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**Funky the Owl is moving to Pinetop-Lakeside, Arizona**  
Partnership announced today to *create 'world-class' attraction for White Mountains*

Pinetop-Lakeside, Arizona: The Valley's loss is the White Mountain's gain as Garfunkel (Funky) the magnificent Eurasian Eagle Owl plans his move to the White Mountain Nature Center in the cool pines, along with his trainers, and their Raptor Flight Show.



Funky belongs to Land On Sky Wildlife Experiences, a non-profit organization based in Phoenix, that has partnered with the White Mountain Nature Center to establish a free flight educational raptor experience at the Center. The show will include Funky and a variety of other raptors. Plans call for Funky to arrive by early summer, 2022. Donations to help build Funky's home and an adjoining amphitheater are being accepted by the Nature Center now.

Although Funky is only two years old, he has been thrilling audiences with his amazing natural behaviors for over a year now. He has a 6-foot 4-inch wingspan, but can easily fly between two guests that are standing only 18 inches apart! Because owls have special adaptations for silent flight, the people feel the wind as he flies between them, but don't hear him coming. Funky is amazingly beautiful and even has his own coloring book and social media pages! (Facebook or Instagram... @funkytheowl)

As they prepare the formal program, the trainers will be offering free training shows on a daily basis. Their training is based upon the most modern, animal choice/positive reinforcement methods. "It works for other animals like household pets and even kids that won't listen!" according to John Glitsos. "How did you get that hawk to do that?" is the most common question we get, he said. "We are happy to answer training questions as guests watch us build a world-class animal education show here," he concluded.

Jim Snitzer, the Vice President of the Nature Center, said, "this will become one of the most visited venues in the White Mountain Region. The programming is designed to appeal to families with children which are a major component of our tourist demographic. And the opportunities to volunteer or watch beautiful animals interact with the skilled trainers is a life-changing experience. My appreciation for animals and nature increased ten-fold after just an hour with them," he said.

The owners of Land On Sky Wildlife Experiences are Balinda Strosnider and John Glitsos. Both are Certified Professional Bird Trainers, and have spent nearly 15 years doing educational programs for groups as well as school and private functions throughout Arizona. They have presented hawks, falcons, and eagles at the Fools Hollow campground with U.S. Fish and Wildlife for a decade. Their shows always drawn hundreds of guests. Because instead of viewing their job as "education" they approach bird shows from the entertainment angle. Balinda and John have produced and starred in stand-up and improv comedy shows, so people have too much fun to realize they are learning!

"People want to be entertained, not educated," said Balinda. "But our conservation and animal welfare messages are designed to touch their hearts and their minds. At the end we are going for conservation action which is based on an emotional attachment to nature and the animals that share our environment," she concluded.

The project has already garnered support from a flock of top-flight (pun intended) professionals including WDM Architects of Wichita, Kansas, who designs buildings, amphitheatres, and animal habitats at zoos across the United States. Also assisting is Natural Encounters, Inc. from Florida who produce and operate bird programs at the world's largest theme park as well as the Indianapolis Zoo, Dallas State Fair, and have recently revamped the bird program at Bearizona in Williams.

Numerous contractors and government entities in the White Mountains are also on board and contributing to the project. From the Fire Department saving stumps and branches for perches, to a local pastry shop offering coffee and pastries during training shows, the White Mountain Community is ready for this opportunity to shine. And Funky is certainly ready to fly!

About the White Mountain Nature Center: The White Mountain Nature Center ([www.wmnature.org](http://www.wmnature.org)) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Established in 2003, the Nature Center is on 10 acres in Lakeside, next to the Big Springs Environmental Study Area, with 5 acres leased from the Town of Pinetop-Lakeside on its Mountain Meadow Recreation Complex. The Center's vision is to connect people through nature education, wildlife rehabilitation and open space preservation in the White Mountains of Arizona.

About Land On Sky Wildlife Experiences: Land On Sky Wildlife Experiences ([www.landonsky.org](http://www.landonsky.org)) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization established in 2014. Its goal is introducing animals to people in a way that leaves them with lasting appreciation and reverence for the natural world and its inhabitants. Land On Sky trains birds of prey for public displays of their natural behaviors and skills. Their goal is "every encounter, goosebumps!" meaning that the magnificence of the animals touches the hearts of the audience in a personal way, driving a lasting positive impression that drives conservation action and behavior. Its founding members are Balinda Strosnider and John Glitsos who are both Certified Professional Bird Trainers and accomplished stand-up and improv performers.