

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

The past year among many things, has been a moment of time slowed down; an opportunity to reflect, renew, and revive. And we did just that. This year, we are thrilled to be celebrating our 25th anniversary of providing Denver's young people with access to the outdoors, STEM education, opportunities to explore careers, and the tools to develop their leaders within. So upon reflection, just what have we accomplished in the last quarter century?

ELK was founded in 1996 by two wildlife biologists whose goal was to educate youth about natural resources, environmental education, and science related career paths to broaden their educational opportunities. For a period of time, ELK was literally run from their kitchen table. Today, ELK is led by 8 full-time and three part-time staff members, many of which have been with the organization for more than five years. This level of staff consistency has allowed bonds to form with youth and families that only continue to strengthen.

At the beginning, the ELK organization was serving approximately 2,500 youth annually - a feat that cannot be undervalued. With the increase in staff and capacity today however, more than 15,000 youth and families through in-school/after-school programming, year-round programs, community outreach events, and day-long activities. Many of these participants are engaging with ELK on numerous outings a year, increasing their dosage hours and thus the lessons and opportunities offered.

We've expanded our reach. After supporting engagement through day-long trips via Youth in Natural Resources (YNR) and Denver Youth Naturally (DYN), ELK now offers a mosaic of programs that serve as a pipeline for both youth and families. Most ELK participants now begin the program via in-school and after-school programming, before entering our year-round programs offered through DYN. The whole family is then eligible to participate in ELK programs via Learning Environmental Activities for Families (LEAF) before our high school aged youth phase into YNR and Leadership Corps programs where they navigate their next great adventures post-high school. These young adults are even eligible to begin building their resumes through our continuously growing summer employment Urban Ranger program.

The Montbello community means the world to us, and we are very much looking forward to celebrating our anniversaries to come in the place we love most.



BROWN'S CANYON - 2012



ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK - 2007



ELK URBAN RANGERS - 2018

A message from Loretta Pineda, Executive Director

DEAR ELK FAMILY...



It has been an honor and privilege to serve as ELK's Executive Director for the past six years. As many of you know I will be "retiring" from ELK as Executive Director on June 30, 2021.

I appreciate everything the Board, staff and ELK students and families have provided to me over the years, and I remain committed to continue growing the ELK mission. ELK students gave me strength and inspired me every day to do my best. I want to thank the past and present Board of Directors who have believed in me. I am proud of all that has been accomplished with the ELK family!

ELK's current 3-year strategic plan has prepared the organization for executive leadership secession. Over the last six years, ELK has been focused on a twofold community expansion campaign project to restore a vacant lot to an open space park and build an education center for ELK's programming in addition to maintaining our regular operational and program funding. ELK has become a solid icon in the metro Denver nonprofit sector in environmental education and youth development for under-resourced youth. Further, ELK has taken a strong leadership role in national networks in STEM education, youth development, DEI and outdoor recreation.

This consolidated effort by the Board and staff has produced strong, diverse Board leadership and a robust consistent program and development staff. We have continued to diversify our funding streams and have developed systems to steward our donors. An open space park is ready for activation in the Montbello neighborhood, and we completed fundraising for the \$6.5 million dollar community campaign and construction on the ELK Education Center will begin this Summer.

With this infrastructure in place, 2021 is the optimal opportunity for ELK to seek new leadership to move the organization to the next phase of growth in our community.

ELK has my heart and I will continue to advocate for our young leaders and our community.

For our Youth,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Loretta Pineda".

– Loretta Pineda | Executive Director

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

ELK is starting to do small group in-person programs Spring and Summer 2021. We appreciate your patience with us as we try to accommodate everyone AND stay healthy and well. We know that many of our friends, partners and families are getting vaccinated and we also know that there are some lifting of restrictions depending on where you live. COVID continues to impact our community – we must continue to protect each other. At ELK programs we ask EVERYONE to wear masks, socially distance, and wash/sanitize their hands often and not to come to events if anyone in their household is ill. ELK staff will continue to require participants to complete our health check-in forms. Also, if you or a family member become ill after a program, please let an ELK staff member know so that staff and families are contacted and quarantine requirements are met. We all care about each other so please join us in continuing to do what we know works to prevent the spread of this disease.



Creative Works – ELK began a first of its kind program, titled “ELK’s Creative Collective” - serving as an art club aimed at holding space for students to express their creativity and connect socially with one another. These meetings were an outlet for youth to explore their passions for the arts in a myriad of different ways. This innovative space is so important for fostering an appreciation for the arts and the often-hidden talents within ourselves and others.



Snow Sports – ELK youth and families had the opportunity to learn about the amazing sport of snowshoeing! Participants learned about the ideal places near Denver to visit and Snowshoe 101 which covered the basics and usage of snowshoeing. Most importantly, families had the opportunity to borrow snowshoes from ELK to go on their own snowshoeing adventure afterwards - what a treat! ELK was proud to offer participants a pass to Colorado State Parks, ensuring all barriers were removed from participation.



Virtual Camping – ELK hosted a virtual camping trip at Star K Ranch. Just like any ELK camping trip, this virtual experience had snacks, games, and ELK families! Participants spent Friday night around the virtual campfire, were introduced to Star K Ranch, showed off their tents, and finished off the night with an educational astronomy program and s’mores. On Saturday morning, youth and families enjoyed a virtual tour of Star K Ranch and a short hike!



Healthy Habits – a handful of ELK youth and parents embarked on a 2-week walking study in partnership with the Sand Creek Greenway. The Greenway’s goal was to collect data about the physical and emotional benefits of walking along the trail. Four walks took place in March and the collected data is currently being analyzed. All participants received complimentary Fitbit fitness trackers from ELK to help encourage them to continue walking beyond the two-week study.





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THE COLFAX MARATHON IS BACK!



The Colfax Marathon is back – and ELK is excited to partner with a group of 2021 runners for the marathon this year! This year the race weekend is scheduled for October 16 & 17th and there are a variety of fun events to choose from; 5K walk, half-marathon, Urban 10 miler, Marathon Relay, and the full marathon. Select from the variety of events and remember to select Environmental Learning for Kids as your charity partner to join Team ELK! We provide fun benefits to our race team; past benefits have included a complimentary breakfast, team t-shirt, and team

comradery and photo op at the ELK tent in the Charity Partner Village post-race. It's a day full of fun and team spirit – to register for the race please visit www.runcolfax.org and feel free to reach out to choffman@elkkids.org with any questions.

CELEBRATE ELK'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Celebrate ELK's 25th Anniversary by becoming a monthly ELK Family Tree donor! Your monthly donation can help us inspire youth to develop a passion for science education, outdoor exploration, while transforming them into responsible leaders. A gift of just \$10 a month can provide a student with their first outdoor experience like camping or fishing!



To become a monthly donor please visit www.elkkids.org, then select Monthly on the dropdown menu under Frequency. Sign up as a monthly Family Tree member and you will receive a special branded ELK gift!

Presented by
Environmental Learning for Kids
Friday, October 8th / 7:30-9:00 AM
Register at <https://bit.ly/2DJMJd0>

Thank you to our sponsors: