



Partner's in Palo Duro  
Canyon Foundation

***On the Edge!***



Photo by Editor

Richie Owaleon: The Zuni Eagle Dance

Palo Duro Canyon State Park Visitor Center



**Photo by Mary Fowler**

The dancers come single file from the entrance to the Visitor Center into the patio. (On this day we call the parking lot the patio.) The dancers have come to Palo Duro Canyon State Park from Zuni, New Mexico, at the invitation of David Townsend, a longtime friend of the Owaleon family and manager of Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Gallery located in the Visitor Center.

Richie Owaleon, the son of Gilbert and Lucy Owaleon, is leading the dancers. He is wearing a rainbow tablita. Following Richie is the teenage granddaughter, two younger grandsons, and Lucy—all festooned in the costumes of their people. Lucy, who has been selling jewelry, fetishes, kachina dolls, and pottery at the entrance to the Visitor Center, leaves the shade to join the dancers. Gilbert stands to the west of the dancers, facing east. He is the patriarch of the family and the drummer. He delivers the cadence from the large drum, whose beat accompanies the dancers and his songs, a separate song for each dance. Gilbert faces east offering a prayer to the universal deity

Accompanying the prayer is a sprinkling of sacred corn meal to the four directions and an introduction of the meaning of the dance to the crowd.

The Rainbow Dance, as the name suggests, is a rain dance. Since this is an exhibition, it is unlikely that rain will fall; but when danced in a Zuni tribal ceremony, rain can occur. We have Gilbert's testimony to that. The rainbow accompanying the rain is the source of the name of the dance, and the tablita which Richie wears is a representation of the rainbow after the rain.

After the Rainbow Dance, the Eagle Dance is performed in full costume by Richie. The Owaleon family are members of the Eagle Clan of the Zuni Pueblo, so the dance by Richie has special significance. His arms are covered with stylized eagle wings, the feathers of the eagle prominent upon his arms. The photo above depicts the costume much better than I can describe it.

Richie's performance is mesmerizing. The crowd is captivated. As for me, I wish I could understand all the nuances of the dance and its spiritual meaning. But not being a member of the Zuni Tribe, it is unlikely that I ever could.

After the dances by the Owaleon family, a crowd-pleasing dance in which the onlookers are invited to participate concludes the exhibition.

I am surprised at the number of "dancers" who get in line behind Richie. Among them are members of the Partners Board of Advisors, including Fannie Nittall, Cindy Meador, and Richard Biggs. Richard carries his baby son and is followed by his wife, Therese; consequently, his dancing is less vigorous than that of the others. However, the dance steps vary from high stepping to shuffle depending on the inclination of each dancer; so whatever step is used is seemingly appropriate.

At one point, David Townsend leads the dance. I'm not sure how that happens. I'm not sure David knows how that happens. As soon as he can, he high steps to the back of the line. The line takes on the form of a serpent, snaking back and forth. I suppose it can be called a "snake dance." However, somehow, I don't think the term applies.

Obviously, everyone has a great time. The Owaleons say they will return again. We hope they will. If so, don't miss the fun, the spectacle, and the opportunity to participate. I won't. Cf





**Collage Courtesy of Jim Livingston  
Jim Livingston Photography**





**Shannon Blalock  
Park Superintendent**

Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Don’t we all, as human beings, have a responsibility to help one another as we are able? Palo Duro Canyon State Park embodies this mindset in our daily actions at the Park, but the opportunity exists to take that mindset a step further and truly engage locally. The State Park cannot function without the support of so many, and so we must treat others with the same level of support.

Recently, the Park partnered with I Heart Canyon. I Heart Canyon is a festival put on by local churches to benefit families and students in the Canyon community by providing backpacks, school supplies, and hygiene products prior to the start of the school year.

The Park had an opportunity to give back to families who give so much to their beloved Palo Duro Canyon. From July 28-31, 2016, Palo Duro Canyon State Park waived daily entrance fees into the Park in lieu of school supply donations. Park patrons donated an impressive amount of supplies that was then bolstered by YOU (Partners), The Old West Stables, The Trading Post, and Park Staff.

Fifty backpacks stuffed with needed supplies were donated to the I Heart Canyon organization. Fifty children, from Kindergarten to High School, walked into the first day of school with the confidence of having what they needed for the year. Fifty blessings were bestowed, and if one of those students grows up with the memory of support they were given and decides that their actions as adults should be of servitude, the world is better.

Thank you Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation, for supporting the goals, ideas, and outreach efforts of the Park. We are certainly proud to make a difference alongside yours.



**Photo by Shannon Blalock**

**Editor’s Note:** Partners is proud to recognize and commemorate Shannon Blalock for receiving one of four 2016 Outstanding Women in Texas Government awards. Shannon’s award is as follows:

**Outstanding Management: Shannon Blalock,  
Texas Parks and Wildlife**

The award was presented to Shannon from the Governor’s Commission for Women. It reads in part: “Today, the State Agency Council Board is proud to recognize four of Texas’ best and brightest in the 2016 Outstanding Women in Texas Government Awards. These awards allow us to pay tribute to exceptional women across the state for the time and service they contribute to improving the quality of life for all Texans.”

Well done, Shannon! Well done!



**Jeff Davis: Park Interpreter**

Texas Parks & Wildlife is a conservation agency. We do what we do so that Palo Duro Canyon State Park will always be here in the most natural state possible. That mission is supported by our staff, our volunteers, and our visitors.

But our conservation mission goes deeper than many people realize. We are also conservation people. It is only through finding, hiring, and constantly growing the absolute best people available that we can hope to achieve our broader mission of conservation and recreation across Texas.

One of the many ways we seek to find those people is through diversity and inclusion. Our Department understands that diversity is not a final destination we will ever reach. It is instead a path that we travel, a journey that we will always be on. We must adapt to all the myriad changes in our state and in its people as they come. We must constantly endeavor to strengthen our organization by creating opportunities for diverse people of all backgrounds to come be a part of this grand mission of ours.

We recently [May 14, 2016] had the opportunity to do just that through the hard work and creativity of one of our interns,

Currie Case. She created the first Deaf Hike, which gave the local deaf community the opportunity to participate in a guided nature hike. This is something many of them had never had the chance to be a part of before.

American Sign Language interpreters, including Currie herself, and Park staff worked together to provide a unique experience to the visitors who attended the hike, hearing and deaf alike. The Park's flora, fauna, history and geology were discussed in both spoken English and ASL. It was truly an amazing event that we hope will be the gateway to many more like it.

Many thanks to Currie for putting this together, and congratulations to her on completing her internship and on graduating at the end of May. Thanks also to Canyon High School's ASL teacher, Traci Prather, for all her assistance with the Deaf Hike and to the Pursuing Real Opportunities internship program that has given Palo Duro Canyon State Park the chance to be involved in the lives of our amazing young interns.

Palo Duro Canyon is a place for everyone.



**Photo by Jeff Davis**





**Backpacks and Park Personnel**  
Photo by Shannon Blalock



**Owaleon Family**  
Photo by Mary Fowler

## **Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation Board Members**

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### **Interested Parties**

**Shannon Blalock, Park Superintendent**

**David Townsend, Store Manager**

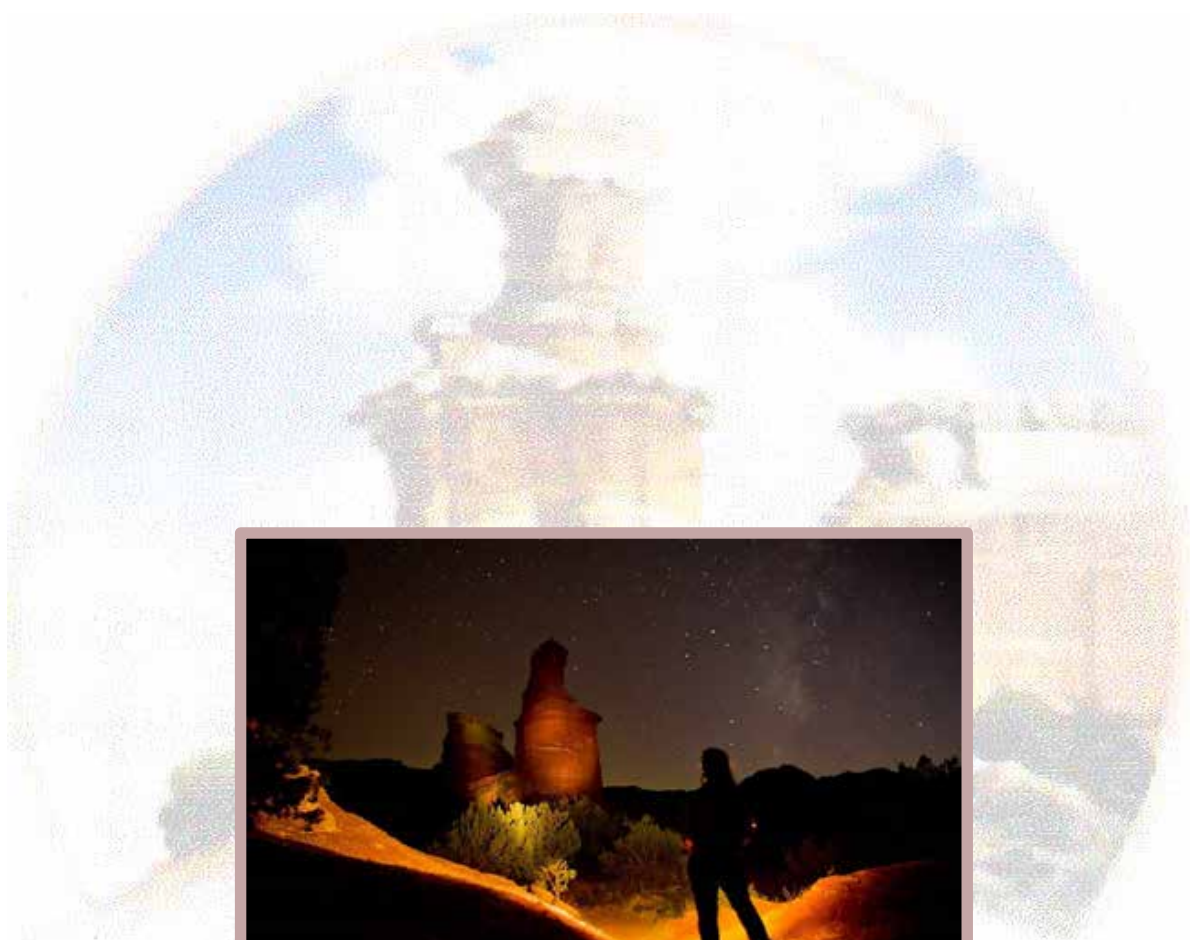


**Photo by David Townsend**



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**PD-Night**

**Image by Jim Livingston**

**Jim Livingston Photography**

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***September 2016, Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation: Editor Carl Fowler***