



The Women of SARSEF

SARSEF is a nonprofit on a mission to create Arizona's next generation of critical thinkers and problem solvers through science and engineering. SARSEF got its start in 1955 as the regional science and engineering fair, and the organization served the K-12 students of Southern Arizona for fifty-five years thanks to a dedicated group of passionate volunteers. In 2009 that all changed. As the SARSEF Fair awards ceremony came to a close, a little girl scanned the winners on stage then turned to her mother and asked "Mommy, why are all the winners boys?" Fortunately, a SARSEF board member overheard the girl's revolutionary question and knew they must take action.

Kathleen Bethel, EdD, a newly retired principal from the Sunnyside School District was hired as SARSEF's first CEO and was tasked with the challenge to make the science fair representative of our Arizona community. Kathleen worked tirelessly, founding SARSEF's signature education programs that target populations that are traditionally underrepresented in STEM and delivering them at no cost to schools or students. Kathleen quickly recognized that in order to make a true impact, she needed help. So, she grew the organization's income by 700% through grant writing and fundraising so that she could form her team- all of whom happened to be female.



It was during this phase that Kathleen brought on Liz (Baker) Bowman, MS, a SARSEF alumna who become involved at the age of eight, and went on to win over a quarter million dollars in prizes and scholarships including First Place at the International Science and Engineering fair. The profound impact that SARSEF had on the course of her own life fueled her desire to ensure that every child in Arizona had the same opportunity she had been granted- "...that my brain has value and my voice has impact."

Liz's drive for equity and recognition of the dire state of STEM education in Arizona led to her desire to expand SARSEF services across all of Arizona. Liz knew that in order to achieve this goal, SARSEF would need a leader who was well-connected and respected across the state, so she brought on Julie Euber, MA, the Director of Education and Outreach for TGen- the Translational Genomics Institute. Julie's remarkable talent for leadership and eye for strategy was clear from day one, and both Kathleen and Liz are thrilled to see what she will bring to the children of Arizona next.



Today, SARSEF has nine programs and events that involve at least 54,000 PreK-12th grade students annually. SARSEF's education programs work directly with students in their classrooms, asking each group to identify a problem they notice in their lives that they want to solve using science and engineering practices. Through this work, teacher trainings and parent workshops, the demographics of the fair have seen remarkable change. At the 2021 Fair, 71% of participating students, and winners, are from areas of poverty, 63% are non-white, and 57% are female.

To learn more about SARSEF and get involved, visit sarsef.org today!

