

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Jeffrey Lazos Ferns, Executive Director
Great Arizona Puppet Theater
ferns_jeffrey@yahoo.com
(602) 262-2050

Date: March 25, 2026

Great Arizona Puppet Theater Brings Beloved Puppets to the Pines with New Flagstaff Presence, Led by Second-Generation Puppeteer Gwen Bonar

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. -- Great Arizona Puppet Theater, Arizona's award-winning year-round puppet theater based in Phoenix, is expanding north and launching an ongoing presence in Flagstaff, bringing its celebrated, family-friendly puppetry to schools, libraries, and community venues across Northern Arizona. The expansion is anchored by Flagstaff-based artist **Gwen Bonar**, a second-generation puppeteer and the theater's artistic director, who grew up in the company her parents founded in 1983.

From its historic 1929 church home in central Phoenix to the ponderosa pines of Flagstaff, Great Arizona Puppet Theater (GAPT) has spent more than 40 years advancing puppetry arts while celebrating Arizona's culture, heritage, and ecology through live performance. Now, through a phased 18–24-month Northern Arizona expansion, GAPT will offer recurring touring shows, seasonal public performances, and education-focused programming tailored to Flagstaff and surrounding communities.

Gwen Bonar: Local Artist, Statewide Vision

Gwen Bonar has been performing for audiences since she was six, touring nationally and internationally and representing Great Arizona Puppet Theater at regional, national, and international puppetry festivals. Alongside her mother, she performed in Great Arizona Puppet Theater's original version of *Cinderella*, which received an UNIMA award—founded by Jim Henson and considered the highest honor in puppetry. Gwen has built and performed works for The Phoenix Symphony (*Peter and the Wolf*), Desert Botanical Garden, The Phoenix Zoo, Phoenix Children's Museum, Delta Dental of Arizona Foundation, and the Grand Canyon Interpretive Department, and has presented hundreds of shows at Great Arizona Puppet Theater, the theater her parents founded that celebrated 40 years of puppetry in 2023. She has performed internationally, including Mexico's International Puppet Festival, and her original short-form adult pieces have been selected for multiple National Puppetry Slams. Gwen appears in schools, museums, libraries, and festivals, delighting audiences of all ages and showing what puppetry is and what it can be.

As a second-generation puppeteer and builder, she oversees productions at GAPT and is passionate about creating high-quality theater for children that blends humor, heart, and meaningful themes. Now a full-time Flagstaff resident, Bonar will serve as the primary performer for Northern Arizona, offering flexible, locally based touring that reduces travel costs for schools and libraries while deepening the theater's roots in the region.

"Flagstaff kids and families deserve the same access to live, professional puppetry that Phoenix audiences have enjoyed for decades," Bonar said. "I'm excited to bring these stories to the pines and to build lasting relationships with educators, librarians, and community partners."

Touring Shows Now Available in Northern Arizona

GAPT's initial Flagstaff touring repertoire features three professional productions designed for school multipurpose rooms, libraries, and community venues, each running 30–45 minutes with minimal technical requirements:

1. **The Monkey and The Pirate** -- A rambunctious original adventure about friendship, sharing, and teamwork, featuring a banana-loving monkey, a banana-seeking pirate, and plenty of audience interaction for ages 3–10.
2. **The Little Engine That Could** -- Based on the beloved children's book, this show supports pre-K through 3rd-grade learners with themes of perseverance, growth mindset, and positive thinking.
3. **Big Bug Circus** -- A hilarious insect circus with hand-crafted marionettes like Darla the Dung Beetle and Bartholomew the World's Strongest Ant, emphasizing teamwork, confidence, and celebrating differences for ages 3–10.

These shows support social-emotional learning and literacy goals, with study guides, classroom tie-ins, and Arizona standards correlations available for educators.

A New Cultural Asset for Flagstaff

The Flagstaff expansion aims to establish GAPT as Northern Arizona's go-to puppetry and family arts company within two to three years, building regular school and library tour clusters, community partnerships, and an annual seasonal mini-series of public performances. With Flagstaff's vibrant arts scene, strong family tourism, and diverse community—including Native and Hispanic organizations—GAPT plans to collaborate with local partners on future Arizona ecology and heritage-based shows that reflect both desert and mountain environments.

"As a statewide organization, our mission is to bring big stories to little audiences across Arizona—now from the saguaro to the San Francisco Peaks," said Jeffrey Lazos Ferns, Executive Director. "Gwen's presence in Flagstaff allows us to be a true neighbor in Northern Arizona, not just a touring company passing through."

Booking and Contact

Flagstaff and Northern Arizona schools, libraries, and community venues can now book Gwen Bonar and Great Arizona Puppet Theater for on-site performances and upcoming tour weeks.

For booking and information:

Email: Gwen.Bonar@azpuppets.org

Website: azpuppets.org

Phone: (602) 262-2050

About Great Arizona Puppet Theater

Founded in 1983, Great Arizona Puppet Theater is Arizona's only year-round puppet theater, offering award-winning educational and environmental puppet shows for children and families at its historic Phoenix home and on tour statewide. The theater's mission is to advance and promote the art of puppetry, celebrate Arizona's culture, heritage, and ecology, educate children and their families, and positively impact Arizona's cultural climate.

Great Arizona Puppet Theater is located at 302 W. Latham Street, Phoenix, AZ 85003.