



**El Ranchito  
de los Niños**

*Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together*

## FUNNY THINGS KIDS SAY:

Being new, Diane was given the grand tour by our 3 year old, Max. When they arrived at the gecko, Max of course introduced him, "This is our wizard" (still unable to pronounce the "L" sound). Diane was very impressed with Max and asked, "What's his name?" Max thought for a long time and turned to Diane matter factly, "Wizard". It should be noted that the gecko's name is Bahwehweh.

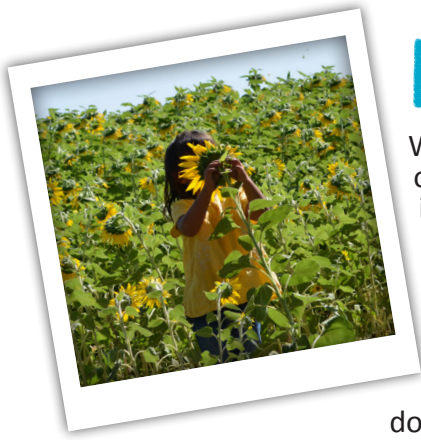


## HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR YEAR

- The **Valencia County Fair** was an exciting week filled with blue ribbons for dog projects, baking projects, sewing projects, dairy goats and market goats. 8 kids participated in a variety of 4-H activities and experienced the fair for the first time.
- We had a **sibling group of 5 join us** last fall and **they have made such an impact** on our family.
- We had **1 child receive his 1st Holy Communion** over the summer. We are so blessed to be a part of his growing faith.
- Adding new kids is not the only way our family grew this year. **We adopted Betty, our new puppy!** She is quite rambunctious (and BIG) but the kids simply adore her.
- Rebels with a Cause furnished and assembled **a new Playground set!** Endless hours of fun for the entire family.
- Our garden is **overflowing with veggies!** From zucchini to tomatoes, pumpkins to sunflowers, the kids are so proud of what they have grown this season.
- We were **excited to have Diane Klaus join our Administrative team** as our new Office Manager this year. Patrick Wilkins has also joined our Board of Directors and we are grateful for his wealth of knowledge.
- The most exciting highlight is the **summer family vacation** for the kids. They traveled to the Great Wolf Lodge in Scottsdale, AZ. 14 hours in the car, 14 kids, 5 staff, 1 waterpark = **PRICELESS FUN and ENDLESS SMILES.** Thank you so much to Brian Johnson with the Great Wolf Lodge, John and Kelly Freeman and Jim Travis for making the trip a dream come true!







## BUSTING AT THE SEAMS

KATHY MECHENBIER,  
PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER

We are busting at the seams! This past year we have grown our family by seven! Not one, not two....SEVEN. We are almost at full capacity and we are feeling it. From needed increases in staff to lack of room in storage, having a full house has its challenges. More importantly, having a full house adds so much joy and a true difference in the world.

We have come to find that much of our home has needed improvements. A new playground set was warranted. Our last one gave us endless fun for 21 years, but it was apparent that the wear and tear had become too much. Our house has needed constant repairs over the last year as its age has caught up with us. New cabinet doors, light fixture replacements, new faucets and new floors are many of the things that we have continued to work on over the years.

One thing that has never changed is our storage. Its capacity and capabilities has remained stagnant for the past 21 years. But, after seeing more than 50 kids walk through our doors and now with 14 currently in our home, the storage space has met its match. There is not an empty nook or cranny. It is important to know that because our kids have a more permanent home with us, we also act as a caregiver for many of their things. We keep baby pictures, childhood toys and other items that hold sentimental value until our kids are adults. We are the one constant in their life and if they have to leave us before they reach adulthood, we want to provide safe keeping for any items should they ask. When they go off to college, we may be their storage unit because they don't have any other family to care for their belongings. Our storage spaces are full and we need help adding a new storage shed.

So, the last 21 years has caught up to us, in more ways than one. This year has taught us the many blessings that we have and the amazing gift we can provide. It's been a crazy, busy year but in the end, we make it work. Volunteers step up to help out wherever is needed. Donors fulfill every need when asked. *This year we realize, we are busting at the seams – but with love, smiles and happiness.*

## THERE IS ALWAYS ROOM FOR ONE MORE

AMY KINDRICK,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

There is nothing quite like the sounds of a full house. The giggles, the pitter patter of bare feet on the hardwood floors, and even the sound of little arguments and big feelings remind us of why we do what we do and why we believe that, when possible, there is always room for one more.

Whenever we receive an inquiry about adding a new child to our home, everyone knows that my first answer is always yes. Only when it is determined that we aren't the right home to meet the child's needs, or we simply do not have a bed available does the yes turn to no.

Many things factor into our decision to add more kids to our home, first and foremost is, do we have the room? We are licensed to provide a home for 16 kids – 8 boys and 8 girls. If we have room, are we the best fit for the child's individual needs or do they require a higher or different level of care? And lastly, and probably the most important consideration is the impact on our existing kids. Will the new kids fit seamlessly (after the growing pains) into our family without any negative impact?

Recently, we received a photo and application for a sibling group of five kids aged 2-10 that were in an emergency shelter and needing a long-term home and we were asked if we could help. The sadness and fear in their eyes was devastating as was the reason they needed a new home. We were so fortunate to have the space available for these kids who are some of the brightest, funniest, and most resilient kids I've met. So, we added a few more chairs around the dinner table and wash a few more loads of laundry every day, but watching the sadness and fear fade into laughter and joy reminds us why we love a full house.

A full house means more groceries, more staff, more tuition, higher utilities and so much more laundry. But, also more love, more laughter, more milestones, and more purpose. A full house means that we are doing everything we can to help the kids who need us most by fulfilling our mission of keeping brothers and sisters together.

Tamlyn Tomita wrote, "if I am more fortunate than others, I need to build a bigger table not a taller fence." We are so grateful to have your support, so that there is always room for one more!





# A NEW CHAPTER FILLED WITH JOY AT EL RANCHITO

We are so excited to welcome Sr. Cristina Marie Buczkowski, SND to El Ranchito de los Niños. It has been ten years since we have had a sister at our home! She brings so much joy to the house. Her smile lights up a room and positivity radiates from her.

Sr. Cristina was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina but her family immigrated to the USA and settled in Camarillo, CA where she grew up. She attended Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and received a Bachelor of Arts Degree. It was later that she decided to enter the Sisters of Notre Dame in 2000 and made her Final Vows in 2008.



*Sister Cristina saying grace before breakfast*

Sister Cristina has always had children at heart. She returned to college and earned a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential from Cal State Long Beach and later earned her Site-Supervisor and Preschool Teacher certifications. Since then, she has served as a teacher, principal, youth program director and various other ministries.

She loves baking, working on crafts, and being out in nature. She cannot wait to share her passions with the kids!

El Ranchito seemed the perfect fit for Sister Cristina. As a young adult, she always dreamed of opening an Orphanage. She feels that working at El Ranchito will be an opportunity to use her passion for making a difference in the lives of those that are most vulnerable. This ministry will allow her a way to help the children here come to know and experience our good God's love for them. What a joy to work for an organization that helps bring children to wholeness and helps them reach their full potential in a safe, nurturing environment.







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P.O. Box 2400 • Los Lunas, NM 87031  
(505) 565-4470 • [www.ElRanchitoNM.org](http://www.ElRanchitoNM.org)

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## A SPECIAL THANKS

### OUR DEEPEST GRATITUDE

We want to express our deepest gratitude to each of you that helped in a variety of ways over the last year. So many of you were willing to lend a hand through monetary donations, volunteering when we were under staffed, giving priceless advice, fulfilling our kids' Christmas wishes, providing pizza and movie parties or sending prayers from afar. We felt and appreciate all that you have done for us. It was a challenging year for many reasons – being home with our family of 14 kids was definitely tiresome, but connecting as a family was priceless. Most importantly, we realized how many of you love our kids just as much as we do. Words can never describe how grateful we are for each of you.

