

History Colorado Expands Efforts to Meet the Childhood Enrichment Needs of Rural Colorado



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DENVER — April 4, 2024 — [History Colorado](http://HistoryColorado.org) is pleased to announce the expansion of its [Hands-On History](http://Hands-OnHistory.org) program into two rural communities in Eastern Colorado: Greeley and La Junta. Facilitated in partnership with the cities of [Greeley](http://Greeley.org) and [La Junta](http://LaJunta.org), this expands History Colorado’s ongoing commitment to provide local communities with high quality, history-based enrichment and educational programs for children of working families.

Piloted at the [El Pueblo History Museum](http://ElPuebloHistoryMuseum.org) in 2014 as a history-based skill-building program to provide academic support, **Hands-On History** was initially designed to meet the needs of working families during school early release days. Since 2014 the program has expanded to multiple History Colorado museum locations across the state and now provides full-day enrichment during school breaks throughout the year including summer and, in communities with a four-day school week, offering “fifth day” educational programs.

Amongst the initial communities to implement **Hands-On History** programs were those served by the [Trinidad History Museum](#) and the [Fort Garland Museum & Cultural Center](#), which both started programs as a result of increased child care needs following the move to four-day school weeks.

“**Hands-On History** came about due to a shortfall of affordable childcare opportunities in the community of Pueblo and rapidly expanded throughout the state as a core educational offering of History Colorado,” said **Tamara Trujillo**, **Hands-On History** program director. “From the very beginning this program has filled a crucial need and given parents peace of mind that their children are safe, supported, and empowered in their educational journey.”

At the heart of all of History Colorado’s **Hands-On History** programs is an interactive and engaging history curriculum that is focused on experiential learning. Using history, these programs explore themes and topics specific to the local community that students might not otherwise have a chance to learn about.

In Greeley **Hands-On History** summer camps provide [Centennial Village Museum](#) another avenue to discuss the histories of the workers that were attracted to the region by the Agri-industry in the 20th century. While workers came pursuing economic opportunities many, especially those of Hispanic and Latino descent, were effectively segregated into disconnected settlements.

Navigating the complex poverty and social issues that resulted from this history is a focus for the Centennial Village Museum, according to **Dr. Chris Bowles**, museums manager for the City of Greeley, and is going to be a key element in the **Hands-On History** curriculum in this area.

“If we’re not telling the whole story, and to as many people as we can, we’re actually part of the problem,” **Bowles** said. “It’s a slow boat to turn, so any chance we get to make a leap, we take. That’s why we’re excited to take part in **Hands-On History’s** expansion. **Hands-On History** provides us with the **chance** to reach kids who may like history, but **would** be otherwise disadvantaged in their opportunities to learn how it continues to impact our community.”

The need for additional enrichment programs, such as History Colorado’s **Hands-On History**, came to public attention during the COVID-19 Pandemic when the State Legislature passed emergency legislation to [create a relief program for the child care sector](#). This support was continued during [the 2022 regular session](#) with bipartisan support, but affordable, educational child care continues to be a challenge in many Colorado communities.

“Many families either don’t have access to enrichment programs like **Hands-On History** or can’t afford them,” **Trujillo** said. “This makes parents have to choose between going to work or staying home to make sure their children have a safe place to be, and that is a situation no one should ever be put in.”

To reduce financial barriers, all of History Colorado’s **Hands-On History** programs offer various automatic tuition assistance options, including assistance for families on free/reduced lunch programs, those with multiple children, and for guardians who work in education, military or as first responders, among other discounts.

“The beauty of the **Hands-On History** program is that, for the kids who attend, it both creates new awareness and understanding of the past and how it influences the present – and allows their parents to go to work knowing their children are doing something worthwhile,” **Bowles**

said. “By making the entry point accessible for families, History Colorado is putting history to work in combating some of the social and educational inequalities that the past has wrought.”

While the new programs in Greeley and La Junta will help support working families there are still many other communities in need either as a result of lack of child care facilities or expanded demand due to reduced academic calendars for local school districts.

As of 2023 one hundred twenty-eight school districts, more than two-thirds of all Colorado districts, operate on some form of [reduced academic calendar](#) which can include four-day school weeks. The majority of districts operating on reduced academic calendars are located in rural parts of the state where there are additional challenges for families to access child care resources.

“The demand in our community is very high and we just don’t have enough childcare programs to accommodate the need,” said **Heather Maes**, director of library services at Woodruff Memorial Library in La Junta. “This partnership allows for us to contribute a much needed resource to our community and is part of larger regional efforts to remedy this issue.”

In the future, History Colorado’s hopes to continue expanding **Hands-On History** throughout Colorado with a focus on increasing the organization’s support for rural communities.

“We hope that the programs in Greeley and La Junta will show other communities that History Colorado is here to be collaborative,” **Trujillo** said. “This is about making sure all families have access to high-quality, history focused camps and classes for their children.”

Registration for [Hands-On History Spring Friday Classes](#) at Woodruff Memorial Library in La Junta is currently open. This “fifth day” program runs from April 12 until May 17, 2024. Registration for Summer Camp at Woodruff Memorial Library opens April 26 and the camp runs from June 10 until July 26, 2024, with no camp offered the week of July 1.

[Hands-On History Summer Camp](#) at Centennial Village Museum in Greeley runs from July 15 until August 9, 2024. Registration for camp at Centennial Village Museum is currently open.

About Hands-On History

[Hands-On History](#) is a history-based skill-building program that provides academic support for communities served by History Colorado. Established at the El Pueblo History Museum in 2014, thanks to funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, **Hands-On History** now has a presence at nearly every History Colorado Museum and a growing number of rural expansion sites across the state. These programs are run by trained educators who provide school break enrichment opportunities, as well as “fifth day” programs for communities operating on a four-day school week. In 2023 there were 4,407 cumulative student contact days at History Colorado’s **Hands-On History** programs across the state and more than 300 families received tuition assistance.

Hands-On History is currently in the process of expanding across Colorado as part of an intentional effort by History Colorado to increase its support of communities across the state. The expansion of **Hands-On History** is possible in part due to strategic funding given to History Colorado by the [Colorado State Legislature](#) for strategic statewide investments.

Communities interested in pursuing a **Hands-On History** partnership with History Colorado, or with questions about the program, can contact **Tamara Trujillo** at tamara.trujillo@state.co.us.

About History Colorado

History Colorado is a division of the Colorado Department of Higher Education and a 501(c)3 non-profit that has served more than 75,000 students and 500,000 people in Colorado each year. It is a 144-year-old institution that operates eleven museums and historic sites, a free public research center, the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation which provides technical assistance, educational opportunities, and other access to archaeology and historic preservation, and the History Colorado State Historical Fund (SHF), which is one of the nation's largest state funded preservation programs of its kind. More than 70% of SHF grants are allocated in rural areas of the state. Additionally, the offices of the State Archaeologist and the State Historic Preservation Officer are part of History Colorado.

History Colorado's mission is to create a better future for Colorado by inspiring wonder in our past. We serve as the state's memory, preserving and sharing the places, stories, and material culture of Colorado through educational programs, historic preservation grants, collecting, outreach to Colorado communities, the History Colorado Center and Stephen H. Hart Research Center in Denver, and 10 other museums and historic attractions statewide. History Colorado is one of only six Smithsonian Affiliates in Colorado. Visit HistoryColorado.org, or call 303-HISTORY, for more information. #HistoryColorado



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