

FEATURES

Navy Week program sets sail for Tucson

SPECIAL TO TUCSON LOCAL MEDIA

The U.S. Navy kicks off their 2025 Navy Week outreach season in Tucson on Monday, Feb. 17, to Sunday, Feb. 23.

The community and Navy enjoy a strong and growing relationship, hosting four Navy Weeks in the city since the program's inception in 2005, to include the most recent in 2023.

The 2025 Tucson Navy Week will bring 50 to 75 sailors to volunteer in the community and interact with the public, striving to inform, educate and inspire discussions on the Navy's importance to Tucson and the nation's security and prosperity.

The Tucson Navy Week also coincides

with the year-long celebration of the Navy's 250th birthday, during which the Navy will host numerous worldwide leadership outreach events, multilateral exercises and community engagements.

"America is a maritime nation," said Cmdr. Julie Holland, Navy Office of Community Outreach director.

"Today 90% of commerce travels through the seas that the Navy has protected for 250 years, and we're thrilled to bring your Navy Sailors to Tucson. Sailors are the reason America's Navy is the most powerful in the world. At Navy Weeks, Americans will connect with sailors who have strong character, competence, and dedication to the mission,

and who continue a 250-year tradition of decisive power from seabed to cyberspace."

Tucson Navy Week will include in-person demonstrations, performances and engagements:

- Senior Navy leaders: Flag officer with ties to Tucson and the surrounding area.
- Namesake Sailors: Sailors serving aboard the Independence-class littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS 10).
- U.S. Navy Band Southwest: Performances and masterclasses with Navy musicians.
- Naval History and Heritage Command: Educational talks and lesson plans about the deep ties between Tucson and the Navy.

• USS Constitution: Demonstrations about the oldest commissioned ship in the Navy.

• U.S. Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command: Educational presentations on atmospheric and oceanographic science and the overall value of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education to the Navy.

• Navy Talent Acquisition Group: Educational presentations, community service projects and static displays.

Navy Weeks visit U.S. regions without a significant Navy presence and over the past two decades NAVCO conducted more than 300 Navy Weeks in 95 U.S. markets.

Watermark residents learn the art of tamales

BY KAREN SCHAFFNER

Tucson Local Media Staff

For Victor Estrella, making tamales is a tradition. The dishes are made of wrapped and steamed cornmeal with red chile stew can be created with green corn.

Either way, this is tamale season.

Estrella, a Watermark Oro Valley Senior Center associate, makes tamales using his grandmother's recipe. Recently, Watermark residents had a taste of Estrella's family history. He demonstrated how he makes his family's tamales.

"We heard that he was a tamale expert, and we quizzed him about it," community ambassador Rick Segui said.

Estrella shared his family's tamales as part of the community's university, where guests — mainly staff and residents — demonstrate how to make their favorite or best foods. Residents have learned about sushi, tortillas and crepes.

At this session, people started filtering into the classroom, where Estrella already had tamales steaming away in a tall, round pot.

"How long do they take to cook?" someone asked.

"Three hours," Estrella answered.

In front of the residents, Estrella placed all the prepared pieces he used to make the tamales. Ingredients include a meat



Victor Estrella, a Watermark Oro Valley associate, shows Beth Bruno how to assemble a tamale. (Karen Schaffner/Staff)

mixture made with red chile and beef, a container of masa made with masa harina (cornflower) and manteca (lard), green olives with the pit still in them and a stack of dried corn husks, which holds the masa and meat together.

Estrella said other foods may be added to tamales before they get steamed.

"A lot of people like to put a piece of potato, a piece of carrot, jalapeño, raisins, but that's for taste," Estrella said.

Estrella's tamales are savory, but some people like to taste sweet.

"There are sweet tamales made out of cinnamon, and there are bean tamales made out of cinnamon and vanilla," Watermark's community life director Alma Mott said.

"(Estrella) has made some for us out of chicken, right? And some pork? And beans and corn."

For this session, Beth Bruno, who had never made tamales before, acted as sous chef. She began putting the masa on the corn husks. "Is this too much?" she asked as she spooned and spread the masa.

Estrella spooned on the meat and demonstrated how to wrap everything together.

As Bruno and Estrella made the tamales, Mott asked a question.

"Does anybody know how many tamales are made at Christmas time all over the United States?"

She had a ready answer.

"I looked it up: It's 1.7 billion," she said. "It's really funny because we all think that in the Hispanic culture we make more tamales than the American culture, but it actually is more in the United States than in Mexico."

When the tamales were done steaming, everyone got an opportunity to try one. That's when people had questions.



Beth Bruno tries tamales for the first time. She thought she had eaten tamales before, but when she tried this one, she realized she never had. (Karen Schaffner/Staff)

For some residents this was their first experience with tamales.

"Is the masa cooked at all?"

"So the corn husk is edible?"

"How do you eat it?"

"I was thinking the same thing: How do you eat it?"

Although Bruno initially said she was an old tamale hand. This was really her first time.

"I thought I had (eaten one), but I guess I didn't," she said. "It's very, very good."

Estrella looked around at the people eating.

"I like to cook and I like to share my culture," he said.