



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

2025

ANNUAL REPORT

A place where people encounter
compassion, community, and hope.



Dear Friends,

In many ways, 2025 was a year of meaningful growth and steady progress for Spirit in the Desert. We surpassed \$1 million in service income for the first time, welcomed a strong number of groups and first-time guests, and introduced new initiatives that expanded both our reach and our relationships.

Among the year's milestones was the inaugural ThanksLiving Music Festival, which brought new audiences to the Center and helped foster new donor connections. We also dedicated the Hanson Contemplative Garden, a sacred outdoor space that is already serving as a place of reflection and prayer for many who visit.

Important work took place behind the scenes as well. We replaced the long-worn flooring in the main portion of the Estrem building and began upgrading locks across campus to enhance safety and security for our guests. These improvements, while less visible than program milestones, are essential to sustaining the ministry entrusted to us.

Spirit in the Desert remains well positioned to continue the grace-centered ministry that takes place daily on our campus. We remain deeply committed to offering exceptional Christian hospitality. As I often share with our guests, we are blessed to witness the many transformations that regularly occur here.

We do not presume to be the source of those transformations. That is God's work. Our responsibility is to create an environment where such transformation can take root, and this community continues to do that faithfully.

With gratitude,

Eric Simonsen

Executive Director



Spirit in the Desert is a 26-room retreat center in Carefree, Arizona dedicated to helping people experience the love of God through joyful hospitality, renewal, and community. Set on six and a half acres of beautifully landscaped Sonoran desert, our campus offers chapels, meeting spaces, a labyrinth, walking trails, and a dining room for shared meals in a setting created for transformation.

MISSION

Spirit in the Desert is an oasis of renewal and healing, nourishing and restoring lives through joyful hospitality, a contemplative setting, engaging programs, and spirited community.

YEAR IN REVIEW



In 2025, our 32nd year, Spirit in the Desert hosted 171 group programs and 122 personal retreats, welcoming 3,738 guests and generating 5,450 room nights, about 57% occupancy across our 26 guest rooms. These gatherings supported renewal, learning, leadership development, and community life across a wide range of ministries, organizations, and local groups.

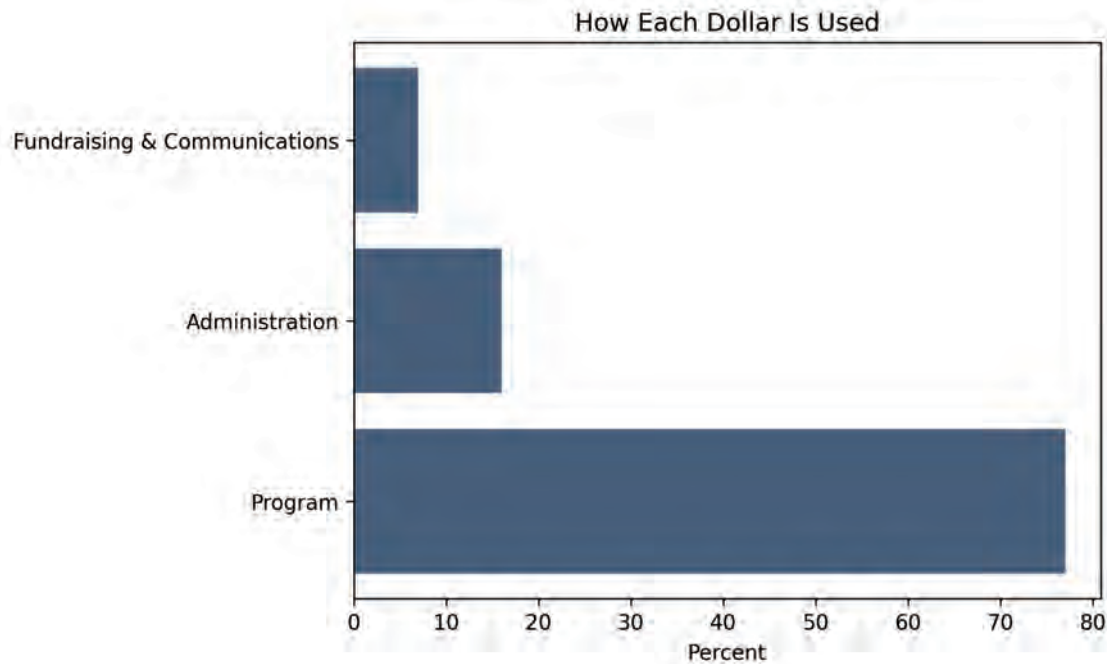
While rooted in our Lutheran identity, the Center served an increasingly diverse faith community, welcoming participants from multiple Christian traditions as well as Jewish, Hindu, interfaith, and non-sectarian communities.

Many guests arrived during times of significant life transition, including veterans, recovery communities, individuals living with serious illness, and those experiencing grief. Others gathered for planning, creative work, and spiritual formation.

INCOME
\$1,217,821

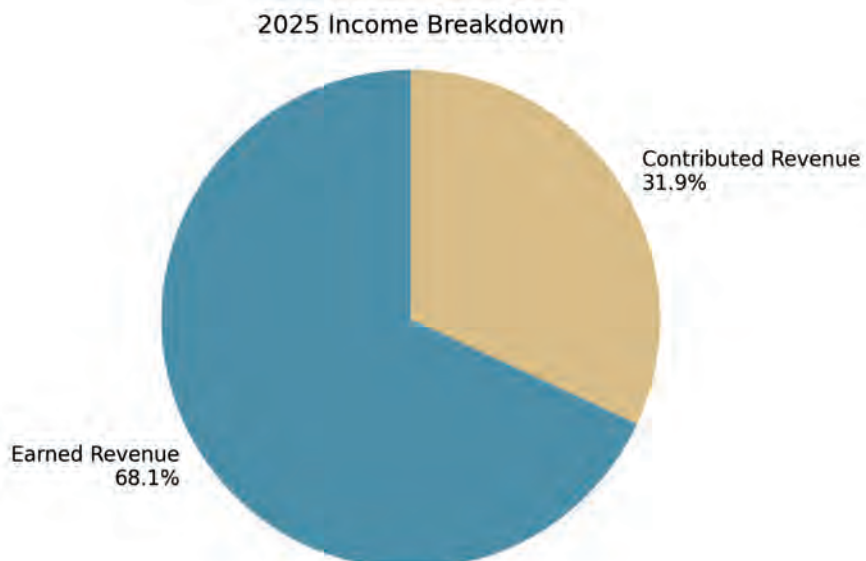
EXPENSE
\$1,184,957

NET OPERATING
SURPLUS
\$32,864



NOTE:

Program expenses include all costs directly related to guest services and program delivery. Administration includes governance and operational oversight. Fundraising & Communications supports donor engagement and outreach.



SUSTAINABILITY

Since 2021, Spirit in the Desert has moved beyond pandemic recovery into a steady and resilient season of ministry, operating at a consistently higher level of activity and impact.

GROWTH

With a relatively stable number of programs, the Center is welcoming more guests and generating more room nights, reflecting fuller programs, longer stays, and deeper engagement.

STEWARDSHIP

Under Eric's leadership, Spirit in the Desert has strengthened its mission delivery while maintaining financial discipline and making thoughtful use of staff and facilities.



IMPACT



“What a wonderful retreat place. Eric and his team were unbelievable during our gathering. They were accommodating, flexible, and genuinely joyful about hosting our event. The experience changed many lives.”

(Anna Grill, founder of the Young Onset Parkinson's Network and Chair of its National Advisory Council)

“Healing of Memories creates a safe place for people to tell their life stories, stories that may include shame, grief, or broken relationships. Every story needs a listener, and every listener has a story to tell.”

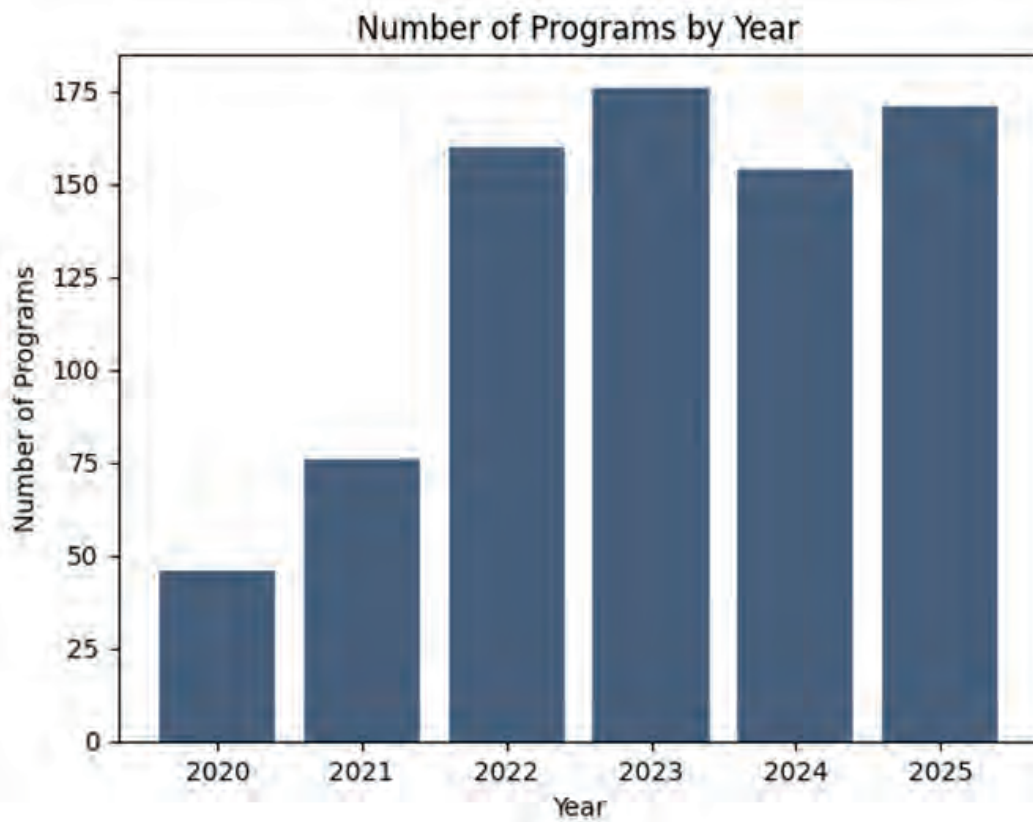
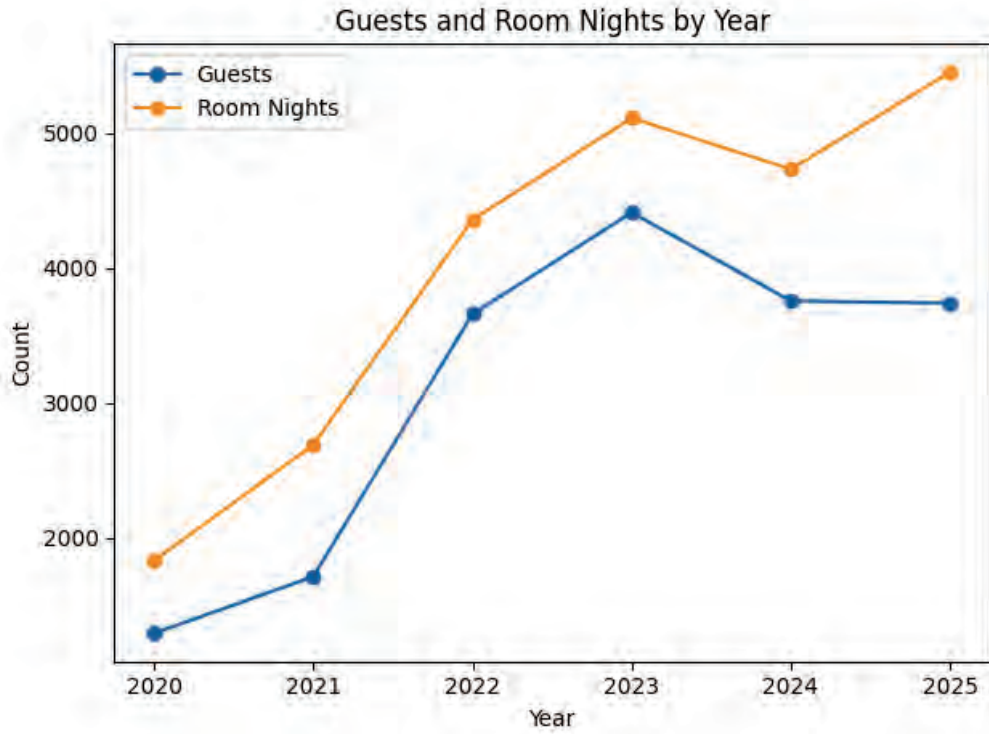
(Sandy Hollett, Lead Facilitator)

“I came in broken. I'm leaving restored.”

(Veteran participant, Healing of Memories Workshop)



GROWTH





RETREAT STORY: YOUNG ONSET PARKINSON'S NETWORK

In 2025, Spirit in the Desert welcomed the Young Onset Parkinson's Network, a community of individuals living with Parkinson's disease diagnosed during the prime of life. For many participants, the retreat offered something rare: the opportunity to spend time with others who truly understand their experience.

Participants described the weekend as "amazing," "life-changing," and "heartwarming," with many sharing that it was the first time they had ever met another person with young onset Parkinson's disease. Conversations that can feel difficult in everyday life unfolded naturally here, and friendships formed quickly. Throughout the weekend, participants gathered for yoga in the chapel, meditation walks through the labyrinth, and time together around meals, the pool, and shared conversation.

One goal of the retreat was simple: that each person would leave with at least one new friend. Organizers reported that most participants left with many. The photos throughout this publication were taken at that retreat, courtesy of Andrea Merriam Crespo, Parkinson's and Movement Disorders Alliance.



SUPPORT OUR MISSION

FULL-TIME STAFF

Eric Simonson
Executive Director

Rika Beckley
Director of Development

Denise Berberich
Director of Programs

Henry Rojas
Spiritual Director, Retreat Leader

Karl Schwirian
Head Chef

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DONATE

Mail check

Spirit in the Desert
P.O. Box 3254, Carefree, AZ 85377

We also welcome qualified charitable distributions (QCDs), donor-advised fund gifts, stock transfers, and other planned giving options. Instructions are available upon request.

Give online with credit card
or scan the QR code.



EIN: 86-0736429



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