparatory School** will be the site of an artist residency program, including field trips to SNP and involvement in performances, for theater and traditional arts students.
- **Ironwood Tree Experience** will partner on youth programming for teens both in and out of the park.
- **City High School** will organize a senior class trip to Saguaro National Park with project artists and Park staff for a saguaro stand and related activities.
- **Hollinger Middle School** will organize a class trip of 7<sup>th</sup> grade science students to Saguaro National Park with project artists and Park staff for a saguaro stand and related activities.
- **University of Arizona Poetry Center** will organize a group stand/writing workshop with project artists and local poets. Material generated potentially will feed Saguaro Minutes podcast and final Park performances.
- **KXCI Community Radio** will host The Saguaro Minutes podcast and aid in reaching out to local musicians for group saguaro stands/serenades.
- **Western National Parks Association** will help sponsor and provide content for The Saguaro Minutes and may host related public gatherings/events.
- **Next Generation Ranger Corps** will assist in drawing young and diverse audiences to project activities.

## FUTURE ACTIVITIES

*Standing with Saguaros* takes place in three acts, all of which invite participation from the public:

- **Act 1: STAND** invites people to stand (or sit) for an hour (or less) with a saguaro cactus in the Park from April 16-May 31 and to post their photo and discoveries on social media with #IStandwithSaguaros.
- **Act 2: STORY** shares stories and information about saguaros via a radio podcast on KXCI, starting mid-April and via live events, including a June saguaro fruit harvesting workshop.
- **Act 3: CELEBRATE** brings live dance and theater performances to Saguaro National Park in November 2016.

## ABOUT PROJECT DIRECTOR KIMI EISELE

Kimi Eisele is a dancer/choreographer, director, and writer. Her work is grounded in explorations of place and environment, community collaboration, & civic participation. She has directed multiple dance projects for New ARTiculations Dance Theatre, exploring issues such as endangered species, water, urban revitalization, and food systems. She received the 2012 AZ Commission on the Arts' Artist Project Grant and the Tucson Pima Arts Council's 2014 "Lumie" Award for Established Artist.

## ABOUT BORDERLANDS THEATER

Borderlands' mission is to develop and produce theater and arts education programs that reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Southwest border region. Borderlands is recognized nationally for our theater and educational programs reflecting the diverse voices of the U.S./ Mexico border region. Recent productions include *Más*, about the

people involved in the movement to save Mexican American Studies Classes in the Tucson Unified School District, and *Barrio Stories*, a site specific promenade style theatrical event honoring Tucson's first Mexican American barrio.

Borderlands views the border not only as a physical demarcation but also as a metaphor opening up our work to explore the borders of theatre and performance. We are interested in how performances and activities in the park can reframe standard notions of "audience" and "performer" and contribute to a broader sense of community belonging and "place-keeping."

## **SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES**

When/Where:

- April 16: Sunrise 6-7:30am Saguaro National Park West
- April 23: Sunset 5:30-7pm Saguaro National Park East (Featuring local musicians)
- May 1: Sunset 5:30-7 Saguaro National Park West (Featuring Tucson poets & writers)
- May 7: Morning 7:30-9am Saguaro National Park East (Featuring Tucson communities of faith)
- May 15: Morning 7-8:30 am Saguaro National Park West (Featuring artists from The Drawing Studio)
- May 29: Sunset 6-7:30 pm Saguaro National Park East

Additional group stands can be scheduled. Contact Kimi Eisele to facilitate.

**Sign Up:** <http://www.signupgenius.com/go/30e0a4aafab22a2fc1-istand>

**Cost:** Free. Park fees waived if you mention ("standing with saguaros"). Consider making a \$10 donation to continue the protection of public lands and threatened species.

For more information visit: [www.StandingwithSaguaros.org](http://www.StandingwithSaguaros.org)

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