



Newsletter, May 2026



**Brillantes
Caminantes, A.C.**

Brightening the Future Through Education

Greetings from Pamela Naessig, Brillantes Caminantes' New President



Pamela Naessig

When I retired, I was looking for purpose in my life. I hail from South Dakota but have lived on several other continents, and when I moved to Guanajuato, I also sought community. Brillantes Caminantes provided both.

I arrived in the capital in 2018 and had the good fortune of living next door to Anna Adams, a founder of BC. She told me about yoga on the rooftop of Casa Cuatro, and, of course, this wonderful organization. I immediately knew I wanted to be involved.

I began as a mentor. That helped improve my Spanish, better understand the local culture and political climate, and gave me a window into younger generations. Since I don't have children or grandchildren, this last part was important to me.

Some of our founding members have held leadership positions with Brillantes for 15 years and are retiring, making room for fresh energy and new ideas. We thank them for keeping this small nonprofit afloat. For the first time, Jennifer Rodríguez Vega, a BC graduate, serves on our board of directors. Her insight is exactly what we need to evolve as an organization.

Pamela Naessig
President

An Introduction from Jennifer Rodríguez Vega, BC's New Secretary

I was born in the State of Mexico, but Guanajuato has been my home since 2010. In 2019, I applied for a BC scholarship while finishing my studies at SABES in Puente de las Vigas and preparing to begin my degree in Political Science. That application changed my life.

Midway through my studies, I faced serious personal and family challenges that threatened to derail my path. It was through the support of Brillantes Caminantes and the people within it that I found the strength to move forward. That experience taught me something I now hold as

a core belief: building genuine bonds and practicing reciprocity are the keys to building a better future, especially when you are young.

Today I work independently as an educator and am developing projects focused on women's political participation, youth rights, and political consulting. Joining the board of directors as secretary feels like a natural and meaningful step—a way of honoring what BC gave me and fulfilling a commitment I feel toward the next generation of students.

I am also proud to be the first BC graduate to serve on the board. I hope my presence opens a door for the voices of former students to be heard, for the incredible work of the international community within BC to be recognized, and for this organization to continue growing as a space that genuinely cares for the future of young people.



Jennifer Rodríguez Vega

A Farewell from our Architecture Student Diana Maria Patlán Murillo

I am about to graduate with a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Guanajuato. The path that has led me to this point has been full of challenges, lessons, and experiences that have profoundly shaped my personal and professional development.

My journey in this program began with a setback: I took the entrance exam for the August-December 2020 semester and was rejected. Far from seeing it as a defeat, I embraced it as an opportunity to prepare myself better and prove to myself that I could achieve my goal. With effort and dedication, I passed on my second attempt and officially began my studies in January 2021. The beginning wasn't easy.



Mentor Renée Bouthot and Diana

The world was going through the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and my first four semesters were conducted virtually. During that time, I struggled to find my footing in the profession I chose; I even doubted whether it was truly for me. However, thanks to the guidance of my first mentor, Jeff Tashman, I was able to overcome that period of uncertainty. Jeff guided me from my second semester, when I joined Brillantes Caminantes, until the end of my third. Although his support was brief, I value it immensely because it gave me confidence at a crucial time.

When I reached my fourth semester, my mentor changed, and I was fortunate to have Renée Bouthot. At first, it was difficult for me to open up, as I am a shy person, but over time, we built a close and meaningful relationship. Renée not only fulfilled her role as a mentor but also became a very important friend. Her support went far beyond academics: she taught me to trust in my abilities, to recognize my achievements,

and not to give up in the face of difficulties. When my grades weren't the best, she reminded me that a student's worth isn't measured solely by numbers but by the passion and effort they put into each project. She motivated me to participate in field trips, competitions, and projects that broadened my perspective on architecture.

Thanks to her support, I learned to see my studies not only as an academic challenge but also as an opportunity to grow as a person and a future professional. Today, as I near the end of my studies, I recognize that Renée has been a fundamental part of my development, and I hope our friendship continues beyond university.

Without a doubt, being part of Brillantes Caminantes has been a cornerstone of my journey. The financial support was a great relief, but the most valuable aspect was the opportunities for interaction and learning that the program offers. The monthly meetings became a safe space where I could share my academic and personal concerns, receive advice, and learn from the experiences of other members. These dynamics helped me feel supported on a path that can often be lonely. In addition, the cultural activities, such as rehearsals for the Christmas play, allowed me to develop teamwork skills and strengthen my confidence by interacting with people of different ages, universities, and majors.

Although deep bonds weren't always formed, each encounter offered a lesson and reminded me that community is a powerful force for moving forward. Brillantes Caminantes not only provided me with material support, but also emotional and human support, and I'm convinced that without this program, my journey through my degree would have been much more difficult.

Now that I'm about to conclude this stage, my gaze is turned toward the future. My intention is to continue with a master's degree, although I haven't yet decided on the specific specialization. I am certain I want to delve deeper into gender-sensitive architecture, a topic I addressed in my undergraduate thesis and which I consider under-explored within the discipline. I am convinced this field has enormous potential to transform the way we conceive spaces and their relationship with people, allowing us to make visible the needs of different social groups and promote a more inclusive, equitable, and conscious architecture.

My goal is to contribute, through research and professional practice, proposals that help create urban and architectural environments that respond to the diversity of their inhabitants. I dream that my work will not only be limited to designing buildings, but will have a real impact on people's quality of life, especially those who have historically been invisible in planning and design processes.

I am also interested in connecting with academic and collective projects that share this vision, to continue learning and collaborating on initiatives that integrate a gender perspective into architecture and urban planning. I know the road ahead won't be easy, but I'm convinced the discipline needs to open itself up to new perspectives, and I want to be part of that change.

Our Public Accounting Student Jazmín García Villa Says Goodbye

As I introduce myself here, I feel a mix of nostalgia and joy. I am currently a student pursuing a bachelor's degree in public accounting at the University of Guanajuato, and I am in the final semester of my eighth and last year of studies.

When we dream and make long-term plans to achieve a project or goal, it seems so distant. We think we have plenty of time and that it will take a long time for that moment to arrive. One day you pause to reflect on the journey you've taken and realize you've reached that goal. You see that in the blink of an eye, you are about to finish what you planned for so long, what you worked so hard for and dedicated so much effort to.

Getting here has been one of the greatest challenges of my life. Since I was a child, going to university was one of my most important goals. Today I share that I am in the final semester of my degree.

I say a joyful and nostalgic goodbye to Brillantes Caminantes, this wonderful family that life allowed me to meet. I thank God for bringing this association into my life. It's very difficult to say goodbye to people who helped you so much in the process of achieving your goals. Now that I'm about to finish my degree and reflect on everything I had to go through to get here, I can say that without BC, I wouldn't have been able to complete this project. This association has been one of its greatest pillars.



Jazmín and her mentor Lee Gould

My time in BC has been one of the most beautiful periods of my life. Thanks to it, I take away many valuable things, many people, moments, memories, experiences, and above all, lessons that contributed to my development over four long years.

I came to understand that being here isn't just about having a good GPA and a salary, but about being part of a support group, a family that encourages you to keep going, believes in you even when you doubt yourself, and celebrates each of your achievements with you.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my mentors, Kimberly Isaacs, whose time with me was incredibly important and meaningful, even though it was very short. I also want to thank Lee Gould for her guidance, support, and for sharing her knowledge with me. Throughout this time, she was not only a mentor but also someone who left a profound mark on my life. Thank you for your patience, your unwavering support, and for always believing in me, even when I doubted myself.

Thank you, Brilliant Caminantes, for everything—for every piece of advice, every word of encouragement, and every moment we shared. I will carry everything I experienced in my heart, and I know that everything I learned here will always be with me, every step of the way.

A Message from Outreach Committee Chair Sunday Sommers

Since I began working with the outreach committee in September 2025, we have increased the number of posts on our Facebook page and added more variety. While previous posts were focused on announcements to attract students and publicity for December's annual Pastorela, we broadened the focus to include mentor and student meetings, community volunteer efforts in the Pastorela production, and photos of the event. We also invited the public to a presentation at the English Language Library featuring mentors and a BC alumnus.

In addition, a first for our page was the video reel of a graduate from five years ago, Letticia Caudillo, which we filmed at her home in Cañada de Bustos. How thrilling to see a BC graduate five years later fulfilling her hope for a career in Veterinary Medicine!

I hoped that video marked the beginning of a project I called “Where are they Now?” But while we would like to make more cameos of our success stories, it has been difficult to track down former mentees. You can help this project by sending us names and contact info for students you have mentored.

Adding to the outreach effort was the production of a pamphlet by John Fiore. Big thanks to John. The **website** was also updated thanks to Agota Page and Pamela Naessig and it looks great. You should take a look!

Have these efforts been worth it? During these eight months we have seen much higher view totals and interactions. We also reached new audiences by posting on some Spanish language Facebook pages and continue to add new followers to our own Facebook page. However, that increase in engagement has not translated into new members. Still, yes, it was worth it, because our online presence is now broadened, and even people who are visiting Guanajuato are aware of us. However, in most cases where we gained new members or donations, a BC member also reached out in person and made the connection.

The takeaway: There are a lot of newcomers to Guanajuato who see our Facebook posts, but we have to reach out to them personally to pull them in. If you live in Guanajuato, please consider attending some TQM happy hours or breakfasts in order to reach out to newcomers. I can provide you with plenty of pamphlets to help spread the word.



Sunday Sommers

An Enormous “Thank You” from Outgoing President Susan Eli Castelazo

What I learned from being BC’s president for the past three years: It takes a team, and all team members are valuable.

It takes a team to provide our students with the opportunities we want them to have. Our range of volunteers is wide: From our generous donors to our graduates sharing their skills and knowledge; from mentoring a student to serving on the board; from volunteering for one of our committees to attending the members’ meetings, partaking in discussions, presentations by our graduates, and making membership decisions, and more! We are all part of the team that brings our students an enriched college experience.

Thank you to all our **mentors**. Without you, our students would have a very different college experience. It is also through you that many of our students meet mentors from the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere, and discover that foreigners can be good and caring people who contribute to their communities.

Thank you to all of the **board members** who served with me:



Susan Eli Castelazo



Linda Gonzalez was the first person to volunteer to serve as secretary after the July 17, 2023 meeting where BC was soliciting volunteers for president, vice president, and secretary. Linda's willingness to serve as part-time secretary allowed me to volunteer for president.

Karen Robinson called me the next morning and volunteered to be vice president. Suddenly we had a full board. Karen continually encouraged me and, when I had a concern, she always offered an idea or resource. I have enjoyed working with her.

Euclides Santiago was student affairs coordinator when I became president. He could make me laugh in even the most stressful situations and gave essential Spanish translation help.

Carolyn Black was Treasurer in 2023 and she was my rock, grounding me and giving me perspective on small and large challenges and helping me to not take myself or the situation too seriously. I fondly remember sharing many glasses of wine together.

Rob Fleming served on the board with me as co-mentor coordinator in January 2023. He continued as mentors' coordinator and then became BC's "Tech Guy." Aside from his tech work, I do not know how many hours Rob spent discussing BC situations with me, brainstorming solutions and crafting language to present to the membership. He has been involved with BC in so many different ways in so many different areas that it is impossible for me to define his contributions.

Sarahí Hernandez succeeded Rob as mentors coordinator until she moved. I still miss her. She now lives in Issaquah, Washington.

Oriana Landa Consigno started as a mentor in BC and then volunteered to be secretary. Her consistency made a huge difference on the board. I am so glad she found BC online during the pandemic, drove to Guanajuato from León on her day off to inquire about our organization. I still remember the loud applause from the membership when it was announced that she volunteered to be secretary. She has been an exemplary secretary, translator and board member. I am pleased to count her as my friend.

Matilde Tónix was our wonderful student affairs coordinator for many months, taking over after Euclides Santiago's tenure. She did a stellar job handling student meetings and managing the position's other duties.

Silvia Salas held many board spots. She volunteered to be mentor coordinator, chair of the selection committee (a huge job), and managed production of the Pastorela. Thank you, Silvia. You and Juan José Prado have spent years making BC what it is today.

Hermes Villafuerte volunteered to be student affairs coordinator in August 2025 after Matilde stepped down. I was happy to work with him and have seen his good work firsthand while attending the student meetings. BC is fortunate to have such a competent presenter of programs.

I want to thank the people who worked behind the scenes keeping BC viable, helping me through the difficult times, and rejoicing with me during good times. Please note just how many team members we have. We are a force because we are many; ask any of the people whose lives BC has changed.

David Spencer helped us with computer distribution and translation on multiple occasions, as well as being part of the events committee.

Agota Page, a longtime member and contributor to BC, first set up our website and, while I was president, updated it. That was no small job.

Sunday Sommers took over as chair of the outreach committee in 2025 and has done an amazing job of contacting new members, recruiting potential board officers, continuing our Facebook and Twitter presence, talking to everyone she meets about BC, giving them information, and inviting them to member meetings.

Nina Johnson and **AJ Buckingham** both served as secretary for more than one member meeting, taking notes and transcribing them for the record and for publication to the members.

Susan Mortimer served an essential role on the outreach committee, editing and publishing our newsletters, as well as serving on the events committee.

Jennifer Rodríguez Vega, a graduate of BC, served on the outreach committee and is now BC's secretary. Congratulations Jenny and welcome to the BC board!

Andrea (Andy) Barbosa, also a graduate of BC, served on the outreach committee and helped the board recruit Hermes Villafuerte to be student affairs coordinator. She also helped make information about UGTO programs available to our students.

René Sanchez Balderrama, another BC graduate, shared his photography expertise with us. He's a wonderful photographer!

The working committee, (Rees Storm, chair; AJ Buckingham; Jorge Castelazo; and Pamela Naessig) formulated and presented three different paths for BC, I thank you for your expertise and clarity. We needed you.

The selection committee did its usual exceptional job. Thanks to all committee members: Silvia Salas; chair; Cathy Lehman; Anna Adams; and Rosemarie Conde. All of these dedicated women have served BC for years in many capacities.

The finance committee worked together to evaluate our current and past financial situation to give us a window into the future. Thanks to Carolyn Black and Jeff Tashman.

The fundraising events committee (Nina Johnson, chair) organized itself into two subcommittees: Donor relations and events.

The donor relations committee did a great job of thanking our previous donor and requesting further contributions. Way to go Jeff Tashman, Kevin McTernan, Carolyn Black, and Kimberli Isaacs.

The events committee worked together with many volunteers to produce the party we call The Pastorela. The Pastorela occurs yearly just before Christmas, and includes a witty play written by Juan José Prado. It's also BC's principal community outreach tool. The event contributes about 10% of our annual donations through ticket and raffle sales. There are dozens of volunteers every year. Much thanks to: Deb Kallen, Susan Mortimer, Karen Robinson, Rob Fleming, Michael Brumbaugh, Juan José Prado, Silvia Salas, David Spencer, and Celise Ingram plus many others. Hopefully it was fun for all of you, too.

The owners of **Forocultural 81** generously donated their auditorium space to us for member meetings and student meetings. Many, many thanks to them.

And finally, to all the BC members who attended member meetings to discuss options, vote, and hear from our graduates. Without our members, BC would not exist.



Credits

Thanks to our graduating students and members who contributed to this issue of the newsletter.

Editor: Wendy Rosenfield
Translations: Rob Fleming
Design: Agota Page and Rob Fleming

Supporting our Students from Start to Finish

We never commit to new students until we know we will have the required funding to support them for the duration of their academic careers. Find more information about donating or making an ongoing pledge [**here**](#).

Our Board of Directors

Pamela Naessig, President

Karen Robinson, Vice President

Jennifer Rodríguez Vega, Secretary

Carolyn Black, Treasurer

Hermes Antonio Villafuerte Molina, Student Affairs Coordinator

Silvia Salas and Rosemarie Conde, Mentors' Coordinators

Rob Fleming, Tech Guy

