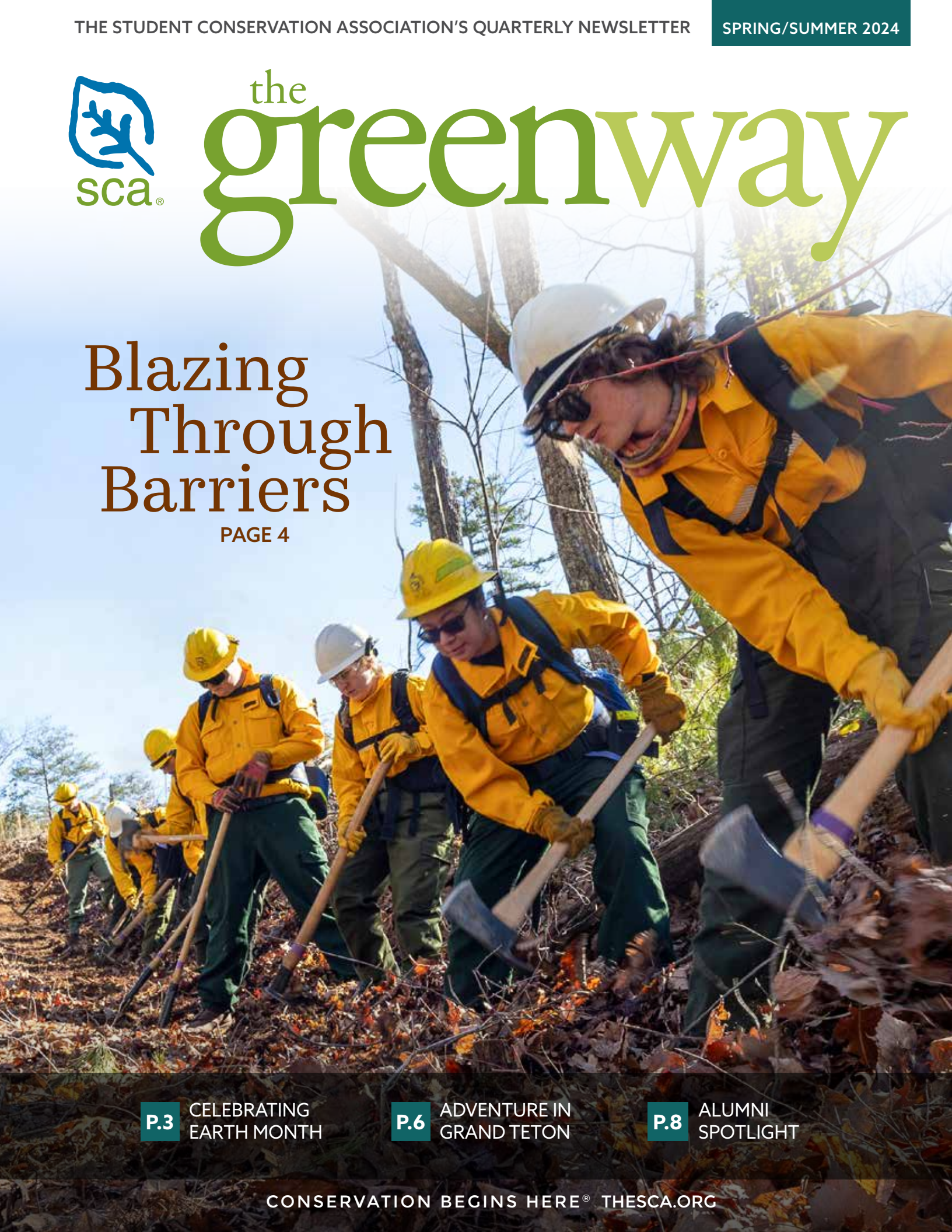




# the greenway

## Blazing Through Barriers

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SPOTLIGHT

# Message from the President

LIDIA SOTO-HARMON, PRESIDENT AND CEO



**THIS TIME OF YEAR IS ALWAYS EXCITING AT THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION.** With spring comes new beginnings as staff launch new programs for the busy summer months of crews and members heading outdoors to bring our mission to life.

Spring also brings Earth Month, which is an incredibly important month for the organization as we partner with supporters to host cleanup events and environmental education opportunities.

To have an even bigger impact this year, we also asked our staff, alumni and the public to Do One Thing for Mother Earth, from turning off the lights and using reusable bottles to picking up litter.

This issue of *The Greenway* highlights our growing women's wildland fire program, shares an unforgettable trip to the Grand Teton for members, introduces you to our new board members and showcases a special tree planting in Chicago. Continue reading to learn more about how we are at work for the planet.

At the SCA, we are dedicated to inspiring young people who are excited about becoming environmental stewards. It truly is an honor to create an experience for young people that can transform their path forward. But we cannot do it alone.

Thank you for your continued commitment to protecting the planet by helping build the next generation of conservation leaders and environmental stewards. We are forever grateful for your support, which makes the work we do possible.





# Gold Medal Action:

## Planting Trees with Aly Raisman For A Greener Chicago



**TO END EARTH MONTH WITH A BANG, THE SCA HOSTED A TREE PLANTING EVENT ON APRIL 28 AT PROKSA PARK IN BERWYN, ILLINOIS, JUST OUTSIDE CHICAGO.** The event drew over 70 volunteers who rolled up their sleeves to help plant 30 new trees, including Aerie Real Foundation Ambassador Aly Raisman, gold medal gymnast and advocate, SCA CEO & President Lidia Soto-Harmon and Morton Arboretum President Jill Koski.

As the world faces growing concerns about climate change, there is a growing body of research showing that neighborhood trees and urban forests improve our physical and mental well-being. Planting trees is a powerful way to beat extreme heat, purify the air and enhance public health.

“Trees are proving to be an important environmental necessity now more than ever, especially in urban areas. They provide shade, reduce air pollution and improve mental health,” said Soto-Harmon. “Planting trees not only beautifies the city but also creates a healthier and sustainable environment for generations to come. We were excited to join forces this Earth Month with our amazing partners to help improve the world around us one tree at a time.”

Together with the Morton Arboretum’s Chicago Trees Initiative, the Berwyn Park District and the Berwyn Tree Canopy Initiative, SCA staff, alumni and community volunteers brought trees to a neighborhood where they were needed most so that the community could enjoy their exceptional benefits.

“The Aerie Real Foundation was thrilled to celebrate Earth Month alongside the Student Conservation Association as we work together with our Aerie community to ensure Proksa Park remains a beautiful greenspace,” said Marcie Eberhart, Senior Director – Corporate Giving & Social Responsibility, American Eagle Outfitters, Inc. “We are incredibly proud to support initiatives that share our passion for protecting the planet and for making the world a brighter place for future generations.”

Through its Urban Green Program, the SCA provides young people with paid green jobs, including single-day service projects, seasonal work and year-long internships or fellowships. In the Chicago metro region, program participants plant trees, build trails and restore habitats while exploring green job opportunities, building leadership skills, and learning about the local environment through environmental education field trips, outdoor recreation and work projects.

# Sparking Change:

## WOMEN IN FIRE



BACK IN THE FALL, TIFFANY ASHLEY WAS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT. Tired of working in the service industry, she longed to be outside and become part of a community. She decided to sign up for the opportunity of a lifetime and join the SCA's 2024 Women's Fire and Fuels Crew.

“What they're able to facilitate here is genuinely, positively life-changing. Everybody leaves an impact, no matter how big or how small. Not only is it providing me with skills I can take into the future but also pride and a sense of direction that I was lacking,” said Ashley, 33, of Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. “What we have been able to do both within our ecosystem and our immediate surroundings by bringing together this group of strangers have facilitated one of the most positive experiences I have had this far.”





Above: Colleen McDermott (middle in orange chaps) and Tiffany Ashley (second from left in sunglasses and orange chaps) with members of the SCA's Women's Fire and Fuels Crew. Left: U.S. Forest Service Crew Supervisor Elizabeth Skelly

Women make up only 13% of all wildland firefighters in the U.S. Forest Service and are often the only ones in a unit or one of a few. By joining forces, both the SCA and the Forest Service hope to increase the number of women and people of color entering the field while also increasing the overall amount of trained wildland firefighters and fuels staff entering the profession.

"I wake up every morning so excited to get out there and do it. Every day, there is a new thing to learn or do," said crew member Colleen McDermott, 21, of Philadelphia. "I think fire can be scary. But being right next to it and really understanding how these burns operate and how much thought goes into this has really been surprising to me. I've really grown so much."

As part of the Table Rock Fire Crew, the team works and travels throughout the Southern Region, gaining hands-on experience in prescribed fire, hazardous fuels reduction, and fire suppression under the supervision of U.S. Forest Service firefighters. Throughout the season, the crew may even have opportunities to respond to active fires.

"Firefighting is still a very male-dominated field. No matter what that culture looks like, it still feels like all eyes are on

"Supporters of these programs are doing a lot for the land and personal development of the young people doing the work."

COLLEEN McDERMOTT

you no matter how supportive they may be," McDermott said. "It's so nice to have that pressure lifted and not have to worry about that. I really love that freedom to be vulnerable. It can be dangerous work and you don't want to be uncomfortable. Supporters of these programs are doing a lot for the land and personal development of the young people doing the work."

During a wildland fire, varying plant materials can act as fuel, including grasses, shrubs, trees, dead leaves and fallen pine needles. As these burnable materials pile up, so do the chances of catastrophic wildland fire. In the right conditions, excess fuel allows fires to burn hotter, larger, longer and faster, making them more difficult and dangerous to manage, making it essential to have trained wildland firefighters and fuels staff at the ready.

"It's super exciting. One of my favorite parts of the job is seeing the light click when a program participant actually knows that they can do this. Seeing something that you thought was almost impossible and doing it is an amazing feeling," said Elizabeth Skelly, U.S. Forest Service Crew Supervisor. "Getting a good foundational experience as a wildland firefighter sets you up for success. It's physically and emotionally demanding at times but is super rewarding for the right person."

# From Home to High Peaks:

## Houston & Atlanta Youth Find Service and Wonder in Grand Teton

**THIS PAST MARCH, 12 SCA CREW MEMBERS FROM HOUSTON AND ATLANTA TREKKED TO GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK TO LEARN AND SERVE.** For several of the members, the adventure was a journey full of firsts, from leaving home to seeing clouds from an airplane window, visiting a national park and seeing snow.

Through a partnership with the Grand Teton Science School in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, the SCA was able to expand first-time outdoor recreation adventures and build equitable access to nature for Black, Indigenous, and other underrepresented high school crew members ages 15-19.

Founded in 1957, the SCA fielded its first volunteers at Grand Teton National Park. Fast forward to today, and program participants are once again being immersed in studying the natural sciences in one of the most beautiful and ecologically complex wilderness areas in North America.

“I’ve never had the opportunity to see or experience anything like this before. Upon our arrival to a literal winter wonderland, all signs were already pointing to the results of a remarkable experience,” said Houston crew member Jericho De-Jesus Pineda Rodriguez. “Not only did I get to learn about the adaptations the Indigenous people invented that were influenced by animals, but I also got to spend time researching with my awesome older brother Elijah. I’ve grown in a countless amount of ways. I’ve grown mentally, socially, and even spiritually from this experience.”

“The knowledge we gained and the challenges we faced in an unfamiliar environment improved each friendship. Thank you to those who chose to gift us with this memorable trip that I know profoundly impacted us as individuals.”

HOUSTON CREW MEMBER RUTH MORALES



This week-long field education experience focused on ecology and leadership so program participants could understand how to ethically interact with the landscape and the wildlife that inhabits it. Alongside knowledgeable instructors, they sharpened their analytical thinking and scientific skills and conducted field research projects focusing on coexisting with wildlife through observation and hands-on exploration.

“If two words could describe this trip in its entirety it would be: First experiences. Never in my life had I been so far away from home, slept in a room with complete strangers at first, or been on a plane,” said Atlanta crew member Daniel Villvianco. “From solidifying my dream career path to reinforcing my love for nature, the SCA has changed my life yet again. I tried things that I’d never done or even knew existed, like snow tubing, snowshoeing and star gazing. Even though I only left my footprints in the Tetons, I took with me memories that changed my outlook on my life as a whole.”

The trip was made possible by the Deidre Bainbridge Wildlife Fund’s Grizzly 399 Project, with special thanks to SCA board member Terri Thomas and her husband, Ray. The SCA is also grateful to the Teton Science School for hosting the program participants.

# SCA Welcomes New Board Members

IN APRIL, THE SCA WELCOMED FOUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS WHO WILL HELP SUPPORT THE NONPROFIT'S WORK OF CHANGING LIVES THROUGH SERVICE TO NATURE.

“As we embark on a new chapter, we are thrilled to welcome to the board these knowledgeable and accomplished professionals who bring immense expertise and insight to the SCA,” said SCA Board Chair Gail Carmody. “We are excited to work together to make a positive impact as we continue the legacy of our conservation work.”

The SCA is led by a diverse group of Board Members, including leaders in both the public and private sectors who care deeply about the responsible use and protection of the natural environment and building the next generation of conservation leaders. The new board members began their terms on April 1, 2024, and can serve a maximum of two terms.

“As we welcome our new board members, we also welcome new opportunities to innovate and grow,” said SCA President and CEO Lidia Soto-Harmon. “We are honored to have such remarkable new board members whose valuable insights and contributions will be instrumental in driving our organization forward.”

Learn more here:



The four new members are:



**Elisabeth Bradley**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Forum One



**Nick Costides**  
President of Information  
Technology at UPS (retired)



**John Glaser, PhD**  
SCA Alum 1971  
Executive-in-Residence,  
Harvard Medical School  
Executive Education



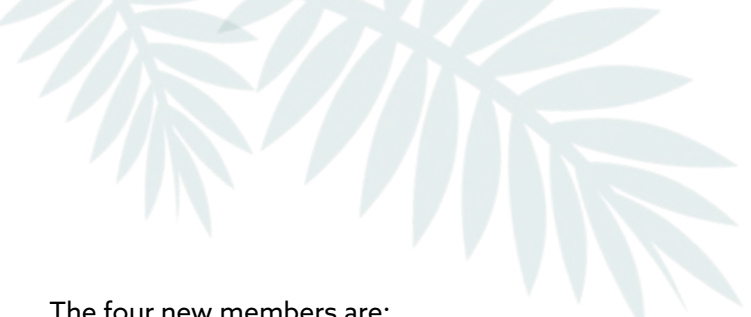
**Karen Wawrzaszek**  
Regional Director & Senior  
Vice President, Northern  
Trust Wealth Management

## ANNOUNCING THE SCA'S *Million Dollar Challenge*

Don't miss this opportunity to *double* the impact of your support! For a limited time, your gift will be matched dollar-for-dollar!

Learn more and make your gift today!

Visit [thesca.org/tgwmatch](https://thesca.org/tgwmatch)

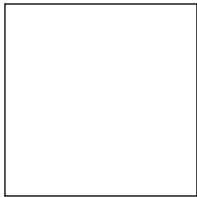




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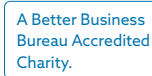
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The Student Conservation Association (SCA) is the largest provider of hands-on environmental conservation programs for youth and young adults whose lives are transformed while they protect and restore natural and cultural resources across the country. Founded in 1957, the SCA is committed to building the next generation of conservation leaders dedicated to the lifelong protection of the environment and the communities we serve.

BOARD CHAIR: Gail Carmody  
PRESIDENT/CEO: Lidia Soto-Harmon  
EDITOR: Sarah Hoye  
GRAPHIC DESIGN: Julia Eva Bacon



FIND US ON:



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:

# Tommy Sheridan



**TOMMY SHERIDAN SPENT HIS FIRST SUMMER WITH THE SCA IN 2002 AS AN INTERN FOR THE NORTHERN SOUTHEAST REGIONAL AQUACULTURE ASSOCIATION IN ALASKA.** He was responsible for caring for juvenile salmon at a net-pen complex on a remote lake, where he lived in a 1964 Airstream trailer.

“I was on my own, 13 miles outside of town. I fed them, cleaned the pen, repaired their habitat and helped with collecting eggs. I really fell in love with the seasonal nature of salmon work in Alaska,” said Sheridan, 48, of Cordova, Alaska. “I came from a pretty modest working-class background. Extravagant travel to a place like Alaska wasn’t possible. That experience started an extraordinary path, and it’s been an incredible journey.”

What was supposed to be a four-month stint turned into a career working at salmon hatcheries and calling Alaska home

for good. After staying in Alaska, Sheridan would later meet his future wife and start a family. During the pandemic, Sheridan stepped down from his position at the largest salmon hatchery in North America to homeschool his children. At the same time, his wife continued to work as a nurse for the local Tribe. Today, Sheridan is the associate director for the Alaska Blue Economy Center at the University of Alaska – Fairbanks and was named to the 19-member Alaska Salmon Research Task Force earlier this year.

“I can’t imagine my life without the SCA. It’s amazing to think about what this kid from Florida who came to Alaska and who lived in a travel trailer has been able to do,” said Sheridan, also a member of the SCA Alumni Council. “I have been able to do all these incredible things and wish that opportunity for others. I am so very grateful to the SCA.”

Make your gift today at [thesca.org/donate](https://thesca.org/donate)