



J. Robert Oppenheimer Memorial Committee

Fall/Winter Newsletter 2024

Jennifer Raff Engaged with One of Our Largest Audiences

by JJ Mortensen



If you missed the annual lecture last June, you missed a popular one by an engaging speaker reporting on a fascinating and timely topic. The 51st memorial lecture sponsored by the J. Robert Oppenheimer Memorial Committee

(JROMC) featured Dr. Jennifer Raff, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Kansas and author of the award-winning bestseller *Origin: A Genetic History of the Americas*. She spoke on “Ancient DNA and the Peopling of the Americas.”

Raff discussed how she and her team interact with native tribes and communities across North America to study how and when people first came to the American continents. In her work, she strives to mend relationships and improve practices to be sensitive to Indigenous cultures. She also touched on the stressful techniques of acquiring, handling, and processing small quantities of ancient DNA samples.

Along with recent archaeological discoveries (such as the 22,000-year-old footprints at White Sands), her research with ancient and contemporary genomes shows that the process of populating the American continents was far older and more complex than the “land bridge” theory. It likely involved coastal migration by boat along what is called the “kelp highway” on the Pacific Coast.

Shortly after her lecture, Raff traveled to Spain to conduct research for her next book, which will delve into how people became human. Perhaps in a few years she’ll be willing to return to speak on that topic. Until then the video of her 2024 lecture is available at

jromc.org/video-recordings

Ron Wilkins: in Memoriam

by Galen Gisler

We mourn the passing of Ron Wilkins, a dedicated member of the JROMC for thirteen years and for seven years its treasurer. I took over from Ron as treasurer in early 2023 and spent many hours with him the previous year learning how the treasurer’s job works. Ron was extremely well organized, careful, and diligent about keeping track of deadlines and meeting them. I consulted with him many times as I grew into the position and always welcomed his very helpful advice. I’ve known Ron for nearly forty years and will miss him dearly, as I’m sure many of us will, not only in the JROMC but also in the broader community.

Ron also served as a dedicated member, board member, or treasurer of his church and several local nonprofits, including as a board member of the Los Alamos Historical Society for twenty years and as its president for six years. The JROMC extends our sympathy to his son, grandson, and many friends.



Inside This Issue

In addition to the scholarships that the committee awards, this newsletter features some of the new ventures in education and community outreach that the JROMC participated in this year: judging and presenting Oppenheimer Awards at the Northeastern NM Regional Science & Engineering Fair, hands-on STEM programs at the Pojoaque Valley Middle School, and a contribution to Santa Clara’s Kha’p’o Community School’s Tewa language program. It also includes several heartfelt thank-you notes worth reading.

JROMC Presented Oppenheimer Awards to Northeastern Regional Science & Engineering Fair Winners

JROMC provided judges and some monetary awards for the Northeastern NM Regional Science & Engineering Fair in Las Vegas, New Mexico and contributed to the travel fund for winners who advanced to the international fair. The award winners were Ethan Mendez, Tate Plohr, Fiona Smith, Helena Welch, and Kalliope Welch (Los Alamos); Henry Tischler (Santa Fe); and Zoe Tafoya and Mario Vargas (Taos). Helena Welch and Tate Plohr advanced to compete in the International Science and Engineering Fair in Los Angeles.



Two Science Fair Award Winners Wrote Notes of Gratitude



As a student who participated in the New Mexico Northeastern Regional Science and Engineering Fair this year, I would like to thank you for your special award and kind gift of \$50 in support of my project, "Virtually Reconstructing an Ancient Musical Instrument." I would

like you to know that this has helped deepen my passion for mathematics and science in general, and I will enjoy participating in this event in future years.

Helena Welch

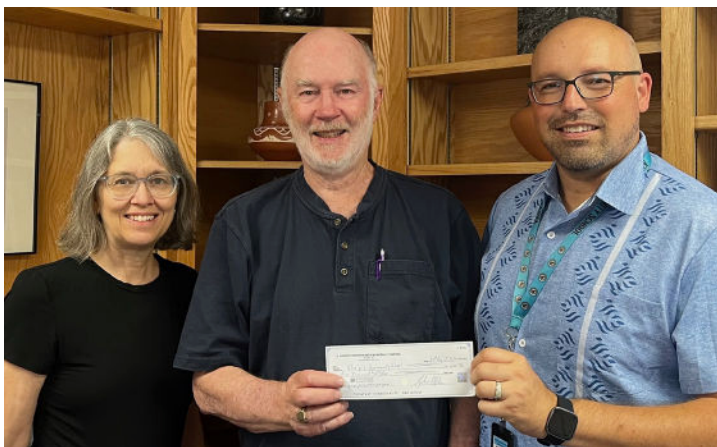
I would like to thank you for visiting the New Mexico Regional Science and Engineering Fair and generously donating the special awards. I enjoyed speaking to your members about my project "Detecting Exoplanets through Transits" and valued the advice I received immensely. . . As the result of your charity, I have reached the state level of the Science Fair program and, with the help of advice from your members, been able to obtain second place in my section. I would like to give your organization final thanks for helping me to excel. I hope to interact more with you in the future.

Kalliope Luna Welch



JROMC Supports Tewa Language Program at KCS

JROMC members Liz Martineau and John Ruminer presented Porter Swentzell, Executive Director of Kha'p'o Community School (KCS), with a check to support the school's Tewa language program. KCS is a dual-language



(Tewa/English) school at Santa Clara Pueblo. The JROMC chose to support Kha'p'o Community School because of Oppenheimer's affinity and love for languages and his appreciation for the beauty of northern New Mexico and its cultural traditions.

JROMC Conducts STEM Program on Hydrology at Pojoaque Valley Middle School

As part of an effort to increase the impact of JROMC in our surrounding communities, the Committee supported a STEM pilot program on hydrology at Pojoaque Valley Middle School (PVMS). Working with 7th grade science teacher Heather Montoya, JROMC member Wendee Brunish and three volunteers (Cathy Wilson, Michelle Bourret, and Kathryn Berchtold) conducted hands-on activities with all 120 seventh graders. The activities included a small-scale model of an aquifer, a hydraulic conductivity experiment, and an analysis of water quality. JROMC is now working with volunteers and PVMS to plan field trips to the Valles Caldera next year for students to collect and analyze water samples in the field.

40 Years of Awarding Scholarships

This year the JROMC awarded seventeen scholarships totaling \$53,000, bringing the grand total to \$806,000 for the past forty years. The first JROMC scholarship was awarded in 1984 to a graduating senior from Los Alamos High School in memory of J. Robert Oppenheimer. Thanks to you, our generous donors, this program grew to benefit high school seniors not only at Los Alamos but also at Pojoaque Valley and Santa Fe high schools. In addition to the usual local and regional schools, the program now includes seniors at Española High and Santa Fe Indian School.

Notes of Gratitude to Our Donors from Scholarship Winners

Natalia Marquez: I want to thank you for this opportunity and tell you just how much this scholarship means to me. As someone who wishes to build my community and help others who may be struggling, I want my impact to better future lives, to better our ways of life, to continue traditions, to learn as I have from my environment.

My nana has always been one of my greatest inspirations. . . .She raised my dad and his siblings as a single mother, cleaning houses so she could make enough for them to have a good life. Now they all have steady jobs and families of their own, thanks to her hard work and efforts in giving them more than she had.

I am constantly reminded of my nana and everything she has done for her family in everything I do, especially as she gets older and more fragile. I strive to make her proud and make her efforts even more worthwhile, as I have seen first-hand the effects of one woman's efforts and strength on the success of multiple generations and have learned so much from her tenacity.

I've grown up around my family's strong pride in our New Mexican heritage, especially since our family has been here much longer than we've been able to trace. With my passion for science, I know there are so many things we can do to preserve our beautiful land, our ecosystem, our wildlife, and, as a result, our community.

I want to thank you for giving me the chance to pursue my education, to learn more about how we can protect our environment,

and over all how I can help preserve and expand everything my nana has worked towards. I will be the first of my nana's grandchildren to attend college and want to use this to show just how intertwined family, community, and our environment are, especially as they have all made me who I am today. ***This is by far the greatest opportunity I have ever been given, and it is thanks to you all that I am able to do this.*** Thank you.

Anelia Holterman: This scholarship will aid me in entering college this fall and promote my education at the University of New Mexico. Being from Northern New Mexico, I have witnessed so many of my fellow students just give up on school or higher education and take different, often darker, paths. It means a lot to me that alongside the JROMC, there are so many others that are encouraging and supporting these students in pursuing higher education. ***Thank you for your support and donation to students who have a lot of potential but not many resources available to them.***

Shiv Antar Khalsa: I would like to express my gratitude in receiving a JROMC scholarship. This scholarship will help me in so many ways and has a value far greater than that of its monetary face. Not only will it aid in paying for my tuition, books, and housing, but also in my mental health. As a result of your generosity, I will be able to focus on my further education with less stress about the financial situation of it. I am now more motivated than ever to achieve my goals in developing myself as a student and character, largely due to your support and contribution to my future success. ***This award means an extreme amount to me, more than I can express in a simple thank you letter.*** Thank you, again, for providing me this scholarship and the opportunities that come with it.

Araya Vigil: I would like to express my deepest gratitude for being selected as a recipient of the J. Robert Oppenheimer Scholarship in memory of Satch Cowan for exceptional promise in science or medicine. This money will assist me in my educational goals at Texas A&M University where I will

be pursuing a degree in Biomedical Engineering. The opportunity to represent this program is one that I am greatly thankful for. I thank you for offering opportunities to young students like me who are excited to try and find their place in the world. ***Thank you so much for all you do to provide help for us students in need.*** Please share my appreciation with the others who made this possible.



Rebecca Li John Carakwell Joaquin Caraveo



Shiv Antar Khalsa Daniel Kim Araya Vigil



Aliana Cornflower Ortiz Chloe Li Anelia Holterman



Natalia Marquez Deeanna Foster Emma Frost Maximus Posada



Ayanna Martinez Dalian Lopez Merrick Word-Brown Matteo Nagle



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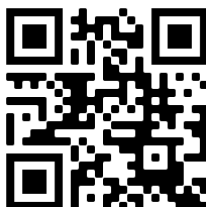
**J. Robert Oppenheimer
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An Important Note to Our Wonderful Donors

The JROMC is considering listing donors' names in categories related to the amount of their donations, as many nonprofits do. For years the committee has been listing donors alphabetically in the annual lecture program. We are now considering listing them in categories in the program and on the website as well. As always, donors have the option to be listed anonymously. If you have any concerns about these possible changes, please let us know by adding a comment on your donation slip, or contact us at jromc.org/contact-us.

There are several ways to donate: by check using the donation form; by PayPal, Venmo, credit card, or debit card using the QR code shown here; by LANL's Employee Giving Campaign community.lanl.gov/giving/employee-giving/; or with Giving Tuesday at LosAlamosGives.org.

**Thank you for your generosity
 and Happy Thanksgiving.**



Donation Slip

I/We wish to support JROMC with a donation of \$_____ Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

By check: Please make checks out to JROMC, and return this slip with your donation. You may use the memo line to specify the general fund or a specific scholarship.

Name(s): _____

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(if you prefer to get JROMC mail that way)

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