

La Conexión

Mexicana

Escapes RV Club Chapter 8

Spring 2019

Enrichment at the zoo

President's Message

La Conexión Mexicana

Escapees RV Club Chapter 8

Member of Escapees Social Network, Inc.

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Website: www.mexicanconnection08.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/EscapeesMexicanConnection

On the cover:

Coastal Baja California is spectacular. Rugged landscape meet aquamarine waters where life thrives. This photo was taken during the superbloom on a Jeep ride during the Rolling Rally near La Jolla Beach Camp Photo by Jane McClay.

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The Mission of Chapter 8, which was organized in 1985, is to:

- ◆ Introduce Escapees Chapter 8 Mexican Connection members to RV travel in Mexico, its traditions, culture, scenery, food, and folklore.
- ◆ Travel South of the Border and give back more than the enriching experiences we gain, through charity donations and business patronization.
- ◆ Enable Chapter 8 members to feel comfortable to return to Mexico for future Rallies as well as their own road trip adventures.



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Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/EscapesMexicanConnection

Membership Reminder: Chapter 8 membership is due in April of each year. If you haven't already, please renew on the Chapter 8 website's [Membership Renewal page](#).

Escapees Chapter 8 Officers

President — Kassandra Dennis, kassandra@ekdennis.com

Immediate Past President — Ed Dennis, ed@ekdennis.com

1st VP & 2020 Wagonmaster — **Vacant, please volunteer**

2nd VP & 2021 Wagonmaster — **Vacant, please volunteer**

Treasurer — Steve Bufty, stevebufty@yahoo.com

Assistant Treasurer — Ron Wroblewski

Secretary — Dory Johnson, dorytx@aol.com

Membership — Jay Hault, hault2@yahoo.com

Webmaster — Billy Johnson, billyptx@aol.com

Newsletter Editor — Joseph M. de Leon, chap8newsletter@gmail.com

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Historian — Debby Clark, debrv@me.com

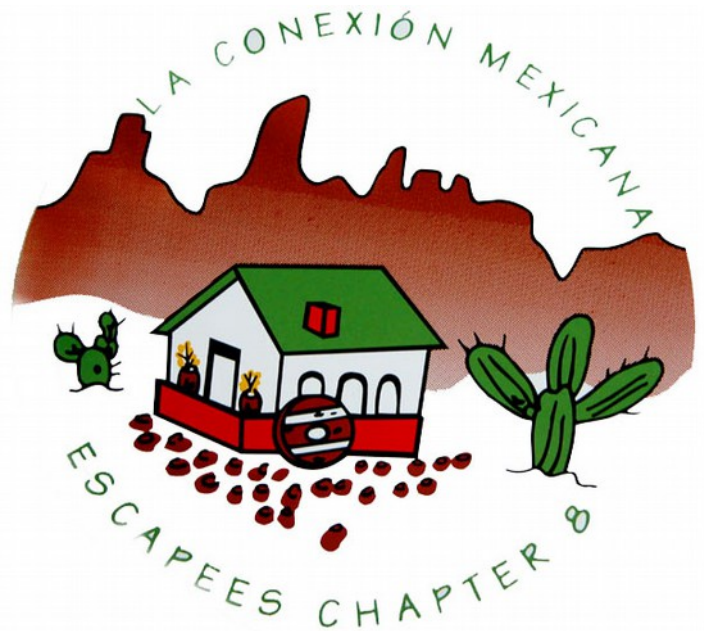
Membership Dues Increase

Steve Bufty

Hear ye! Hear ye!

Effective May 1st, Membership annual dues will be increasing from \$6 to \$10 per Membership Year. Memberships expire on April 30th and any Renewals or New Member dues payments made before that date will be at the old rate of \$6 per Membership Year. Payments for Membership Renewals or New Member dues made after April 30th of this year will be at the new \$10 rate. Save "big bucks" and sign up now!

Membership in good standing is required to register for and attend a Chapter 8 Rally. So, take advantage of the current "big buck" savings and get those Memberships current now!



Editor's Notebook

Joseph M. de Leon

It's with reluctance and disappointment that I have tendered my resignation as newsletter editor of *La Conexión Mexicana*. The past year has been a wonderful exercise in reliving the 2018 Wine to Whales caravan and getting a glimpse of the 2019 Rolling Rally through your photos and accounts.

If I've learned anything while RV traveling, it's that plans can very quickly change and going with the flow usually leads to wonderfully unexpected destinations.

I accepted a permanent full-time job with the U.S. Forest Service, no small feat, since it often takes seasonal workers years to work into the ranks. Much as I did with this publication, I put my all into my job as a front desk clerk and was rewarded with longer hours, weekend assignments, and out-of-state training opportunities, all of which I relish. With limited availability and paltry access to high-speed internet came the realization that I must count this edition of the newsletter as my last. However, the memories and friendships I made along the way will stay with me for years to come.

Joseph is a former graphic artist, web producer, and newspaper reporter currently working for the U.S. Forest Service in Republic, Washington. He travels in a Class C motorhome with his wife Denise and their dog Kimbo.



By the end of April, I will have moved back into my 23-foot Class C motorhome called Loretta. This winter in Northeast Washington she lived under cover while I stayed cozy in a tiny house. Photo by Joseph M. de Leon

Webmaster's Log

Bill Johnson

Hello all, my name is Bill Johnson, I am the new Webmaster for Chapter 8. I have more than 40 years of experience working in the IT or IT-related fields and look forward to making the Chapter 8 Web experience a great one.

My first task is to learn the application and then make the changes necessary that will assist in giving great information to our Chapter. If you haven't

already visited the Chapter 8 Website recently, please do. You'll notice a number of changes, including Ellie Kidd's PowerPoint presentation.

My wife, Dory, who is the newly elected Secretary of Chapter 8, and I are both retired and love RVing; however, we are not full-time because we also love our city and home. We stay on the road about 6-7 months a year. Just to show you I am a level headed kind of guy, here is a picture of me with my head in an alligator's mouth.



Hmmm, no internet viruses in here. Courtesy photo

Historian's Record

Debby Clark

We had a lovely time in México with the Chapter 8 folks this year. For me, it was also about thinking about the job of the Historian, the processes that need to be in place, and how to have all Chapter members benefit, as need be, from the archive.



The Chapter 8 Historian's job is to document details from a rally to make it easier for future Wagonmasters to benefit from that stored knowledge, for example, best parking team practices. Photo by Connie Farley

As Historian, I keep a record of all of the meeting minutes, charity and financial reports, and also planning documents, other information and pictures of the Rallies so that a future Wagonmaster can have the benefit of that stored knowledge. I believe it is valuable information, not only for the Board, but for Wagonmasters, and in some cases, members at large.

In the future, there are plans to have some of that archive available online via secure login on the website for Board members and Wagonmasters for their information and planning. If you have any suggestions for me to consider as Historian, I'm all ears!

Row Representative

Bob Elliott

The Mexican Connection information table at Escapade (ROW) was a big success. The Chapter 8 table drew a lot of interest with 107 people signing up to get more information.

There were too many Chapter 8 members to mention, all volunteering to help: set up, man the table, clean up and take the materials back to storage in Yuma.



The Chapter 8 information table was quite popular during this year's Escapade. Photo by Bob Elliott

Many volunteers helped put on a social late Tuesday afternoon. The social provided nachos and included presentations by Ellie Kidd and Wagonmaster Cassandra Dennis. The room was supposed to handle 200 guests and was nearly full. Ellie did an incredible job with her PowerPoint presentation - illustrating how much fun Mexican Connection is.



Who doesn't love nachos? This year's Escapade attendees certainly had their fill of the tasty snack. Photo by Bob Elliott

Treasurer's Report

Steve Bufty

We had a wonderfully successful Rally to Baja's Guadalupe Valley and to Punta Banda south of Ensenada, thanks to our great Wagonmaster and to all who volunteered and contributed. That pretty much includes everyone who was on the Rally. What a great group of people! Not only was the Rally a rousing success, but it all worked out financially with an unplanned surplus. This surplus was attributed to numerous things including skillful negotiating by our Wagonmaster, reductions in anticipated prices by such agents as Miguel Pabloff, our landlord at La Jolla Beach Camp, and by doing some things by group volunteerism instead of subletting those items out to caterers, such as our Welcome dinner and Valentine's breakfast.



Treasurer Steve Bufty

The net result was that the Rally produced enough surplus that in addition to the charities that we all supported, we were also able to send \$1,000 to Escapees CARE, as we very much like to do each year, plus put \$2,500 back into the Charity Fund as seed money for next year's Charity Drive (this year we had \$2,266 in such seed money from the previous year's Rally). We were also able to roll \$2,600 into our General Fund to support such ongoing expenses as our storage unit where we keep all of our year-to-year stuff, PayPal fees, Website support, Escapade costs, such as the Mexican Connection Social, which was so well done this year, and so many more Chapter expenses. Well done everyone!

Our Charity collections, including the seed money from the previous Rally, was distributed to the Gertrude Pearlman Theater for costumes for the Grupo Folklorica (\$500), to Zoologico Parque del Nino Jersey for a new transportable X-ray machine for use on their animals (\$3,500), to the Christmas Basket Fund for the needy in the local

Punta Banda community handled by Miguel Pabloff (\$2,500), and to the school adjacent to La Jolla Beach Camp, where in addition to the monetary donation (\$1,500), our group also donated supplies and an immeasurable amount of labor and love to repair and recondition the school playground and equipment at Escuela Primaria Rural. So, between these monetary donations of \$8,000 and the donation to Escapees CARE, we should all be proud of having contributed a total of \$9,000 to the needy causes of the communities where we visited and, of course, to the needy at our parent organization.

New Membership Dues money has been coming in from the many new contacts that we established at the "Row" table and at the social during the 59th Escapade in Tucson, and your Treasurer is on target to be able to submit a final Treasurer's Report and file our Income Taxes before the end of our Fiscal Year and to start a new year fresh on the 1st of May. The Treasurer and the newly appointed Assistant Treasurer, Ron Wroblewski, had a fruitful meeting before the close of the Escapade to exchange some of the Treasurer's knowledge base, and soon the tedious process of dealing with the bank to add Ron as a signatory to our account will begin. Based on previous such experience, that is anticipated to be a long and tedious process, but we will persevere!

Thank you all for your contributions, your patience in dealing with all my fiscal pickiness throughout the year and during the Rally, and we will look forward to another successful, fun, and benevolent year ahead.

Your Humble Treasurer,

Steve Bufty

Charity Committee Report

Nancy and Jay Hoult

The Charity committee would like to thank everyone for their participation in helping with the school playground rehabilitation, the funding of the x-Ray equipment for the zoo, funding new clothes and shoes for the Mexican children's dance group and donations for the Christmas baskets. Chapter 8 members also purchased local food supplies which were distributed to needed local families by charity committee members.



The Pabloff family found a baseball team to accept in-kind donations of baseballs and gloves. Courtesy photo

Of special mention were the many hours of labor by over 50 Rolling Rally attendees welding, sanding, painting and cleaning up the Punta Banda elementary school playground to the amazement and appreciation of teachers, students and their parents. Also, of note was a generous amount of In-Kind donations by both Rolling Rally attendees and a few stay-at-home SKPs. In-Kind donations are all manner of contributions that the Charity Committee distributes along the way.

I could not of had a better group to help me with all these projects! I am looking forward to working with Chapter 8 again next year. Thank you, one and all, for your help.

President's Message

Kassandra Dennis

Hola Amigos y Amigas,

What a wonderful time we had in Mexico! Many new friendships were made. While we get to travel on with some of you in the U.S.A., we left some new Friends behind in Mexico. The Familia Pabloff from La Jolla Beach Camp and Perla and her daughters from Zoologico Parque del Nino Jersey have already sent us emails on how much they miss us. All of our new friends are looking forward to having us return as individuals or as a group!



*Kassandra Dennis,
Chapter 8 Mexican
Connection President
and 2019 Rolling Rally
Wagonmaster.*

This year we had a rally of gentle adventure, local charity and lots of social time and happy times shared by all. While I was initially concerned about how everyone would handle the negative border rhetoric... all of you came through beautifully.

We had great Group Leaders in Jane & Terri McClay, Jack & Pat Mulhall, Jay & Nancy Hault, Terry & Lynn Schreiner, Jean Pedersen & Bob McComb, Bob Elliott & Cathy Dunham and a special salute to Jim McEver & Connie Farley for their awesome job organizing a fabulous Parking Team that got the job done no matter what the situation!



Group Leaders took a pre-trip to Tecate to help show group members everything needed to enjoy the border crossing. Photo by Cathy Dunham

The "Secret Ingredient" of Chapter 8 Rallies is Spirited Volunteers... and we had a lot of them! Like Al & Mata Lehman... and Donna Patten led the parade as Volunteers Extraordinaire. Jane McClay organized the Potrero welcome dinner. Karen Van Vliet the Valentine breakfast. Becky Tscherne beautifully decorated the pavilion at Potrero Park as well as our social room (aka "The Salon") at La Jolla Beach Camp.



Volunteers prepare the meal for the welcome dinner at Potrero County Park. Photo by Cathy Dunham

Many thanks also go to the Charity Committee (Nancy Hoult, Chairperson) raising approximately \$12,600 in direct cash donations, in-kind donation valuations, and individual attendee donations given directly to the Zoologico Parque del Nino and Punta Banda recipients. [Be sure to look for the awesome Charity activities elsewhere in this Newsletter.]

Having our Treasurer, Steve Bufty, along was a great asset that we dearly missed having last year. Few members realize just how much an "on the ball" treasurer contributes to Chapter 8.

After the rally, we had Board Meetings and "Brain Storming" sessions to accomplish the formidable task of updating our Bylaws and Standing Rules which were subsequently approved by the Escapees RV Club management.

On this note, we welcome several new Board Members: Secretary, Dory Johnson; Assistant Treasurer, Ron Wroblewski; and Webmaster, Bill Johnson. We thank our departing secretary Jean Pedersen for her diligent services.

Nancy Hoult and Donna Patten are in the process of putting some guidelines together for future Charity Committees for the Executive Board to review.

We had a great turn out at the Escapade! Our ROW staff was super and the ROW table and Social dinner were superbly organized by Cathy Dunham and Bob Elliott. We had a room full of old timers and new SKP's eager to join us on the next rally. Ellie Kidd topped off the evening with an artistic Power Point presentation highlighting our 100 happy Rolling Rally revelers. If you have not had the chance to see it yet, you can find it posted on our website, mexicanconnection08.com. Frankly, many were wondering if political tension north of the border would extend to our rally south of the border? Fortunately, although we are a diverse group of many beliefs, no one needed to worry. After a short reminder that Chapter 8 is not a political or religious group, we all got along as well we should! We also talked about the importance of being charitable to each other on this trip, as well as being charitable to the needy of Mexico and by donating to the Escapees CARE program.

I personally want to thank each Rolling Rally participant! You guys were such a pleasure



One of the Rolling Rally attendee's favorite stops was the bakery in Tecate, Baja California. Photo by Bob Elliott

and always an uplifting group. I will remember your helping hands and cheerful spirit for a very, very long time. I must admit I shed a few tears when the rally was over ... and once again at the end of the Escapade. You have been such a vital part of my life during the Rally and its preparations that being back to my "ordinary" life falls a bit short.

Every so often, in an exercise of meditation, I push my clock forward in my imagination as if it were the end of my life and I am pretending to look back and see what really mattered in my life. I know leading you guys (some of you for two years including the Wine to Whales Caravan with my husband Ed) was a true highlight for me.

I have grown so much from interacting with all of you. While Wagonmaster for Chapter 8 is not a paid position, you get plenty of other "payment" in the form of hugs, smiles... and just knowing that we did a good and respectful series of events in Mexico and enjoyed travelling with our fellow Chapter 8 Friends which makes all the planning and implementation worthwhile.

As most of you know, the position of Wagonmaster 2020 is waiting for the right person or persons to carry on Chapter 8's Mexican Connection tradition. Fortunately, the adventure of Wagonmaster is usually accompanied by a team of talented folks who volunteer to do just about everything. After two consecutive years as Wagonmaster, I have been amazed at just



Rolling Rally participants enjoy dinner with each other, forming bonds that will last long. Photo by Cathy Dunham

how much cooperation and help is available from our fellow Chapter 8 Members. And when you are the Wagonmaster, you get to make most of the fun decisions ... like where and when to go, what's for fun... and what's for dinner! The challenge of the scouting trips to Mexico turned out to be more fun than I had imagined. As a Wagonmaster, you have the ability to organize a trip as complex or as simple as you and the Executive Board like.

Please let me know if you would like more information on this. Ed and I will gladly pass on what we have learned from being on the last four Chapter 8 trips and being co-Wagonmasters for the 2018 Wine to Whales Baja Caravan and Wagonmaster & President for the 2019 Rolling Rally. We gathered what we could from helpful Wagonmasters of yesteryear, scoured the records of previous simple rallies and more complex caravans over the past 3 decades. To simplify logistics and calculate the various costs of our multi-venue Mexican adventures, we created spreadsheets and guidelines to make the organizational tasks easier for the next Wagonmaster(s).

The Mexican Connection website is a treasure trove of information and our Historian is combing the past to add helpful hints to Wagonmasters of the future. CB radios, Mexican insurance, preferred in-kind donation items, travelling with your pets in Mexico, updating Mexican tourist FMM and visa forms ... and so much more can be found at



Wagonmasters ensure participants have an enjoyable time at the rally, from designing travel routes to picking what special events to attend. Photo by Cathy Dunham

MexicanConnection08.com. It is no longer necessary to re-invent the Mexican wheel to put together your own successful Chapter 8 Rally 2020.

In the past, there was a multi-year commitment along the way to becoming Wagonmaster ... but that was neither strictly adhered to in the past nor likely to be a pragmatic requirement in the future. We have become an eclectic movement of the moment ... where serendipity is not dead and Wagonmaster help is just around every corner. As members, we have something special in Chapter 8. Anyone who was on the Rolling Rally will tell you that we had a hundred happy SKPs having the time of their lives in harmony with one another while doing the fun of making the rally an unqualified success.

I believe banding together as a Wagonmaster Team even in the early planning stages will make organizing the rally more manageable and fun than one can see at first. Personally, I believe the help of some good assistants early on or some Co-Wagonmasters might be a great way to divide the chores. You, or your teammates do not have to commit to more than one rally. You can invite your friends to help you, and maybe divide all the responsibilities up into sections: Parking and maps, campground and dinners, social and potluck, charity etc. and get several people to share in these tasks.

However, there should be someone (or a small team) at the "top" keeping the vision of



Wagonmaster Cassandra Dennis addresses Rolling Rally attendees during a pot luck. Photo by Cathy Dunham

the overall rally in mind. Decisions can be made fast in small teams and then forwarded to the "top". Or if you choose to make your Rally a bit simpler and have a light schedule, attendees can be more spontaneous and come up with fun and charitable ideas once we all arrive on location in Mexico.

We believe that this flexibility will make it more feasible for someone to step up and lead. We do still have the continuity and experience of the Board to pass on items of importance from rally to rally. We also currently have a good and happy core group from past rallies and many will attend again next year and are willing to help out where needed.

It is wonderful to have a good mixture of seasoned attendees and of newbies. As part of our mission statement is "introducing new people to travelling in Mexico" it takes both, the teacher and the student. Once again, I am just so honored by the beautiful people and their willingness to work together to make a Rolling Rally worth remembering!



Chapter 8 members always rally around good travel, good food, and good company. Photo by Cathy Dunham

Kassandra

Kassandra Dennis, President
Mexican Connection
Escapes RV Club, Chapter 8

Zoologico Parque de Nino Jersey

By Ellie Kidd

During the Chapter 8 Mexican Connection Rolling Rally in 2019, we had several wonderful stops. We began in beautiful Potrero Park, then went into the wine country of the Valle de Guadalupe, and on to Punta Banda, La Jolla Beach Camp just south of Ensenada. One of the best parts of the trip for me was the Zoologica Parque del Nino Jersey. (translation, Jersey Children's' Park and Zoo.

The zoo was introduced in the Chapter 8 Spring 2018 Newsletter. It is a small non-profit zoo with very humble beginnings, when the owner first accepted a camel as payment for a debt about 10 years ago. Many people would come to visit the camel. Eventually there were more animals added, plus places for all these people to relax and picnic when they came. Now it is still owned by the same family (daughter and grand-daughter of the patriarch) and is a true family



A staff member offers a ring-tailed lemur an item to play with, known as enrichment. Such items help exercise a captive animal's body and mind. Photo by Ellie Kidd

destination with many picnic tables and grills, a beautiful park like setting and even two swimming pools and a splash park. This place is filled with families in the summer time. Admission is only about \$1 per person. The park runs almost entirely on donations.

There are about 250 animals in the zoo. Many were originally privately owned and were removed for various reasons by the government. The zoo provides them a much better home. There are a few full time staff members. These people really put their heart and soul into this zoo. They are passionate about it and their love for the animals and the people is infectious. We were all caught up in it with them.

For a small zoo, they are very unique in that they care so much for these animals they have their own animal enrichment team (Antonio Meza and Stephanie Eaton). These two work hard six days a week. Their whole job is to come up with new ways to



Rolling Rally participants help prepare enrichment items for zoo animals. Photo by Ellie Kidd

keep the animals happy and to not get bored. When we had an opportunity to join the enrichment team for a day many of us jumped at the chance. We were told about how they have to think about five different enrichment categories, Social, Cognitive, Habitat, Sensory, and Food. All of these play an important part in any animal's day. Social can be dealing with others of their group, or individuals using like a mirror or a plush toy, or just human interaction. Cognitive ideas include puzzles for mental stimulation, or a novel experience such as a smell or unusual food. The way food is presented is also part of the

food enrichment. Sensory stimulation can also be smells or tactile, hearing, or visual. For one example, they found that the perfume, Channel No. 5 is a big attractant to the female cats like tigers and mountain lions. It acts much like catnip and they love it. The males not so much. Antonio and Stephanie made a board that has different dowels on it. They may hold food, feathers, bells, balls, or whatever they dream up. This is put in a cage for the animal to explore. This idea won them an award in an enrichment competition among zoos in 33 countries!

We got to help with food enrichment. We had some small paper bags. In these we put a pinky (small pink baby rat), cranberries and coconut. The raccoons and the coati loved this. The paper bag gives them a thing to reach into like they would in a hollow tree or under a rock in nature.

A cardboard box was filled with green corn husks, and covered with stinky chicken fat. This was mixed up and sealed. When it was tossed into the wolf pen it was amazing to see how the wolves reacted. The dominant male stood guard over it while he ripped into it. The females circled waiting for their chance. The poor lowly "goofy" wolf had to stay back. He tried getting in there but the others chased him out.

Finally the box was open, alpha allowed the females to get some, and even Goofy ran by and got a piece too. We all cheered. We filled long hollow bamboo sticks with peanut butter and oatmeal for the monkeys to hold and pick at.



It's hard to beat the experience of preparing and delivering enrichment items at a zoo! Photo by Ellie Kidd

A big box was created for the parrots that had ficus branches sticking out all over it. They love to pull on them. We had fun in the animal's kitchen and watching them enjoy. It was a great experience for all of us. Next time we go back, and we all want to go back, we want to do more!

Our chapter raised money at an auction we held while in Ensenada. This was one of the charities benefiting from that. We raised enough money to purchase a used portable x-ray machine they needed. Several of us also got ahold of a wish list, written by the enrichment team. They had on this list simple things such as screwdrivers, paint brushes, work gloves, extension cords and a few more items like that. We went to a Home Depot and loaded a couple of buckets full of items for them. We delivered these items on the way back north. They were so excited to have these things. I still get photos from them, using their new tools.



Zoo staff hang branches in an enclosure to provide naturally curious animals something to investigate. Photo by Ellie Kidd

FYI: Being from New Jersey, which we left when we went full time almost five years

ago, seeing Jersey in the title of this zoo intrigued me. For those who want to know, it is because the owners of the park, run a milk company called Jersey. The milk company helped to support the park. The name was decided on because they originally started with Jersey Cows, but now they use Holsteins.

See the [PBS video presentation done by the show "Crossing South."](#)

*Rolling Rally participants were thrilled with the selection of tastings and sights Wagonmaster Kassandra Dennis picked. Next year's rally is still not planned. Could you be the next Wagonmaster?
Photo by Bob Elliott*



MONTE XANIC
BODEGA VINÍCOLA