

# Creative action in a river of change



FUNDACIÓN LA PUERTA, A.C.



## President's *message*

Tecate is known throughout our region as a friendly small town and as a community that values nature with a colorful cultural life and innovative programs. Fundación La Puerta has worked for nearly fifty years to nurture and preserve these qualities; a dynamic process amidst the chaos, contradictions and vitality of a border town.

I am proud to report that in 2023 we fully recovered from Pandemic restrictions. Parque del Professor, the beautiful park that we created and have maintain for the families of Tecate since 1989, continues its work of building community. Over 100,000 people visited Parque del Profesor in 2023, participating in workshops, hiking the nature trails, playing soccer and attending our festivals.

Four thousand elementary and preschool children attended our environmental education and gardening workshops, learning that we live in an inter-dependent world that we must care for and share with other living beings. Our youth leadership programs nurture a feeling of identity, community and responsibility through teambuilding, ecosystem restoration, investing in the health of our river, in the way we communicate, and in the dreams that we nurture.

Our seasonal festivals brought learning, connection and joy to the lives of families in Tecate, attended by 15,166 people.

Our work has grown beyond bringing young people into relationship with the natural world, teaching them to act responsibly, to care for their own bodies and to be stewards of their community. We are sowing seeds that are transforming our city and we are shaping culture through collaboration, education, vision and leadership.

We hope that you will be inspired as you read about our accomplishments in 2023.

*We warmly invite your support and participation as we look to the future with hope and shared purpose,*

**Sarah Livia Szekely**  
President of Fundación La Puerta, A.C.

## Mission

To **restore and honor** the environmental, cultural, and social heritage of the Tecate River watershed, **embracing a sustainable way of life** that thrives on collaboration, respect, and the joyous celebration of natural and human communities.

## Vision

Fundación La Puerta will lead the city of Tecate and its watershed in sustainable environmental practices and cultural preservation, where **people and nature thrive together**, embracing creative growth solutions, fostering healthy communities through education, and nurturing a living river with parks, recreation, and wildlife.





2023 staff picture

## Our team

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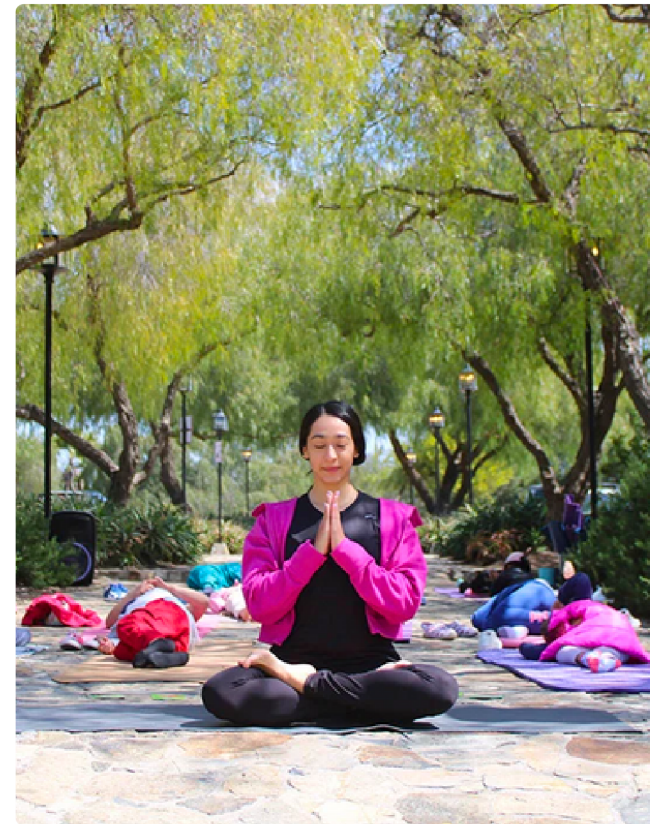
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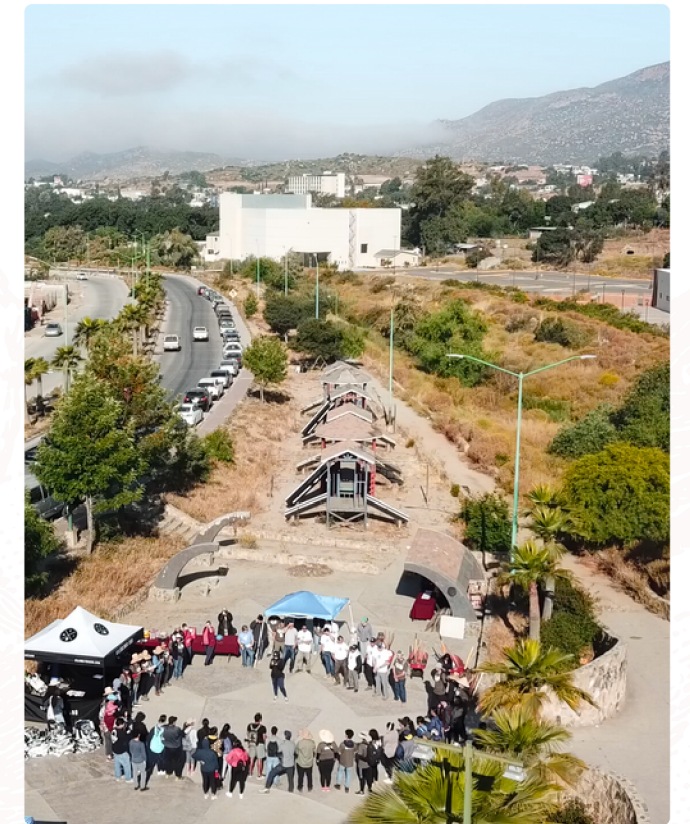


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# Children

Children are the heart and soul of our future, and nurturing their connection with nature is essential for **fostering a generation** that values and protects the environment. At **Las Piedras Environmental Education Center**, we are dedicated to providing a transformative experience for young minds.

*Our little ones first come in pre-school: pulling a carrot out of the family garden, making a rainbow colored salad and eating edible flowers; they learn about phytonutrients and how plants grow and feed us. They return throughout elementary school on field trips, becoming friends with our chapparal ecosystem. Learning how we breathe with our plant kin, how soil is made, how animals adapt to our long dry summers. And they slip into Las Piedras and feel the cool tunnels and shimmering colors of this magical classroom. They imagine being something small, a scarab beetle or a stink bug in the vast network of lives that live unseen and unnoticed in the city.*





more than  
**4,000 children**  
attended our workshops in 2023

**Workshops** at Las Piedras provide school children with hands-on learning experiences. One of our key objectives is to **enrich the school system's curricula** by providing educational materials, activities, and training to **enhance environmental education**. Workshops encompass age-appropriate topics including the water cycle,

climate awareness, the value and importance of trees, healthy habits **to reduce our carbon footprint**, recycling, and a basic knowledge of local plants and animals.

By fostering a sense of place among the citizens, **our workshops educate and inspire the people of Tecate** to respect and care for their immediate natural environment, the chaparral ecosystem.

# Enviromental Educational Curriculas



## Guardians of *El Chaparral*

In this curriculum, children embark on an **exploration of their local ecosystem** through interactive and educational activities. They uncover the rich tapestry of living and non-living elements, along with **cultural and social interactions** within this **natural sanctuary**



## Seeds *of Awe*

In this workshop, young ones take their first steps into **organic horticulture** and **healthy eating**. The aim is to cultivate an appreciation for nature through **hands-on experience** with the soil and its fruits, promoting both health and spiritual delight.



## Tree *of Life*

Through these activities children discover the importance and **value of trees** and explore the metaphor between **personal growth**, a forest, and a **community ecosystem**. This workshop fosters a feeling of **reverence** for all that trees contribute to our lives.



## Water's *Journey*

Through this workshop, children explore the importance, **uses, forms, and composition of water** through engaging activities. The goal is to encourage **reflection on their daily actions** and how these impact **water quality** and the sustainability of this essential resource.



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## Municipal Science Fair

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The competition to award **the best science fair projects** in the city, brought more than 30 innovative sustainable prototype projects presented by 7th and 8th graders to *Parque del Profesor*. These projects, representing the best of 30 schools, were evaluated and awarded by specialists in science and technology, in order to foster innovation and encourage environmental awareness among young students.

*Students from Colegio Salvatierra,  
presentin their "Microplastics  
Elimination Solution"*



- 32 *Volunteers*
- 10 *Special Projects*
- 82 *Community Activities*
- 34 *Collaborations with local groups*

**= 7,060** *Volunteer hours donated*



# Youth

Through personal growth activities, community service, environmental care, and nature appreciation, **young leaders** develop creative, responsible solutions to address **social problems** and **environmental challenges**.

Volunteering fosters **awareness**, develops **skills**, and **empowerment**. Our youth become **agents of change** for the benefit of their community.

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## Youth Leadership and Volunteer *program*

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This program serves youth aged 14 to 21. Our youth learn to work together, and imagine changing the world, **cleaning trash along the river**, feeding the homeless, supporting veterinarians during our free spay and neuter clinics, devising ingenious ways to **reuse, recycle and renew**.

They journey from "me" to "we", the empowering, enlivening experience of working together for a **common goal**. And they have fun, being generous, kind, and playful with each other; a skill set that seems to be disappearing in this time of reactivity, dissent and conflict.





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## Training and inspiration

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To strengthen our Youth Leadership Program, activist Carlos Prieto from the international organization Greenpeace shared his extensive experience in volunteering and environmental activism, inspiring participants with his personal stories and insights on how to effectively advocate for environmental causes.



An Ecopsychology workshop was conducted by Carlos del Campo, one of the pioneers of the methodology in Mexico.

*Carlos Prieto from Greenpeace in the top images, and Carlos del Campo (Ecopsychology) in the ones below.*



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# Animal Welfare

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Youth Volunteers creating a new Dog Walking Trail in the park to provide a safe and enjoyable space for dogs and their owners while promoting **responsible pet ownership**.



Youth Volunteers supporting **free spay and neuter clinics** at *Parque del Profesor*

# The Park

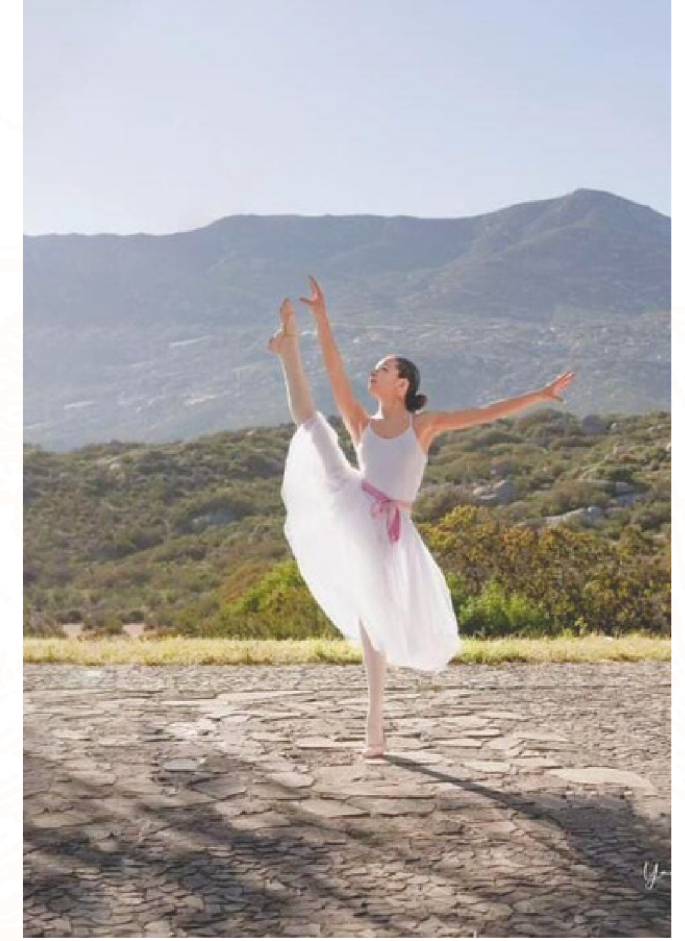
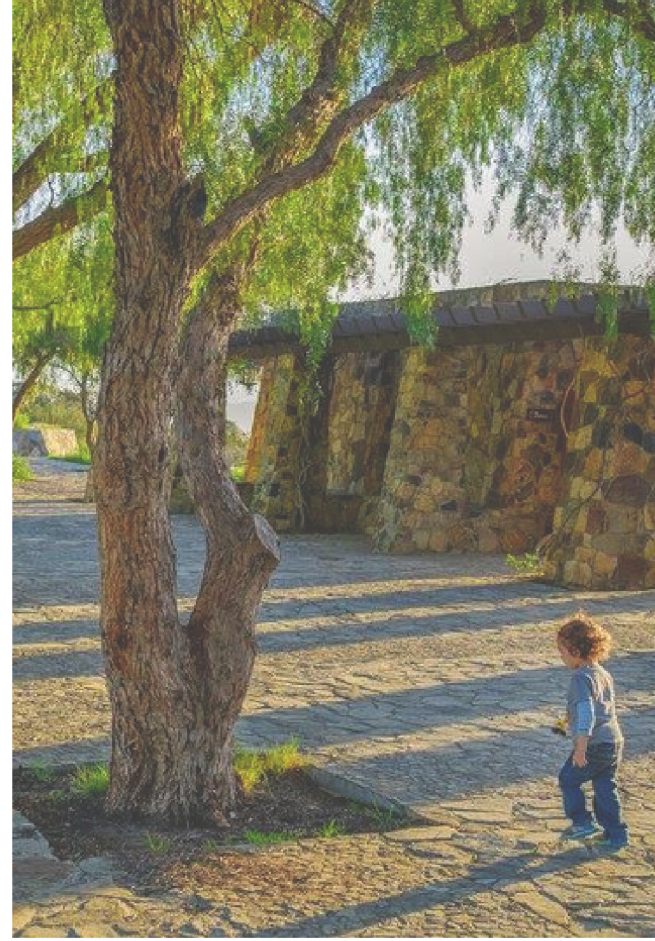
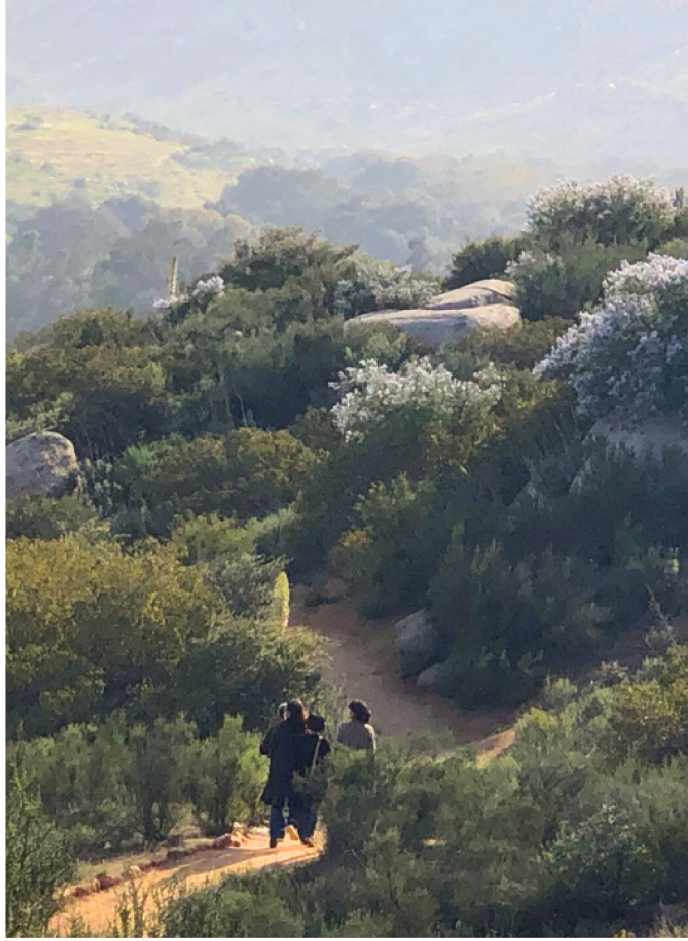
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Named after Prof. Edmond Szekely, co-founder of Rancho La Puerta, Parque del Profesor is a **28-acre community oasis** attracting 100,000 annual visitors. It's a unique venue in Tecate, **providing a natural environment for families to connect.**

The park features intimate classrooms and a plaza for events, plus a mile-long trail offering views of Mt. Kuchuma and **an intact chaparral ecosystem.** Workshops and programs inspire and educate in this beautiful setting. The park's mission is to **provide Tecate with a safe space that enhances community engagement** through recreational, cultural, and health-promoting activities, improving quality of life for all.

**+107,462 visitors**  
in 2023





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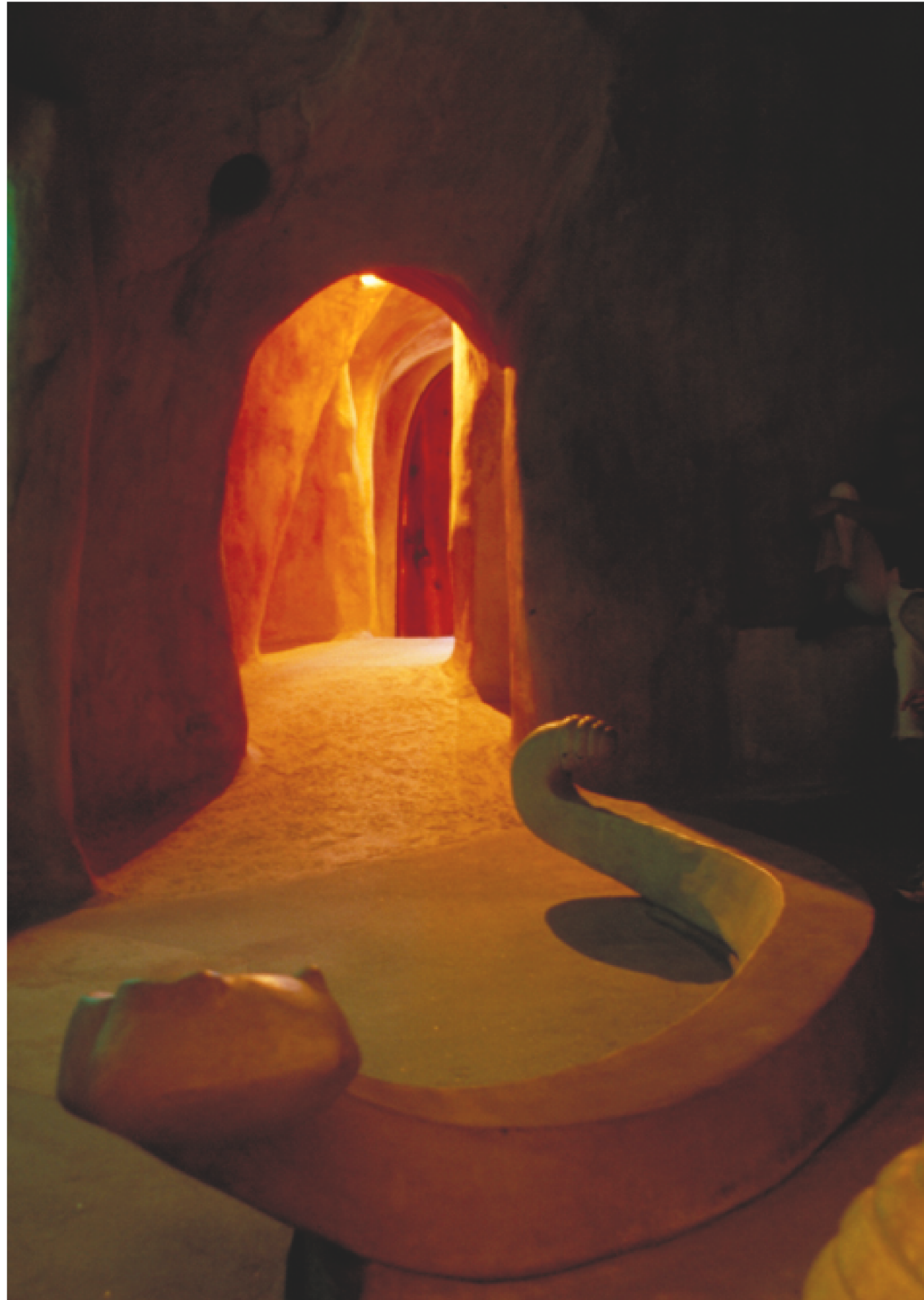
## Daily life at the Park

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Working mom's and dads come early to **walk in nature**, to jog on the trails, and on weekends the park fills with families; at soccer games, festivals, yoga classes, gardening and art classes. Every Saturday our **family gardening program** is fully enrolled with a waiting list, these families are eager to begin growing food in their homes and communities.

The Park **provides a beautiful setting** for engagement photos, anniversaries, quinceñeras, graduations and weddings. Mercadito Cuchuma, a monthly craft fair, supports local craftsmen and cottage industries.





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## A Place of Beauty

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**Welcoming**  
*Spring Festival*

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*1,000 participants*

*More than 25 activities*

*Cuatro Puntos Native Dance*

*Arts & crafts*

*Seed Bombs*

*Farmer's Market*



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# 23rd World Environmental *Day Festival*

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2,166 attendees





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# 23rd Day of the Dead *Festival*

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*12,000 attendees*





# Community

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Our city-wide campaigns have led to the preservation of the Tecate River, established **community gardens** provided **urban planning** for a **green corridor** along the Tecate River which is now home to Tecate's museums and performing arts center. We have sparked **partnerships** and woven networks with other organizations to **preserve and protect** our diminishing wild spaces.



Community garden at "La Colosio" Comité Mujeres Lluvia del Sur





For twenty five years, Fundación La Puerta has worked with neighborhood and **community groups** leading **river clean ups**, participating in **citizen's committees** to protect the watershed and **monitoring policies** that effect the natural environment in our watershed.

As a key tributary of the Tijuana River, the Tecate River faces considerable **impact from industrial and urban growth** with more than 50% of Tecate's wastewater entering the river channel untreated.



**Homeless encampments** within the river corridor are a new challenge for Tecate. Parks and walkways, seven miles of urban river once free of trash, are no longer healthy or safe.

These conditions require a **coordinated effort** between civil society, business and the city government.

# Advocacy and urban planning



Visit to the San Diego River Park Foundation



Inauguration of the Citizen's Committee for the River

## In 2023 we

- organized visits to the San Diego River Park Foundation and Santee,
- generated exchanges with USD, UCSD
- supported local environmental organizations.
- presented at three conferences in major cities in Mexico
- participated in urban planning policies through official channels such as El Comité Especial del Río.

2023 was a **year of collaboration**. Through new alliances with the UABC, the state university system in Baja California, and many other institutions, we are **addressing urgent issues** in our community. Tecate is experiencing new levels of homelessness, insecurity and a decline in basic services such as sanitation, waste collection and water quality. Together we are able to **create synergies** to address these issues.



**INPLADEM**

Tecate's Urban Planning Authority  
Citizen's Comitee for the River

**CDET**

Economic Development  
Council of Tecate

**San Diego River Park  
Foundation**

**TRAN**

Tijuana River National  
Estuarine Research

**CESPTE**

State Public Services Administration  
"Olimpiaguas"

**Fundación Hélice**  
Recycling paper program

**Polos Unidos**

Rehab and Community Service

**SEE**

State Department of Education  
"Nuestra Sombrilla Verde"

**CEMEFI**

Mexican Institute of Philantropy

**Mujeres Lluvia del Sur A.C.**

Community gardens

**UABC**

Baja California State University

**Familia Blancarte**

Fundraising project

**USD**

University of San Diego

**Promotora de Bellas Artes**

Support for Fine Arts / Community Chorus

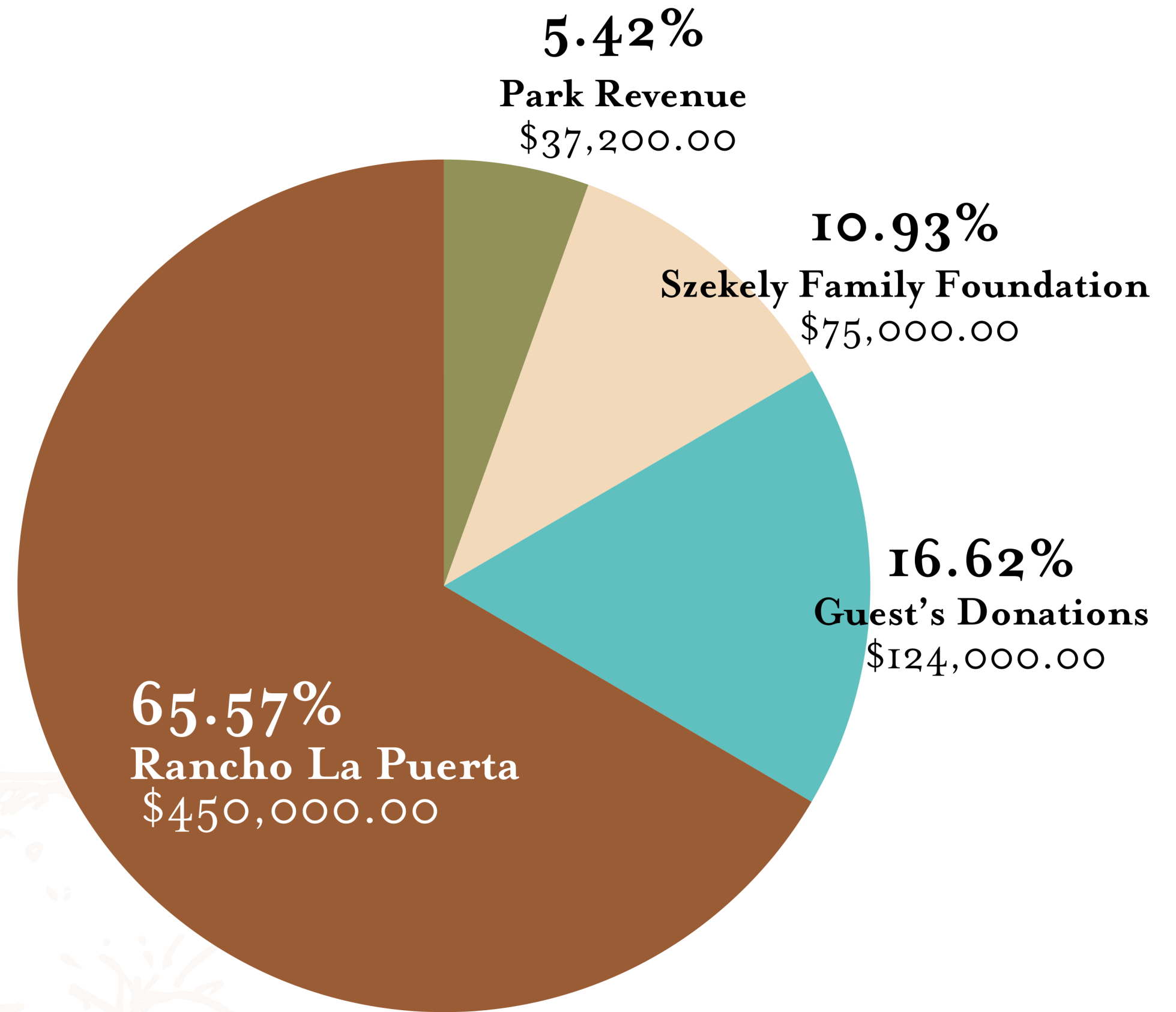
**INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS**

**ALLIANCES**

# Financial Summary

Total Income 2023

\$686,200 usd



# Financial Summary

Total Expenses in 2023

**\$709,383 usd\***

\* Exchange rate

Projected budget \$20.5mn

2023 average \$17.75mn

**Inc. Professor's Park deferred maintenance and improvements:**

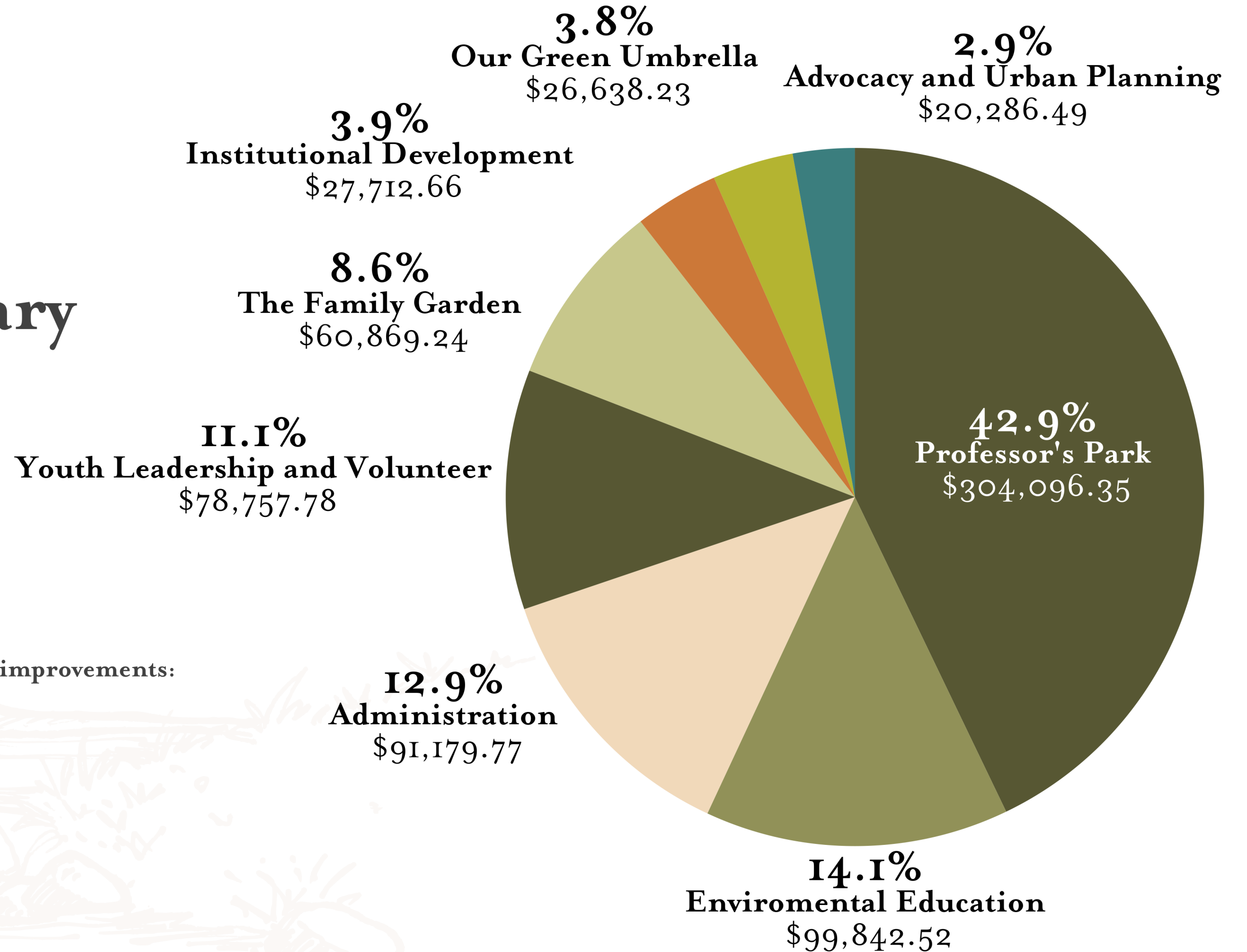
Security fence and Guard Station

Palapa

Las Piedras waterproofing

Telephone and wi-fi

Water lines



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