

ROUND THE ROUNDHOUSE



New Mexico
STATE EMPLOYEES' NEWSPAPER

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April 8 to May 5, 2024



SPOTLIGHT
On New Mexico Leadership

New Mexico Mainstreet, Pg 17



Where is
Cooper?
pg 29



Smokey Bear Days
May 3rd & 4th, pg 10

Clean Fuel
Standards
Enacted,
pg 19



Congrats, SLO!
pg 11



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Mail Subscriptions are available for \$25 per year.

New Mexico State Police Helicopter Rescues Injured Hikers

By Ray Wilson

The New Mexico State Police Aircraft Section rescued 2 individuals that had been injured while hiking near the Embudo Trail-head.

On March 27, 2024, at approximately 5:00 p.m., the crew of the New Mexico State Police Aircraft Section, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, launched from Double Eagle airport to conduct a hoist rescue, in the Sandia Mountains, in Bernalillo County.

The information received from a New Mexico State Police Search and Rescue Coordinator explained a rockslide occurred near the Embudo Trail Head in the Sandia Mountains. 3 subjects were hurt during the rockslide. The coordinator explained one of the subjects had a head injury and lost consciousness for a brief time, the second subject had an open fracture to their leg, and the third subject had a sprained ankle. The rescue crews on the ground were requesting the assistance of ABLE 7, the New Mexico State Police Helicopter.

ABLE 7 arrived on scene and began coordinating with the ground crews of the Bernalillo County Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue. Aboard ABLE 7 was a paramedic and 2 tactical flight officers (TFO). The paramedic and one TFO were hoisted down to the ground crews to assess the patients and clear a staging area for a landing zone for patient extraction. The other TFO remained on board the helicopter to receive the injured patients as they were hoisted up.

A short time later, the patients with the head injury and leg injury were hoisted up into the helicopter and flown to the landing zone and then offloaded into an awaiting ambulance where they were then transported to an area hospital. The patient with the ankle injury was escorted out by the Search and Rescue crews. The patients' conditions are unknown.



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WCA’s Risk Reduction Program helps New Mexico Businesses Improve Employee Safety

By Diana Sandoval-Tapia

The New Mexico Workers’ Compensation Administration (WCA) recently renewed its focus on its Risk Reduction Program (RRP), referred to in Section 52-1-6.2 of the Workers’ Compensation Act as the “extra hazardous employer” program. Businesses are identified through a variety of tools as “extra hazardous” if they have reported an unusually large number of work-place injuries. Companies’ experience modification rates, known commonly as “e-mods,” are used by their insurers to assess that company’s risk for work-place accidents or injuries, and ultimately affect the cost of the company’s workers’ compensation insurance premiums. In the workers’ compensation industry, an e-mod rate of 1.0 is considered average. When a company’s e-mod rate begins to creep above 1.0, it might indicate unsafe working conditions, or be due to a spike in on-the-job injuries. The WCA’s safety consultants

use reported e-mod rates as a gauge of whether they may need to step in and provide some assistance.

Nine businesses were enrolled in the WCA’s RRP in 2023, with three successfully completing the process. And so far in 2024, one more business was enrolled and two more successfully completed the program. “The Safety Bureau’s Risk Reduction Program was rejuvenated by establishing a comprehensive risk assessment process to identify employers with a high accident frequency, experience modifier, or severity of injuries caused by accidents. This new risk assessment process helps identify those employers that would benefit by being placed on our Risk Reduction Program,” explained Safety Bureau Chief Paul Martinez. “The program’s objective is to assist employers with injury and illness prevention, hazard identification, mitigation strategies, implementation of hazards and control measures to

reduce work injuries and illnesses in the workplace. Although employers use various strategies and approaches to deal with risk, some eliminate them, and others can only minimize or reduce risk in the workplace.”

If a business has been identified as having an increased risk or high frequency of injuries or their e-mod rate has escalated above the industry average, the business is notified of enrollment in the WCA’s RRP. The company must receive a safety consultation and inspection within 30 days of notification. Inspections can be done by WCA safety consultants, the company’s insurer, or another third-party safety professional consultant. Businesses in the RRP cannot conduct their own safety evaluations while enrolled in the program. Following the consultation and walkthrough inspection, a report detailing risks and hazards is issued and the company then has 30 days to develop an action plan to address issues identified at inspection. Six months from the approval of the action plan, a final follow-up inspection is performed by the WCA safety consultant to ensure businesses in the RRP successfully mitigated all findings and implemented any required safety measures. Once companies are no longer in the RRP and no longer identified as “extra hazardous,” they may begin to conduct their own safety inspections. The WCA’s Safety Bureau issues businesses who have successfully completed the RRP a letter notifying the company’s insurance company as well as a certificate of completion signed by the WCA’s director.

One business owner that recently completed the RRP, Sergio Bermudez of El Mezquite Market, LLC, was thankful for the assistance of the WCA’s RRP and Safety Consultant Joel Mejia. Bermudez, who owns and operates four Albuquerque locations, opened his first store in 1998 in Albuquerque’s South Valley. Today, he boasts 209 employees, “and growing.” But in May of last year, the WCA’s Safety team noticed some concerning safety trends at the grocery stores, specifically an increase in hand injuries occurring in the stores’ butcher shops. When Mejia reached out to Bermudez about the alarming frequency of these injuries, many



Sergio Bermudez, owner of El Mezquite Market (left) and WCA Safety Consultant Joel Mejia

of which were reported in 2020, Bermudez explained that those injuries occurred during the thick of the COVID-19 global pandemic when dine-restaurants were closed and there were limits to numbers of individuals allowed to enter grocery stores at any given time. Bermudez said many of his employees were working 60-plus hours per week to keep up with the unusual demand and were fatigued.

After El Mezquite Market was enrolled in the RRP, Mejia worked with Bermudez and his workers’ compensation insurer, HUB International, to implement better safety measures, to include written training manuals on everything from machinery operations to chemicals handling, provided in both English and Spanish for the market’s many bilingual employees. Additionally, Bermudez centralized the meat processor at his store located at Central and San Pedro, installed a partition and separated the functions of counter ordering and meat processing so that employees who are cutting and packaging meat are no longer distracted by also having to take orders at the counter.

Bermudez said that while he was initially reluctant about his business being enrolled in the RRP, he soon found it was “more helpful than anything else,” and that he greatly appreciated the information and resources that came his way via participation in the program. “Joel helped us to keep track of things, like postings, and showed us how to do trainings,” Bermudez said of the WCA’s Mejia. With the changes Bermudez has implemented, like lowering hours worked and separating functions to eliminate distractions, there has not been one injury in his meat market, and he’s thankful for that; “the program is amazing,” he said.

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Jose Montano named NMPRC Employee of the Month for March

By Patrick Rodriguez

The New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (NMPRC) recognizes Jose Montano as the agency's Employee of the Month for March 2024. Montano, who serves as the financial coordinator in the Budget and Finance Bureau of the Administrative Services Division, received praise for his dedication to the agency and outstanding work ethic.



"Jose has been with the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission for nearly two years, and during his time with the agency he's always been willing to help wherever he is needed as well as ensuring his duties are completed in a timely manner," said Miranda Mascareñas, director of the Administrative Services Division. "He is a pleasure to work with and is always courteous and helpful when working with vendors and NMPRC staff. Jose is always willing to take on additional tasks when asked and does it with a smile on his face. He is always kind, professional, and eager to learn new things."

Montano has worked at the NMPRC since June 2022. Previously, he worked for New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration as a human resources generalist and general ledger.

In his current role as the financial coordinator in the Budget and Finance Bureau, Montano audits the monthly WEX statement compared to the employee vehicle logs and receipts. He also processes operating transfers to other state agencies for invoices and monies due.

Montano is originally from Mora, New Mexico. When he's not at work, he enjoys spending time with his family and refurbishing wooden furniture.

The Honorable Louis E. DePauli, Jr. Retired

By Beth Wojahn

Eleventh Judicial District Judge Louis E. DePauli Jr. retired on April 1 after serving 17 years on the bench in Gallup.



"My biggest overall accomplishment was keeping the court running in good order, doing my job efficiently and economically, and with purpose," said Judge DePauli, a native of Gallup. "I tried to accomplish justice as best I could in my role as judge."

"Eleventh Judicial Judge Louis DePauli leaves an indelible mark on the Gallup community, and the district," said Eleventh Judicial District Chief Judge Curtis R. Gurley. "We are grateful for his service and wish him the best."

Judge DePauli comes from a long line of judges. His father, Louis E. DePauli, Sr., was a district attorney in Gallup for many years before serving as a district judge in 1975-1988. Judge DePauli's grandfather, Tulio DePauli, was a probate judge in Gallup. "I love Gallup because my family has been here for four generations," said Judge DePauli. "It's a small town where I can still wave to people and know them. We're varied and culturally different and at the same time, we really get along well. It's a great melting pot of a town."

Judge DePauli received his undergraduate degree from New Mexico State University, and a Juris Doctor from the University of New Mexico School of Law in 1987. His first job as a lawyer was as an assistant district attorney. He opened a private law practice in 1990 with his father and a former judge, Robert Aragon. In 2006, Judge DePauli was appointed to the bench by Gov. Bill Richardson.

Judge DePauli has advice for new judges. "Control your court, lead by example, demand professionalism, and know the cases as well as the attorneys do," he said.

Judge DePauli says he "plans to explore the wilds of New Mexico and the Four Corners area, get his golf game into shape, and perhaps travel internationally a time or two."

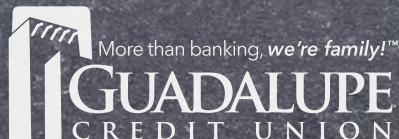


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VOICES FROM THE PAST

By Robert J. Tórréz
Former State Historian
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A Future Governor Jailed, 1820!

I have lately been attempting to systematically review and organize the hundreds of notes I have accumulated about jails during our Spanish and Mexican eras. As I do this I regularly encounter intriguing material that sends me off on a tangent. So it was when I came across an 1820 case file in the Spanish archives in which a future-to-be governor of New Mexico found himself jailed in Santa Fe!

The case opens with a lengthy report from José Francisco Leyva, the parish priest at Albuquerque's San Felipe Neri church. Dated January 5, 1820, the complaint describes what Leyva considered a flagrant and notorious outrage committed against him by Manuel Armijo and members of his family. Leyva explained that on the evening of December 27, 1819, he sent a friend to the house (store?) belonging to Cristobal Pacheco to order a few items he needed on credit. When he sent a servant to pick them the servant returned with a message that his credit was no good but there was plenty available to anyone who paid in cash. Thinking the message was from Pacheco, Leyva sent Pacheco a message noting he always paid his debts and accused him of being a troublemaker (picaro), to which Pacheco responded in kind that Leyva was the greater troublemaker.

Father Leyva quickly proceeded to confront Pacheco, and when he

arrived he found Pacheco, Manuel Armijo, Armijo's brother, Ambrosio, Gregorio Ortiz, and two women were there. Leyva challenged Pacheco about being called a troublemaker and why he had denied him credit. Pacheco did not respond but instead Manuel Armijo rose from his chair with a vara de medir (measuring rod) in his hand and speaking to Leyva, told him he had sent the message, not Pacheco. Following an exchange of accusations of who was the greater troublemaker, Leyva struck Armijo with what may have been a cane or staff and Armijo responded by striking Leyva twice with the vara, after which Ambrosio took Leyva by the scruff and literally threw him out the door. Leyva added there had been several earlier incidents for which the Armijos had not been punished or admonished for their excesses. Regardless, he expected justice would be done for the flagrant and notorious insult done to him and the class of ecclesiastics of which he was a member.

Governor Facundo Melgares responded quickly. On January 5, 1820, the same day Leyva submitted his written brief (Leyva had apparently traveled to Santa Fe on December 28, the day after the assault took place, and verbally notified Melgares of the accusations before he filed a formal complaint) Melgares commissioned don Pedro Armendaris to open a judicial case

against "el Teniente de Urbanos Don Manuel Armijo."

Armendaris opened his investigation that same day, in which he identified Armijo as a preso (prisoner), indicating he was already being held in the jail at Santa Fe. This suggests Armijo had already been arrested and taken to Santa Fe although the case file does not contain an order for his arrest and imprisonment or suggestion of who issued it. Regardless, Armijo's oath notes he was 28, single, and a resident of the Villa of Albuquerque. His statement describes a history of conflict with Leyva stemming from various disagreements during the past two years, including issues about Holy Week festivities, issues over gambling losses (monte) and some doubts Leyva expressed about Armijo's faith. Armijo even suggests Leyva was jealous about a woman Armijo was interested in.

Over the next several days Armendaris refers the case file back and forth between Armijo and Leyva for responses to accusations, charges and counter-charges and Armendaris even planned to interrogate a number of individuals named in their statements. However, this step became unnecessary because on January 12, following at least two weeks of imprisonment, Armijo pleaded with Armendaris to release him from jail, noting he was suffering greatly from the cold (it was January) and complaining

that when his cell door was closed, it was a dark as night. The case file does not indicate how Leyva was made aware of Armijo's plea but on the following day, January 13, Leyva sent Governor Melgares a letter noting Armijo had called him to his cell and expressed his repentance over the entire affair. Leyva indicated that despite the outrage Armijo had committed against him, it was his sacred duty as a minister to recommend that the governor set him free, allowing that Armijo's numerous days in prison were sufficient punishment. In dropping the charges, Leyva indicated Armijo had agreed to go to confession while he was in Santa Fe, and then receive communion from Leyva's own hand at the parish church in Albuquerque. The case file does not provide details on Armijo's release but the following day, January 14, Armendaris delivered the case file to Governor Melgares, noting the issue had been settled between the parties. As per standard practice, the file was archived, allowing us more than two centuries later, to take a peek at how certain things were done in those days and be amazed (or amused) at how a future governor could be humiliated, at least temporarily.

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New Mexico Department of Health Announces the Appointment of Dr. José A. Acosta as Director for Public Health Division

By Jodi McGinnis Porter

On March 7th, the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) announced the appointment of Dr. José A. Acosta, MD, MBA, MPH as the new Director for the Public Health Division. Dr. Acosta will report directly to Secretary Patrick Allen and assumed his new role April 1, 2024.



"I'm delighted that Dr. Acosta has accepted the challenge to step into the role as leader of our Public Health Division. He has done outstanding work in his current role leading the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division through a challenging time, and I'm confident he has the public health, medical and leadership background and experience to take public health to the next level, as DOH works to achieve its goal for New Mexico to become the healthiest state in the nation by 2040," said Sec. Patrick Allen.

The Public Health Division (PHD) works with individuals, families, and communities in New Mexico to achieve optimal health. The division provides public health leadership by developing health policy, sharing expertise with the community, ensuring access to coordinated systems of care, and delivering services to promote health and prevent disease, injury, disability and premature death. Public health focuses statewide on cost-effective, evidence-based programs that improve health outcomes, efforts to prevent and control infectious diseases, local and regional emergency preparedness planning/response, and ensuring access to health care services.

Dr. Acosta brings a wealth of experience as a results-driven executive healthcare leader with expertise in public health, operations management, service optimization, patient safety, quality assurance and financial management. His proven track record as a skilled team leader includes strengths in staff training, strategic problem-solving, collaboration skills, and resource management. Dr. Acosta is fluent in both English and Spanish.

In response to his appointment, Dr. José A. Acosta, MD, MBA, MPH, said, "I am truly humbled and honored to accept the role of Director of the Public Health Division at the New Mexico Department of Health. I am deeply committed to the Secretary's goal of making New Mexico the healthiest state by 2040. I look forward to collaborating with our incredible team and partners, as together, we strive to improve the health outcomes of our communities."

Previously serving as the director for the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division since June 2023 and as the chief medical officer for NMDOH in 2022, Dr. Acosta has a distinguished career. He served as the Executive Medical Director for the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet, providing trusted healthcare advice on health service optimization and medical plans for service members and their families. Dr. Acosta oversaw reporting from multiple large organizations, offering decision-making and negotiating expertise on medical equipment, personnel and resources.

Among his key accomplishments is the role he played in streamlining crisis/medical communications between local and federal agencies during Hurricane Maria in 2017. Dr. Acosta established a positive team culture and achieved strategic corporate objectives, boasting a 92% compliance rate with health and wellness goals.

Dr. Acosta's extensive education includes a Master of Public Health (Epidemiology) from TH Chan Harvard School of Public Health, a Master of Business Administration from Regis University, a Trauma/Critical Care Fellowship from the University of California San Diego, a Surgical Residency from the University of New Mexico Affiliated Program, an MD from Ponce Health Sciences University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Biology from Washington University in St. Louis. He is a recipient of the Legion of Merit (five awards) in addition to various personal, unit, service, and campaign awards.

Residing in Placitas, Dr. Acosta lives with his wife of 33 years, Mary, a radiologist at UNM. The couple have two children, Miguel, an Economist at the Federal Reserve, and Lourdes, a Naval Officer.



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Cannabis In New Mexico Officially a Billion-Dollar Industry

Sales top \$1 billion, \$75 million excise tax reported through January

By Lauren Thorp



Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced today that cannabis sales in New Mexico have topped \$1 billion in adult-use and medical sales. The sales record comes a month prior to the second anniversary of legal adult-use cannabis sales in New Mexico.

Cannabis consumers have purchased more than \$678.4 million worth of adult-use cannabis products and \$331.6 million in medical products since April 1, 2022. To date, the state has recorded more than 21 million transactions with \$75 million in cannabis excise taxes going to the state general fund and local communities.

"This is a huge milestone for New Mexico's cannabis industry," said Gov. Lujan Grisham. Nearly two years after beginning sales, New Mexico is on the map as a premier hub for legal and safe cannabis and the thriving business community that comes with it."

Albuquerque remains the top city in the state for cannabis sales with more than \$202 million in adult-use products being sold since legalization. Sunland Park, one of the many communities that has been positively impacted by cannabis tourism, recorded \$57.4 million in adult-use sales.

Smaller communities across New Mexico are also reaping the benefits of the flourishing cannabis industry. Municipalities like Las Vegas, Silver City, and Deming have each seen more than \$5 million in adult-use sales since April 2022.

As of March 1, 2024, the state has issued 2,873 cannabis licenses across New Mexico, including 1,050 retailers, 878 manufacturers, and 459 micro producers.

More data on sales and licenses can be found here, <https://crop.rld.nm.gov/>

Governor Lujan Grisham Approves Historic \$1.3B Budget Boost for Higher Education Initiatives

By Stephanie Montoya



Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has approved a record \$1.3 billion to support higher education statewide in FY25, a nearly 4% increase from last year that includes expanded funding for proven tuition-free college, loan repayment programs and workforce initiatives.

"Under Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's visionary leadership, New Mexico is steadfast in its commitment to fostering accessible and equitable education for all. This significant funding underscores our dedication to realizing the promise of cradle-to-career education, empowering individuals, bolstering our economy, and enriching our communities. It exemplifies our unwavering belief that education is the cornerstone of progress and prosperity for every New Mexican," said Higher Education Secretary Stephanie M. Rodriguez.

The governor approved \$162 million for the Opportunity Scholarship, the largest appropriation in program history. Combined with the creation of the state Higher Education Trust Fund, New Mexico now dedicates a greater proportion of state funding to tuition-free college than any other state. A record 42,000 students benefited from the program last year, with 10,000 students using the program to attend college in the summer. Since the signing of the Opportunity Scholarship Act in 2022, statewide enrollment has increased by more than 7% and completion of short-term certificates has increased by 39%. Between 2021 and 2022, students receiving the Opportunity Scholarship were 8 percentage points likelier to stay in schools than their peers.

The state's record-breaking loan repayment and scholarship programs for working health care professionals and teachers received a continuation of expanded funding from last year. The Health Loan Repayment Program received \$14.6 million for the second year in a row to provide up to \$25,000 in student loan forgiveness to 700 working doctors, nurses, dentists, mental health professionals and others with a three-year service commitment. The Teacher Loan Repayment Program is sustained at \$5 million, and the Teacher Preparation Affordability Scholarship also received a \$5 million appropriation.

Colleges and universities will see a 4% increase in operational funding for a total \$1.1 billion going toward the state's 25 public colleges and universities. Additionally, the governor approved \$325 million for capital outlay projects on college campuses, \$32.5 million for building renewal and replacement and \$5 million for equipment renewal and replacement. College faculty and employees will also receive an average 3 percent pay increase and a funding increase of one percent toward employee benefits.

Additional budget measures signed by the governor are outlined below:

- \$15 million for the Health Professional Loan Repayment Program
- \$14.8 million to expand nurse education programs
- \$25 million to provide matching funds for university research
- \$10 million for scholarships for master's and doctoral students pursuing STEM degrees
- \$10 million to create endowed faculty positions and fund scholarships in social work education programs
- \$20 million to support students in workforce training programs not covered by other financial aid programs
- \$2 million for a pilot program to support adult students in Integrated Education and Training Programs
- \$3.725 million for RISE NM, the state's education and workforce longitudinal data system
- \$3 million for the state's six centers of excellence for social work, agriculture, early childhood education, cybersecurity, renewable energy and biosciences
- \$750,000 for adult literacy programs
- \$1 million for the Dual Credit Program at public colleges and universities
- \$600,000 for the Dual Credit Program at tribal colleges and universities
- \$6,828,000 for adult education programs, including instructional materials and high school equivalency test vouchers.
- \$5 million for the Teacher Preparation Affordability Scholarship
- \$5 million for the Teacher Loan Repayment Program
- \$5.5 million for cybersecurity initiatives for K-12 and higher education



CELEBRATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE MONTH

April is Community College Month. SFCC invites you to come out to campus, learn about the many opportunities available, and see how our dynamic pathways can help you achieve your goals.



April 4: College Prep for Student Parents

April 17: PDAC Annual Diversity Day

April 20: CEA Greenhouse Open House & Culinary Arts food samples

April 26: Auto Tech Car Show



Scan for more Community College Month information. Summer Registration opens 4/9. Fall Registration opens 4/16. sfcc.edu/ccmonth



New Mexico's Elections Ranked Number One in Nation

Prestigious Non-Partisan Ranking Measures Election Performance in Each State



By Alex Curtas

New Mexico's elections have been ranked best in the nation by the prestigious Elections Performance Index (EPI), a project of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Election Data and Science Lab described as "a non-partisan, objective measure of U.S. election administration."

The rankings, released late last week and based on the 2022 midterm elections, use a variety of performance indicators measuring aspects of election administration such as voter registration rates, post-election audits, security protocols, ballot rejection rates, wait times, and more. New Mexico moved up eight spots in the rankings since the 2018 Elections Performance Index when we were ranked ninth.

"The professional election administrators who keep the polls open and the votes counted and the engine of democracy running in New Mexico are exemplary and it's an honor to see this work recognized on the national stage," said New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver. "Alongside my incredible staff and the tireless work of our thirty-three county clerks and their staffs, I'm proud to have helped modernize New Mexico's elections by finding a critical balance between voter access and election security. Many members of the legislature also deserve thanks for their efforts to improve New Mexico's elections over the years. I'm particularly proud of the Index's recognition of New Mexico's excellent online voter resources, our low ballot rejection rates, our use of post-election audits, and our membership in the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) – all of which were cited as indicators of our peak performance."

More information about the Elections Performance Index, including a deep dive into the methodology and data itself, can be found on their website.

Though New Mexico topped the rankings, it's important to also recognize that election administration has improved all over the nation in recent years – a testament to the strength of our American democracy. As the MIT Election Lab stated in a press release: "The latest update to the EPI shows that election management across the United States improved in the 2022 midterm election, continuing an upward trend we see throughout the past few iterations of the index...In 2010, the nationwide average score on the index was just 63%. In 2022, that has leapt to 80%, an incredible achievement. Among the biggest factors driving state improvement have been improved data collection and practices, as well as more capable websites that feature better tools for voters."

Check out New Mexico's own online voter information portal at NMVOTE.ORG.

Are You Ready for Your New Deferred Comp Plan Account Experience?

By Karyn Lujan



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Smokey Bear turns 80!

Smokey Bear Days May 3rd and 4th in Capitan

By Mary Lavin

In 2024 the nation will celebrate Smokey Bear's 80th birthday, focusing on the Cooperative Forest Fire Prevention icon's official date of creation on August 9, 2024.

Capitan, New Mexico is the home of the living symbol of wildfire prevention, Smokey Bear. In May of 1950 a young bear cub was recovered from the Capitan Gap fire on the Lincoln National Forest just north of Capitan. He had been separated from his mother during the fire and was badly burned. There was little chance that he would survive the ordeal until firefighters rescued him and brought him back to fire camp. There he came under the custody of New Mexico Game and Fish warden, Ray Bell and several other key figures who connected the story of this little orphaned bear cub to the national wildfire prevention campaign.

Smokey Bear became the living symbol of wildfire prevention. He spent the next 25 years at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., serving as an ambassador for wildfire prevention to the millions of people who visited the zoo every year. When he passed away in 1976, he was brought back to Capitan to be buried in the park that bears his name.

On Friday, May 3 and Saturday, May 4, 2024, the Smokey Bear Historical Park and their non-profit Friends Group, the Smokey Bear's Hometown Association, will host the 2024 Smokey Bear Days event. This two-day, family-friendly event was started in 2004 and was last hosted in 2019 in celebration of Smokey Bear's 75th birthday.

Events in this year's Smokey Bear Days will include a two-day folk music festival, a firefighter challenge competition, chainsaw carving demonstrations, conservation education and vendor booths, a hometown parade on Saturday morning, and more family-friendly activities. Park admission is \$2.00 for adults, \$1.00 for kids ages 7-12, and children 6 & under are free.

Check out the event's website at: <https://www.smokeybeardaycapitannm.com/>, follow us on Facebook (Smokey Bear's Hometown Association and the Smokey Bear Historical Park), or call the Park at (575) 354-2748 for more information.

We hope you can join us for this fun event celebrating "Capitan's bear that changed history."

Smokey's message of preventing careless, human-caused wildfires still rings true today: "Remember...only YOU can prevent wildfires."



Higher Education Department Offering \$14.6 Million in Debt Relief for Health Care Workers

By Stephanie Montoya

The New Mexico Higher Education Department is encouraging licensed health care professionals working in New Mexico to apply for its Health Professional Loan Repayment Program, which provides eligible applicants with up to \$25,000 in student loan forgiveness.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham approved \$14.6 million for the program this year. The funding could support more than 700 working health professionals in New Mexico.

"The Health Professional Loan Repayment Program continues to support record numbers of working health care professionals each year, encouraging more New Mexicans to enter careers in health care and attracting out-of-state professionals to our beautiful state," said Higher Education Secretary Stephanie M. Rodriguez.

The program covers more than 25 health occupations and licenses in allied health, dental, medical and mental health fields. A full list of eligible professions is available at hed.nm.gov.

Recipients must commit to practicing in an area of the state designated by the Health Profession Advisory Committee as a health professional shortage area for a minimum of three years. Currently, 28 out of the state's 33 counties are designated as whole county shortage areas and four are listed as partial shortage areas. Practitioners must be U.S. Citizens or permanent residents, established New Mexico residents for at least 12 consecutive months, licensed or certified in the State of New Mexico as of July 1, 2024, and employed at least 36 hours per week.

Program applications will be accepted until May 1, 2024, and can be completed online at <https://hed.nm.gov/> Interested health professionals can also contact the Financial Aid Division at fin.aid@hed.nm.gov or 1-800-279-9777.



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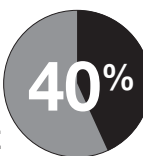
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State Land Office Named a 2024 Top Workplace by USA Today

By State Land Office Staff

USA Today has announced that the New Mexico State Land Office has won a Top Workplaces USA award, ranking 22nd nationally among organizations with employees between 150-499. Over 2,220 organizations participated in anonymous employee surveys as part of the national challenge. The State Land Office was the only organization from New Mexico to rank in the top 25, regardless of size or sector. The State Land Office was the top ranked government agency in its category.

The State Land Office was also the recipient of the 2023 Regional Top Workplace Award, and the 2023 Women-Led Top Workplace National Award. In the 2023 Regional Awards, announced by the Albuquerque Journal, in the government category, the State Land Office finished ranked: in the top 1% in work-life flexibility, meaningful work, employee appreciation, inclusion, and confidence in leadership; in the top 3% for managers caring about the concerns of employees; and in

the top 5% for operating by strong values.

"We strive to provide our employees with meaningful work-life balance, knowing that they all have a life outside of their job," said Commissioner Garcia Richard. "Our employees care for parents, children, spouses, grandparents and other loved ones. We want everyone at the agency to feel like they can reasonably fulfill their personal as well as professional responsibilities."

The list of employers receiving recognition is based solely on employee feedback gathered through a third-party survey administered Energage, LLC. The confidential survey uniquely measures 15 culture drivers that are critical to the success of any organization: including alignment, execution, and connection, just to name a few.

Over the past few years, Commissioner Garcia Richard has instituted agency-wide policies that invest in and support employees, including providing telework options that meet the needs of both employees and the

agency. In addition, Commissioner Garcia Richard has implemented various programs to acknowledge the great work our employees accomplish, including a volunteer Celebrations Committee that organizes events as small as popcorn days or as large as our annual 4th of July picnic. Our employees enjoy working for the Land Office and refer to it as their second family.

The State Land Office's mission is to earn money for schools and other public institutions by responsibly leasing state lands for energy production, commercial development, and agriculture, among other uses. The State Land Office has continued to earn record-breaking revenue every year since 2019, exceeding \$2.75 billion last year alone, as these cultural changes were implemented. The agency has also been able to diversify revenue streams during this time, quadrupling the amount of re-



newable energy under lease on state lands, providing affordable housing, and expanding access to outdoor recreation.

"Our employees are the backbone of our agency and the record revenue we have earned in the past few years is due entirely to their amazing professionalism and hard work," Garcia Richard said.

97.6% of State Land Office employees responded to the Top Workplaces survey, and 98% of respondents said they would recommend working for the agency.

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Department of Information Technology Provides eSignature Services

By **Renee Narvaiz**

Upgrade your department's form management with DocuSign eSignature's Web Forms. Using Web Forms provides a modern form-filling experience and generates completed PDFs for signing. Web Forms is a digital form using a template. Recipients can simply complete the online form, and the result is a completed agreement that collects a signature. Instead of having to enter data into PDFs, recipients can provide their input in a user-friendly online form. Web Forms simplifies and enhances the data collection experience for your department or agency.



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The Honorable Karen L. Townsend Retired

By **Beth Wojahn**

Judge Karen L. Townsend, the longest-serving district judge in San Juan County, retired at the end of March after serving more than 17 years on the bench in the Eleventh Judicial District.



Judge Townsend became the second female judge in the district when she was appointed by Governor Bill Richardson in 2006. Judge Townsend was elected the same year.

In 2008, Judge Townsend started a Treatment Court program for the district with the help of Court Executive Officer Weldon Neff. "The most rewarding part of my job is when I get stopped in a grocery store or on the street by someone and have them say, 'Hey you saved my life when you sent me to treatment.'"

Although judges in the district usually share case types, Judge Townsend primarily presided over felony criminal cases. Between 2015 and 2021, Judge Townsend was administratively responsible for all magistrate and district courts in Farmington, Aztec and Gallup as the Chief District Judge.

"Judge Karen Townsend's experience will be missed," said Chief District Judge Curtis R. Gurley. "Judge Townsend has served our community and the state well for nearly two decades."

Judge Townsend graduated from Aztec High School in 1982, Ft. Lewis College in 1985, and worked at the Public Service Company of New Mexico at its San Juan Generating Station before going to Syracuse University College of Law and receiving her Juris Doctorate in 1990. Judge Townsend moved back to Farmington and was an associate with Tansey, Rosebrough, Gerding and Strother for seven years, helping to start the San Juan County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program with former judge Benjamin Eastburn before opening her office in Aztec. CASA volunteers advocate for foster children as they move through the child welfare system.

After an extended European vacation with her family, Judge Townsend said she hopes to remain active in the legal profession in some way in retirement. "Mediations and legal training are on the table," she said.

"Being a judge is the best job I could have ever imagined," said Judge Townsend. "I am happy to see the support the judiciary received this year from the Legislature for better compensation. I'm sure it played a part in getting a very qualified slate of applicants for my position."

Judge Townsend and her departing Trial Court Administrative Assistant Katrina Barber celebrated at a gathering in Aztec on April 2, 2024.

The Eleventh Judicial District serves people in San Juan and McKinley counties.

NMDOT District 5 Employee of the Month, February 2024

By Marlene Gallegos



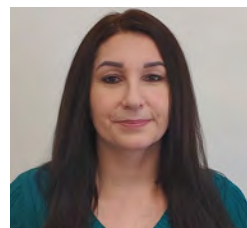
Employee of the Month- Greg Pat, Bloomfield Project Office

Greg is always willing to teach, guide, help, and mentor with the work of fellow employees. His teaching skills have helped me immensely to grow and learn more of my position every day and do my job to the best of my ability. He is very thorough. When dealing with contractors Greg is very knowledgeable in answering questions and giving guidance on what is required in the Spec, Plans, RFI, or contract book.

As an example, a shipment of rebar came onto the jobsite. I verified the rebar lengths and quantities with the cut sheet after delivery. There were 8 #11 rebars 18" long that were delivered as black bars. Looking over the plans in a comment there was a remark for the pay item to be placed under Galvanized rebar. I informed Greg about the rebar and asked him to verify this bar is supposed to be

galvanized and not black bar. He verified that the bar that was delivered was incorrect and gave guidance on how to inform the contractor of the incorrect bar.

I am fairly new with the state, any time I have questions about anything on the jobsite with plans, Spec book, paying for items filling out paperwork taking tests like densities Greg is always more than willing to help and teach. He strives to make sure us that are new to the state are taught correctly and capable of doing this job to the fullest potential.



Supervisor of the Month-Laura Romero, District Administrator

Laura is very supportive of the departments she oversees, offering help when needed. Her follow up is great and she gives guidance to expedite vouchers and payments. She provides customer service to everyone looking for help with financial matters within the

department.

Laura needed to correct some entries in the bulk fuel reports that were wrong. She was very patient even though this gave her additional work for her to resolve. Laura did not have to do this; however, she often goes above and beyond and is always willing to share her knowledge and take time out of her workday to help accounting continue to run smoothly while also managing her work.

This Supervisor deserves to be recognized as an outstanding individual because she goes above and beyond in our financial section at D5 every day even though she has a very heavy workload. There has never been a time we couldn't ask for help or a time we couldn't interrupt her work to answer our questions, she doesn't get upset with us no matter how often we need help. We are so grateful to have someone like her on our team. Laura is a great Supervisor, leader, and mentor. Such a wonderful asset to D5.



Randy Gonzales (Supervisor), John Madrid, Daniel Talamante, Thomas Royston, Joe Nieto, and Federico Aguilar

Crew of the Month-Dulce Patrol

Our Patrol has the honor of providing the traveling public with safe roads throughout or patrol area. We hadve had to come in at all hours of the day and night to respond to emergencies such as rockslides, mud slides, and to provide traffic control at vehicle accident scenes for the state police. All this In addition to our regular duties.

This crew is always ready and willing to assist other patrols. We have hauled cinders from Santa Fe to Shiprock, helped out with litter pickup in Farmington and Bloomfield, and helped clear snow from any neighboring patrols that needed our assistance. The Dulce Patrol crew is always willing to go above and beyond in their duties, to learn new things and new ways of doing them, and to excel in doing so.



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NM Outdoor Recreation Division's FY24 Outdoor Equity Funding Reaches \$3.7 Million

By Donna Stumpf

The New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD) of the New Mexico Economic Development Department (EDD) has announced funding of \$975,142 in new Outdoor Equity Fund (OEF) awards to 33 organizations.

These awards will be distributed to 16 rural, 13 urban, one land grant, and five Tribal communities. Of those awarded, 28 are first-time recipients of OEF funding.

The first-of-its-kind Outdoor Equity Fund (OEF) was created in 2019 to enable all New Mexican youth equitable access to the outdoors. The grant supports programming that provides outdoor experiences that foster stewardship and respect for New Mexico's land, water, and cultural heritage.

Since Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed the Outdoor Equity Fund into legislation, the program has granted over \$5.7 million to nearly 250 organizations throughout the state, actively introducing over 72,000 young New Mexicans to the outdoors through hiking, mountain biking, canoeing, horsemanship clinics, and rich lessons in wilderness safety and water conservation.

"The Outdoor Equity Fund is a powerful engine that benefits our outdoor recreation economy by creating jobs in recreational activities throughout New Mexico," Gov. Lujan Grisham said. "This funding source also introduces New Mexico youth to the great outdoors, often for the first time. Through this program, more children are discovering our state's rich outdoor beauty and becoming the next generation of protectors of our unique lands, waters, and cultures."

"This cornerstone program of the Outdoor Recreation Division continues to have a major impact on the state's outdoor recreation industry," Acting EDD Cabinet Secretary Mark Roper said. "It not only increases equitable outdoor access for youth, but it also supports outdoor recreation businesses through equipment purchases and guide contracts, creates jobs, and diversifies the economy, especially in rural communities." *Continued from page 15*



Photos courtesy of Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps

Investing in 529 Education Savings Plans is a Great Option to Save for the Future

By Carolyn Fittipaldi



Recent data from Forbes indicates 66% of Americans were able to save money in the past year and the average American has \$65,100 in personal savings. According to Forbes, Americans are taking three major steps to address economic uncertainty: 64% are cutting costs, 50% are building savings and 41% are delaying large expenses. Americans have many options to consider when planning and saving for their family's future. <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/banking/savings/american-savings-statistics/>

One option for families to commit to saving successfully is 529 education plans, which provide a tax-advantaged option to help pay for future education. The Education Plan®, a 529 education savings plan sponsored by the state of New Mexico, provides families with a reliable tool to pay for various educational costs including tuition, room and board, books, computers, and software. Money invested in 529 plans can be used at any accredited trade or vocational school, college, or university throughout the nation. Funds can also be used to pay for K-12 private school tuition, apprenticeship expenses, and student loan repayment.

"Education is an investment in the future, and 529 plans offer a practical approach to make that investment wisely," said Natalie Cordova, Executive Director of The New Mexico Education Trust Board, the state agency that administers The Education Plan®. "We encourage families to take the time for future-looking financial planning. Any time a family can save money, it's building opportunity. When that money is saved for future education, it's even better, as higher education can lead to greater employment opportunities, higher salaries, and more financial stability."

Unlike traditional savings accounts, 529 plans offer tax-free growth on earnings when utilized for qualified education expenses. This feature allows people to see their contributions grow over time without being subjected to taxes, enhancing the overall value of their savings. Withdrawals are also tax-free when used to pay for qualified education expenses. For New Mexico residents, any contributions you make into an account with a New Mexico 529 plan are eligible for tax deduction on New Mexico state income tax returns.

Setting up a 529 account with The Education Plan is easy and takes about 15 minutes online. There is no minimum initial contribution requirement to open a 529 account and contributions can be made at any time. For more details on The Education Plan® and its role in supporting education savings, please visit, <https://www.theeducationplan.com>.

Monastery Lake Reopened for fishing March 5

By Darren Vaughan

After a winter closure, the Benedictine Monastery Lake, near the village of Pecos, will be freshly stocked with trout and reopen for fishing at 10 a.m., Tuesday, March 5. The Benedictine Monastery Lake is part of the Department's Open Gate Program. Please visit our website for more information about this property. <https://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/download/hunting/maps/open-gate/property/Open-Gate-Property-Info-Map-OG127-Monastery-Lake.pdf>

If you are planning a fishing trip this spring, the Department has several tools to help you. The Weekly Fishing Report provides up-to-date information on fishing conditions at numerous water bodies throughout the state. The Fishing Conditions and Trip Planner is full of figures depicting fishing conditions for several species and water bodies throughout the year. Additionally, the interactive Fishing Waters Map contains a wealth of information on fishing locations in New Mexico, displaying hundreds of fishing access points with information on fish species available, facilities, accessibility, boat ramps and general regulations.

Anglers are reminded that their 2023-2024 fishing licenses expired on March 31, 2024. Fishing licenses for the 2024-2025 season went on sale starting March 25, 2024, and will be valid from April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025.

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The New Mexico Department of Justice Hosts Another DEA Drug Take Back Day!

By Lauren Rodriguez

Do you have expired or unused medications cluttering your medicine cabinet? Now is the perfect opportunity to dispose of them safely and responsibly. Join us for the DEA Drug Take Back Day on **April 27th**, from 10 am to 2 pm, at our Santa Fe office located at 408 Galisteo Street, Villagra Building, Santa Fe, NM 87501.



This event, organized by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the New Mexico Department of Justice, aims to provide a convenient and secure way for individuals to dispose of prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications. By participating in Drug Take Back Day, you contribute to the prevention of drug abuse, protect the environment, and ensure the safety of your community.

Why should you participate? Here are a few compelling reasons:

1. **Prevent Drug Abuse:** Unused medications sitting in your home can be tempting targets for misuse and abuse, especially by teenagers and young adults. By safely disposing of these drugs, you help prevent potential addiction and overdose incidents.
2. **Protect the Environment:** Flushing medications down the toilet or throwing them in the trash can lead to contamination of water sources and harm to wildlife. Proper disposal at DEA Drug Take Back events ensures that these substances are incinerated safely, minimizing environmental impact.
3. **Ensure Safety:** Keeping expired or unused medications around poses risks, especially if they fall into the wrong hands. By participating in Drug Take Back Day, you eliminate these risks and create a safer living environment for yourself and your loved ones.
4. **Compliance with Regulations:** Improper disposal of medications can lead to legal and regulatory issues. DEA Drug Take Back Day provides a convenient and compliant way to dispose of medications according to established guidelines.

Join us on April 27th at our Santa Fe office to make a positive impact on your community. Our team will be on hand to assist you in safely disposing of your medications. Remember, every pill you dispose of is a step towards a safer, healthier, and cleaner environment.

Mark your calendars and spread the word! Together, we can make a difference in combating drug abuse and protecting our planet. For more information about the DEA Drug Take Back Day, contact us at communications@nmdoj.gov.

Let's work together towards a safer and healthier future. We look forward to seeing you there!

Outdoor Recreation Division's Equity Funding

Continued from page 14

For the third round of the FY24 Outdoor Equity Fund grant cycle, recipients were awarded \$975,142 with grants averaging \$30,000. Awardees bring an additional total match of \$698,401 and serve 14 counties across New Mexico benefiting 8,879 youth through their combined efforts.



Photo credit: Kiefer Garcia
Shared by Santo Domingo Pueblo

"ORD's programming is helping raise the next generation of stewards of our natural environment," ORD Director Karina Armijo said. "Through strategic investments in transformative outdoor experiences, New Mexico's youth are developing a deep connection with the outdoor industry, which may pave the way for their future success within it."

Total FY24 OEF awards have reached an impressive level with \$3,730,528 in grant awards — a level nearly 4.7 times greater than funding the prior fiscal year — with 115 organizations generating \$2.8 million in matching funds and reaching over 36,000 youth. Outdoor Equity Fund awards were made possible through both state and federal funding this year, including junior bill and special appropriations funds and over two million in American Rescue Plan Act money.

The grant applications were reviewed and scored by a six-member panel that included: ORD Director Karina Armijo, The Wilderness Society New Mexico State Senior Manager Kay Bounkeua, ORD Deputy Director AJ Jones, Outdoorist Oath Executive Director Gabaccia Moreno, Disability Advocate and Social Impact Consultant Kyle Stepp, and New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps Commission Executive Director Sarah Wood.

To learn about the 33 award recipients visit, <https://edd.newmexico.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/FY24-OEF-Round-3UPDATED.pdf>

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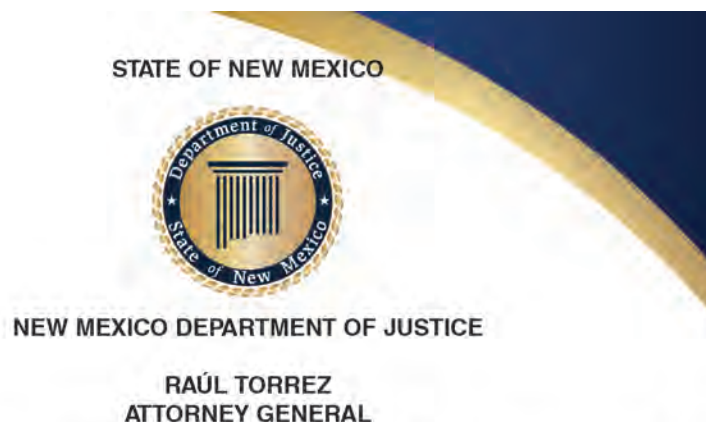
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NMDVR Success Story: Flying High, with a Little Help

By **Jeff Levine**

The sky's the limit now for John O'Laughlin. Becoming a commercial airline pilot was an achievable goal for him, with help from the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

"I don't think you truly understand the good work you do," O'Laughlin says of NMDVR's rehabilitation services. "You took something that was unattainable for me and made it attainable. It has allowed me to not only have a better life for myself, but it's also made an impact on my family. You allowed me financial security. You took someone at a disadvantage and put them in a position to thrive by providing them with what they need to be successful. That's an amazing thing."



A military veteran, he qualified for NMVDR services due to his spinal stenosis, severe arthritis, and other musculoskeletal issues. His aunt and uncle are pilots, which sparked his interest in aviation. O'Laughlin logged some flight time while serving his country, and his wife suggested he pursue that as a post-military civilian career.

"The process is very time consuming and financially burdensome," the Albuquerque resident says. "(NMDVR) allowed me to overcome the financial barrier that would have kept me from getting the certificates and ratings, and also the flight time I needed." The agency helped him through the hours requirements as well as the Airline Transport Pilot Combined Training Program, consisting of ground school, simulators, and a knowledge test. Passing those earned him the certifications and ratings necessary to qualify as an airline pilot.

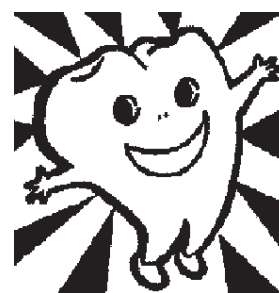
O'Laughlin flies for Envoy, a regional subsidiary of American Airlines. His routes take him throughout most of the United States and Canada, as well as parts of the Caribbean and Mexico. At age 32, his short-term goal is to be promoted to captain and join the parent American within the next few years.

His disability is not something that needed to be overcome, but rather managed. "Some days, it's fine. Other days, I'll roll out of bed the wrong way and it throws me off for the rest of the day," says O'Laughlin. "Sitting in the cockpit doesn't typically affect me."

He adds he is not the type of person to reach out for help, and only came to NMDVR on the suggestion of a friend of a friend. "Don't count yourself out before you even ask," O'Laughlin advises. "Take a chance. They turned my life 180 degrees."

For information about NMDVR programs, contact your nearest office. There are two dozen locations across the state: dvr.state.nm.us/locations/.

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SPOTLIGHT

On New Mexico Leadership

New Mexico MainStreet



In 2014, Daniel J. Gutierrez joined the New Mexico MainStreet (NMMS) program as Assistant Director and then became the organization's Director in 2019. NMMS is part of the NM Economic Development Department (NMEDD) and is a Main Street America™ Coordinating program (one of more than 40 programs nationally.) Prior to joining NMMS, Daniel co-founded and worked with Barelas Community Coalition in downtown ABQ from 2007-2014 where he organized community revitalization projects such as the Barelas Community Garden. He currently serves as Governing Board Chair of the Siembra Leadership High School, committee member of Main Street America's Leadership Council, and ex-officio Board member of the New Mexico Resiliency Alliance. He holds a B.A. in Anthropology/Native American Studies from the University of California Davis and an M.A./Ph.D. Candidacy in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

With nearly twenty years of experience with community organizing, Daniel has extensive community economic development experience implementing community-based planning and economic development strategies while protecting historic and low-income communities from the negative impacts of revitalization and gentrification. He is passionate about cultural identity, social justice, community revitalization, and engaging in meaningful work. He is more interested in doing actual work rather than just talking about it!

What is the mission of the New Mexico MainStreet Program?

New Mexico MainStreet's mission is to develop local capacity to engage people, rebuild places, and grow the entrepreneurial, creative, and business environment resulting in economically thriving downtowns, greater business and employment opportunities, and a higher quality of life.

Where are your offices located?

NMMS is housed in the NM Economic Development Department and their offices are in the Joseph M. Montoya Building at 1100 South St. Francis Drive, Suite 1242 in Santa Fe.

How many FTE's do you have?

Daniel manages three full-time NMMS/NMEDD staff members and will gain an added FTE in the next fiscal year. In addition, Daniel oversees 10 Revitalization Specialists (contractors) who provide direct technical assistance to affiliated communities throughout the state. Revitalization Specialists are experts in their respective fields and provide training, support, in-field services, and more to NMMS's network of communities. The NMMS team continues to grow and adjust available services to meet community needs. "The New Mexico MainStreet team wants to help communities thrive, grow capacity, and build relationships with their municipal and tribal partners so the whole state can elevate economically," said Daniel.

What are some of NMMS's major accomplishments?

During his tenure, NMMS's programs and initiatives have

grown significantly. In addition to supporting affiliated MainStreet districts, NMMS also aids affiliated Arts & Cultural districts, Historic Theaters, Frontier & Rural Community projects, Native American Community projects, Urban Neighborhood Commercial Corridor projects, and Capital Outlay public infrastructure projects across the state.

Under his leadership, the Frontier & Rural Communities Initiative was expanded to welcome more community projects across the state by developing the Native American Communities Initiative in 2019 to provide specific project-based community economic development support to New Mexico's indigenous communities where the preservation of tribal culture and political sovereignty create different economic development challenges and opportunities. He also developed the Urban Neighborhood Commercial Corridor Initiative (with NMMS Project Coordinator Lucas Pedraza) in 2021, which supports economic development projects in NM's largest cities. Combined, NMMS programs and initiatives support a wide spectrum of community revitalization projects to improve local & creative economies, spur private reinvest-



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ment, preserve historic places, and build capacity to revitalize

affiliated districts. Daniel and Lucas continue to reshape NMMS's tools and services to remove barriers of entry and allow more communities to join the network. They are currently working on molding the project-based initiatives and MainStreet Accelerator process as an entry point for communities to work towards Main Street America designation. The benefits of this prestigious designation include joining a national network of grassroots organizers, programming & education on the proven Main Street Approach™, government advocacy, and access to more resources and opportunities.

Daniel has been committed to the Historic Theaters Initiative since joining NMMS and he fondly recalls going to the historic theater in his hometown in California.

This important program has provided LEDA and Capital Outlay funding to rehabilitate theaters, install digital projection/sound systems, and prevent them from going dark. So far, 11 historic theaters have received support from NMMS, and communities have benefitted from reclaiming these valuable assets. "There's an economic benefit to bringing these buildings back to life because many of these cinemas serve

as anchor institutions," said Daniel. "Cinemas draw people downtown. They help keep local businesses around them open."

In the 2024 Legislative Session, NMMS/NMEDD was awarded \$10 million in Capital Outlay funding. This is the third consecutive year that NMMS has received such a generous amount from the Legislature for public infrastructure projects in affiliated MainStreet districts. The NMMS Capital Outlay program funds projects that directly support economic growth, property renovation, public safety upgrades, business development, and job creation. Within three years of completing public infrastructure projects, pedestrian traffic, business expansions/openings, and downtown event attendance all increase exponentially.

"We are thankful for the Legislature's continued support for this vital program that transforms communities for the better. These public infrastructure projects are years in the making – they require innovative planning and coordination among many key players," says Daniel. For more information, please visit <https://www.nmmainstreet.org/>



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New Mexico becomes Fourth State to Enact Clean Fuel Standards

By Michael Coleman

On March 5th, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed House Bill 41, Clean Transportation Fuel Standards, into law. New Mexico is the fourth state in the nation to enact the standards.

HB41 allows producers and importers of low-carbon transportation fuels to generate clean fuel credits to sell to producers and importers of high-carbon transportation fuels. HB41 then directs the emissions of transportation fuels in New Mexico to decrease over time.

“Clean fuel standards not only decrease emissions and move us toward our climate goals, but also diversify our economy and attract new businesses to our state,” said Gov. Lujan Grisham. “Thank you to the bill’s sponsors for their hard work in getting this important legislation across the finish line.”

Clean fuel standards will bring at least 1,600 full-time jobs and nearly 2,300 construction jobs, generating \$470 million in wages, and attracting \$240 million capital investment in production and manufacturing in New Mexico.

In states that have adopted similar programs, clean fuel standards are proven to spur investment into innovative technologies, support infrastructure for transportation decarbonization and reduce harmful emissions – all without increasing fuel prices for consumers.

“Decreasing air pollution and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, especially around transportation corridors, makes for healthier, thriving communities while addressing the serious impacts of climate change,” said co-sponsor Pro Tem Mimi Stewart.

“Thanks to this legislation becoming law, I expect to see a measurable, positive impact on both our health and our economy, and I am so proud of this legislature and Gov. Lujan Grisham for taking yet another bold step toward our clean energy future.”

“This program establishes a market-based approach to reward those entities that decide to produce and import clean fuels here in New Mexico,” said Environment Department Cabinet Secretary James Kenney. “In



order to receive a clean fuel credit, you must reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

“Under the program, at least

50 percent of net credit revenue from participating utilities must be spent on transportation decarbonization in low-income and underserved communities,” said co-sponsor Rep. Kristina Ortez. “As we transition away from higher carbon fuels, this legislation ensures that our most vulnerable experience the benefits cleaner transportation where they live.”

Now that HB41 is signed into law, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) will initiate a rulemaking process with the Environment Improvement Board (EIB) to draft, share, and ultimately adopt rules governing the clean fuel market established by the legislation. The first step in the rulemaking process is the establishment of an Advisory Group, which will be announced in early May. The first meeting of the Advisory Group is anticipated to take place in July and will continue to do so through

November. NMED plans to petition the EIB in late 2024.

The transportation industry is New Mexico’s second largest source of emissions, following those from oil and gas production. New Mexico has achieved remarkable progress in implementing policies aimed at reducing emissions from transportation during the Lujan Grisham Administration.

Between 2019 and 2022, New Mexico awarded nearly \$18 million in funds from the Volkswagen Settlement Allocation for low carbon equipment and infrastructure. In July 2020, the Federal Highway Administration approved New Mexico’s first Alternative Fuel Corridors. In 2021, New Mexico adopted Clean Cars Rules and adopted Advanced Clean Cars and Clean Truck rules in 2023. In January 2024, the New Mexico Construction Industries Commission voted to adopt construction codes requiring electric vehicle infrastructure to be built into new commercial and residential construction projects. To date, 308 EV Stations are installed throughout the state, with 736 total chargers available to New Mexicans with more on the way.

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Artist in Residence

By Keri-Lynn McBride



Recently, students and staff at the New Mexico School for the Deaf had the great pleasure of working with Mexican Artist in Residence, Rolando Sigüenza. Rolando is a very talented artist from Oaxaca and Mexico City and is well-known throughout the Deaf Community. Rolando worked daily with



students from the end of February until the end of March painting murals and tubes and creating linocuts using techniques they learned.



The NMSD Community celebrated students' art projects at a community-wide Showcase. What they created was extraordinary!

Quick Online Test Determines Diabetes Risk

Small lifestyle changes can prevent life-altering disease

By David Morgan



Many people have heard of diabetes but may not know their own risk of developing the disease. The New Mexico Department of Health's (NMDOH) Diabetes Prevention and Control Program estimates here, in a state of just over two million people, around 255,000 New Mexican adults had diabetes and over 587,000 New Mexican adults had prediabetes in the years 2020 through 2022.

Small lifestyle changes can help people delay or avoid diabetes or prediabetes and it begins with knowing your risks. NMDOH joined the American Diabetes Association in recognizing Tuesday, March 26 as Diabetes Alert Day.

This annual health observance encourages New Mexicans and others nationwide to take a quick, free online Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test to learn if they need to take action that could prevent or delay this condition. A link to the test can be found on the NMDOH diabetes program's webpage, Paths to Health NM: Tools for Healthier Living.

"I am among many New Mexicans managing Type 2 diabetes," said Department of Health Sec. Patrick Allen. "It is a life changing experience that requires being constantly aware of how you feel, what you eat, regularly monitoring your blood sugar and more. One quick list of questions answered privately online can let you know your risk and possibly avoid becoming diabetic altogether."

Preventative tips are provided for everyone who takes the test, including encouraging those at high risk to talk with their healthcare provider.

"Diabetes is a disease that can develop when your blood sugar is too high," explains Christine Brown, Diabetes Prevention and Control Program Outreach and Education Manager. "With time but no effort to try to prevent it, uncontrolled blood sugar causes other health problems, such as heart disease, nerve damage, eye problems and kidney disease."

Family history of diabetes, race/ethnicity, higher body weight, increasing age, smoking, lack of physical activity, high blood pressure, and a history of gestational diabetes are all risk factors.

Prediabetes is a condition in which blood sugar levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes. Prediabetes can often be reversed, but without taking any action, many people with prediabetes could develop Type 2 diabetes within 5 years. With Type 2 diabetes, the body cannot properly use insulin, a hormone that helps glucose get into the cells of the body. Losing extra weight, eating a healthy diet and exercising are important steps towards possibly avoiding diabetes altogether.

NMDOH's Diabetes Prevention and Control Program supports several programs for New Mexicans to prevent and manage prediabetes, type 2 diabetes and other chronic conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure and obesity. For more information on the program, visit the Paths to Health NM webpage, <https://www.pathstohealthnm.org/> or call (505) 850-0176 or (575) 703-2343.

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State Personnel Office Highlights Culture of Civility Courses

By Jaime Phillips

According to research recently conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), two-thirds of workers (66 percent) say they have experienced or witnessed incivility in their workplace within the past month. More than half (57 percent) reported having experienced or witnessed incivility at work within the past week, and one-third believe workplace conflicts will increase over the next several months due to upcoming elections and related sources of disagreement and friction (SHRM Research on Civility, Conflict and Expression, February 2024). Incivility in the workplace can be thought of “as a subtle form of interpersonal mistreatment in the workplace, consisting of rude behaviors such as derogatory or condescending comments, interrupting others, not listening, or having a dismissive body language” (Holm, Torkelson, and Backstrom, 2022). These kinds of behaviors, if not

adequately addressed, have been shown to lead to worse treatment, including bullying. Even relatively low-level disrespectful behaviors are associated with negatives outcomes such as greater absenteeism, turnover, and work errors, as employees find it difficult to focus on their work, and then seek to leave the toxic work environment.

The State Personnel Office Learning and Development Bureau has been providing courses on creating a culture of civility in the workplace since 2019 in an effort to help workgroups build their skills for preventing and addressing incivility in order to keep it from escalating. These courses, “Leading a Workplace Culture of Civility” (SoNM-1688 – for supervisors and managers) and “Creating a Culture of Civility Together” (SoNM-1791 – for all employee levels) help participants learn to recognize workplace incivility, its causes and effects; identify charac-

teristics and benefits of a culture of civility; and use strategies to create and maintain a culture of civility. The courses are provided regularly over Zoom, or can be conducted in person for a specific agency upon request. The State Personnel Office also offers related courses, including “Effective Workplace Communication” and “What’s Your Communication Style?” to help workgroups build the kinds of communication skills that will help them maintain positive and productive work environments. Last, SPO provides the “Communication and Conflict Resolution (CCR) Skills Series” consisting of six eLearning courses available on ELM, followed by an instructor-facilitated final course to practice and apply the skills and knowledge gained in the in eLearning. A certificate is awarded for successful completion of the Communication and Conflict Resolution Skills Series courses. All of these courses

are effective ways to help keep incivility from harming your team’s productivity and engagement.

Contact the State Personnel Office Learning and Development Bureau with questions about these and other learning opportunities. Find out more about learning and development opportunities on their new webpage: <https://www.spo.state.nm.us/learning-development/>, view schedules for upcoming classes on their Class Calendar, <https://www.spo.state.nm.us/learning-development/training-calendar/>, register for courses directly using the Enterprise Learning Management (ELM) system at <https://elm.share.nm.gov/>, or email for assistance at their new address: Learning.Development@spo.nm.gov.



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New Mexico Ranks Among Top States for Agriculture Production

Latest Census of Agriculture data now available

By Jennifer Green

The latest Census of Agriculture reflects the diversity of New Mexico's agriculture industry, showing that the Land of Enchantment ranks among the top states in the country for the production of pecans, chile peppers, milk, cheese and onions. Data sets from the 2022 Census of Agriculture were released Feb. 13 by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).



The following highlights from the 2022 census reflect increases in the size and diversity of New Mexico agriculture since 2017:

- In 2022, New Mexico's total value of agriculture production was \$3.71 billion. This calculated a 17% increase from the previous year;
- Direct-to-consumer or -retailer farm and ranch sales increased by 2.3% from 2017;
- 71% of producers have been on their operations for more than 10 years;
- Family-owned and -operated farms accounted for 95% of all New Mexico farms, with 82% of agricultural operations being less than 1,000 acres in size;
- While the average age of the New Mexico producer increased from 59.8 to 60 years of age, 7.2% of New Mexico producers in 2022 were younger than 35 years of age, which calculates a 1% increase in young producers from the 2017 census.

NASS conducts the survey every five years. This census counts all U.S. farms and ranches and those who operate them. Even small plots of land – whether rural or urban – growing fruit, vegetables or some food animals count if \$1,000 or more of such products were raised and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year.

NASS mailed 2022 Census of Agriculture questionnaires to ag producers in late 2022 to collect data for the 2022 calendar year. Producers could respond online or return completed questionnaires by mail through May 2023.

New Mexico Secretary of Agriculture Jeff Witte encourages all New Mexicans to explore the updated ag census that reflects advances in the industry.

"Through the ag census, New Mexico producers help show the nation the value and importance of agriculture and influence decisions that will shape the future of the industry," said Witte. "For farmers and ranchers in New Mexico and across the country, the Census of Agriculture is their voice, their future and their opportunity."

The census highlights land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income, expenditures and other topics. Notable changes for 2022 data include new questions about the use of precision agriculture and updates to internet access questions.



The Census of Agriculture gathers information that can be used by Congress, local agribusinesses, policymakers, researchers, local governments and many others for decision-making related to the creation of funding for agricultural programs and services. The information gathered by the census can directly impact New Mexico producers and the future of the industry.

New Mexico State Statistician Margie Whitcotton said the latest census gives a comprehensive snapshot that helps data users to see trends in the industry and helps producers do business.

"The time that individual producers take to provide responses to USDA NASS surveys is essential in creating this publication. Your data shows how agriculture is changing in the state over time and where resources need to be dedicated," said Whitcotton.

First conducted in 1840 in conjunction with the decennial Census and conducted since 1997 by USDA NASS – the federal statistical agency responsible for producing official data about U.S. agriculture – the Census of Agriculture remains the most comprehensive agricultural data for every state and county in the nation.

For more information about the census data, visit <https://www.nass.usda.gov/agcensus/> and browse . <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/> Census reports can be viewed at the local NASS field office in your area. Be sure to also peruse the downloadable PDF of the 2022 NMAGA Statistics. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/New_Mexico/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/2022/2022-NM-Ag-Statistics.pdf



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New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority Administers Over \$585 Million, Serving Nearly 19,000 Households in Fiscal Year 2023

By Kristie Garcia

The New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority (MFA) continues to have a positive impact on New Mexicans, serving 18,963 households and administering \$585.8 million in funding in fiscal year 2023 (Oct. 1, 2022-Sept. 30, 2023). According to its annual report, MFA helped produce, finance or preserve a total of 3,707 homes.



“Although it was a challenging year, MFA, alongside our 350+ partners, expanded affordable housing opportunities across the state,” said MFA Executive Director/CEO Isidoro Hernandez. “Whether it was helping to create stable housing environments, assisting first-time homebuyers or administering tax credits for the purpose of new affordable housing construction, we continued to push forward and get creative with our programs to address the ever-changing needs of New Mexico’s communities.”

Established by the state legislature in 1975, MFA is a self-supporting quasi-governmental entity that secures funding through housing bonds, tax credits, federal and state agencies and private institutions. This funding is directed toward various initiatives, including the construction of affordable rental communities, rehabilitation of aging homes, provision of down payment assistance and affordable mortgages, emergency shelter services, as well as the administration of rental assistance and subsidies.

As identified in the 2022 New Mexico Housing Strategy administered by MFA, affordable housing priorities in the state include:

- creating more housing
- preserving and improving existing affordable housing and catalyzing redevelopment
- building homeownership and wealth
- creating stable housing environments and
- federal advocacy

In fiscal year 2023, MFA’s overall impact included the following:

- \$126,560,000 for constructing, weatherizing, rehabilitating, preserving or redeveloping 1,862 homes
- \$388,294,000 for first mortgage and down payment assistance, totaling 3,352 loans to 1,845 families
- \$24,145,000 for mortgage assistance to 2,925 households
- \$39,796,000 for housing vouchers, benefiting 5,843 households
- \$7,002,000 for housing stability and homeless shelter services, aiding 6,488 people

“From homeless prevention support to rental development to homeownership programs, it’s imperative we all keep working together to provide affordable housing opportunities to New Mexicans,” said MFA Chief Housing Officer Donna Maestas-De Vries. “In the current fiscal year, we will continue to make the most impactful use of federal, state and private funding sources to leverage our programs and continue to address the housing needs in our state.”

MFA’s efforts in 2023 significantly contributed to the state’s economy, resulting in \$433 million in direct and indirect economic impact. MFA’s programs and projects also helped create and support 5,900 construction and long-term jobs statewide.

New Tax Law Provisions Open Solar Tax Credit To More New Mexicans

EMNRD is revising program rules before accepting new applications

By Sidney Hill



Now that Governor Lujan Grisham has signed omnibus tax package for 2024 into law, the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) is preparing to accept a new wave of applications for its Solar Market Development Tax Credit Program.

The 2024 tax omnibus, House Bill 252, contains provisions that make the existing solar tax credit available to more New Mexicans. Those provisions include:

- Raising the annual cap on the total amount of credits that can be issued to \$30 million per tax year.
- Ensuring that tribal members who hold property in leasehold are eligible for the credit.
- Making \$20 million in tax credits available to individuals whose applications were rejected after the cap was reached in previous years (tax years 2020 through 2023).
- First enacted in 2020, the Solar Market Development Tax Credit Program offers a tax credit up to 10% on solar system installation costs for qualified solar thermal and photovoltaic (PV) systems, up to a maximum of \$6,000 per taxpayer per year.

Over the past three years, EMNRD was forced to reject hundreds of solar tax credit applications because the previous annual caps were quickly reached.

Since the program’s inception, more than 12,000 New Mexicans have received tax credits averaging \$3,081.00 per credit. EMNRD estimates these New Mexicans have each saved an average of \$1,624.00 per year in energy costs while adding more than 100 MW of distributed solar generation to the state’s power grid.

EMNRD staff has started a required process to update the administrative rules for the program, including writing new sections of the rule which apply to the \$20 million in credits available for taxpayers who missed out on receiving a credit for solar systems installed between 2020 and 2023. That process will include publishing proposed rules for public comment.

Applications are currently being accepted for solar systems installed in 2024 on the EMNRD website. The aggregate cap on credits for the 2024 tax year is now \$30 million.

“We are thrilled that the Governor and legislature enacted these new provisions to this incredibly popular program,” said Dylan Fuge, Deputy Secretary at EMNRD, which certifies systems for eligibility under the tax program.

“We have some groundwork to do before we can begin accepting applications based on these new provisions,” said Rebecca “Puck” Stair, director of EMNRD’s Energy Conservation and Management Division (ECMD). “We are already hard at work on those changes and will let the public know when we are accepting applications for systems installed before 2024.”

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New Mexico Film Office Announces Feature Films "Honey Don't!" and "Eddington" will be Filming in New Mexico

By Dolores Martinez

New Mexico Film Office Director Amber Dodson announced that the feature film **"Honey Don't!"** will begin filming in and around Albuquerque through May.

The production will employ over 600 New Mexicans – 150 crew members, 15 principal actors, and 450 background talent. "Honey Don't!" will star Margaret Qualley ("Maid"), Aubrey Plaza ("The White Lotus"), and Chris Evans ("Avengers," "Ghosted") as they tell the story of a detective investigating the death of a young woman and its connection to a mysterious church. The film is directed by Ethan Coen ("No Country for Old Men") and produced by Coen, Robert Graf, Tricia Cooke, Eric Fellner, and Tim Bevan.

"New Mexico holds a special place with the producers, and we're ecstatic to film our fifth feature here," Graf stated.

"Ethan Coen and the team have filmed several of their movies in New Mexico, including 'O Brother,' 'Where Art Thou?' and 'Burn After Reading,'" Dodson said. "Drawn to

the state's competitive incentives, unique landscapes, and skilled crews, acclaimed films such as these create high-paying jobs for residents, support local businesses, and market New Mexico as a premier production hub to worldwide audiences."

For more information, contact honeyproductionoffice@gmail.com.

New Mexico Film Office Announces Feature Film **"Eddington"** Filming this month in and around Albuquerque, Santa Fe County, and Truth or Consequences.

"Our film incentive programs were designed to bring big-name projects to our incredible rural communities," Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said. "This means jobs for locals, a boost for small businesses, and a chance to showcase New Mexico's breathtaking landscapes to the world."

The production will employ over 300 New Mexicans—230 crew members, 59 principal actors, and 105 background talent—with an estimated economic impact of over \$52 million.

The film is set to star Joaquin



Phoenix ("Joker: Folie à Deux," "Napoleon"), Pedro Pascal ("The Last of Us"), Emma Stone ("Poor Things," "The Curse"), Luke Grimes ("Yellowstone," "American Sniper"), Austin Butler ("Elvis," "Dune: Part Two"), Deirdre O'Connell, Micheal Ward ("Top Boy," "Empire of Light") and Clifton Collins Jr. ("Capote, Jockey"). The film follows a small-town New Mexico sheriff with higher aspirations.

Ari Aster will write, direct, and produce alongside Lars Knudsen under their Square Peg banner, and Academy Award-winner Darius Khondji will serve as the director of photography.

"A big-talent film in T or C is great for our local economies," State Representative Tara Jaramillo said. "It supplies jobs for caterers, carpenters, and camera crews, a surge in business for motels and restaurants, and puts a spotlight on the unique beauty of our rural communities, attracting visitors who might never have considered them before. It's a win-win for ev-

eryone involved – the filmmakers get stunning scenery and a skilled local workforce, and our communities get an economic boost."

"New Mexico is established as a premier production hub where projects of all genres come to life," Dodson said. "The combination of our breathtaking landscapes, expert crew, and competitive film incentive attracts top-tier films like 'Eddington' to New Mexico—not only to film in places like Truth or Consequences but also to tell a story set in the Land of Enchantment."

In fiscal year 2023, spending on productions outside the Albuquerque-Santa Fe Corridor reached \$21 million. Since the Legislature modernized the Film Tax Credit to further incentivize film production in rural communities, spending outside this corridor has surpassed \$36 million this fiscal year, with four months still to go.

For more information about the production, contact OfficeJCFM@gmail.com

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NMDVR Around the State

By Jeff Levine

During the month of March, rehabilitation counselors and technicians from the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation have had informational displays and interacted with attendees at school events and job fairs all around the state. Here are just a few of the places where NMDVR staffers have been spotted



Spring Into Action Career Fair at Silver High School on March 5.



Top photo: Field Operations Director Antoinette Holmes presenting at the Parents Reaching Out conference in Albuquerque on March 22. Right photo: Bernalillo County Youth Rapid-Hire Job Fair on March 23. Bottom left: Las Cruces Public Schools "Mock It 'til You Rock It" mock interview day on March 26. Bottom Right: Spring into Your New Career job fair in Las Cruces on March 27.



"Fight Like a Girl" event at Western New Mexico University on March 8.



Top photo: Career and College Fair at the Shiprock Diné Youth Complex on March 14. Left photo: Diné College "College and Career Fair" in Shiprock on March 20.



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Job Training Awards in February and March

By Bruce Krasnow

The Job Training Incentive Program Board approved \$1,628,287 of funding in **February** to assist eight New Mexico companies in the training of 94 employees, New Mexico Economic Development Department Acting Cabinet Secretary Mark Roper announced.

“This program becomes more vital in a tight labor market when we need to invest in and support our current workers so they can learn new skills, earn a higher wage, and remain in New Mexico,” said Roper.

The February awards will assist up to 94 total employees – 56 new trainees and 38 incumbent employees with wages averaging \$24.25 to \$58.47.

JTIP grants were awarded to the following eight New Mexico companies in February:

- **Adelante Consulting** (Corrales), 1 trainee with an hourly wage of \$33.68 for a total award of \$20,514.96. Adelante Consulting assists municipal and Tribal entities in obtaining grant monies to execute decarbonization and economic development projects.
- **BlueHalo LLC** (Albuquerque), 18 trainees with an hourly average

wage of \$58.47, for a total award of \$571,030. BlueHalo is a national security platform with capabilities spanning space superiority, directed energy, missile defense, C4ISR, cyber, and intelligence.

- **Kairos Power** (Albuquerque), 29 trainees with an hourly average wage of \$54.31 for a total award of \$840,058. Kairos Power is an advanced energy technology and engineering company launched out of a broad research effort at U.S. universities and national laboratories.
- **Parting Stone LLC** (Santa Fe), 6 Step Up trainees for a total award of \$13,250. Parting Stone offers a new form of solidified human and animal cremains.
- **Sceye Inc.** (Moriarty), 2 trainees with an hourly average wage of \$55.60 for a total award of \$82,203. Sceye is a manufacturer of High-Altitude Platform Stations (HAPS) for the stratosphere at 65,000 feet.
- **Serbin Machining Inc.** (Albuquerque), 6 trainees with an hourly average wage of \$24.25 for a total award of \$47,810. Serbin Machining is a provider of precision-machined components for the aerospace, mili-



BlueHalo EVP and Sector President, Mary Clum, spoke to 35 middle school students from Southwest Secondary and Prep Learning Center Charter School in Albuquerque. They discussed the significance of pursuing careers in STEAM and she encouraged the students to start their careers in New Mexico. Photo courtesy of BlueHalo LLC.

tary, and industrial sectors.

- **STEM Boomerang LLC** (Albuquerque), 30 Step Up trainees for a total award of \$50,750. STEM Boomerang is a woman and minority-owned business that works to help create a talent pool of highly skilled STEM professionals locally and connect them to the best career opportunities.
- **X2nSAT Inc.** (Las Cruces), 2 Step Up trainees for a total award of \$2,670.60. X2nSAT is a full-service satellite network operator at the forefront of satellite communications technology.

The Job Training Incentive Program Board approved awards to five businesses in **March** to assist with the workforce training of 70 trainees and two interns, Acting Economic Development Department Cabinet Secretary Mark Roper announced.

“We are committed to ensuring that as businesses expand and grow, they not only stay in our state but also provide employment, career opportunities, and training to New Mexico residents,” Roper said. “The JTIP program, along with Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s robust and innovative tuition-free college initiatives, will ensure we can grow our own workforce for decades to come.”

The total amount awarded for March was \$814,902.60. The awardees were:

- **F5 Theming & Design 2 LLC** in Animas, which applied for JTIP fund-



F5 Theming plans to use its first-ever JTIP funding to hire and train an art director and a scenic artist to meet current and growing production demand. Photo courtesy of F5 Theming & Design 2.

ing for the first time. The business was awarded \$86,562 for 5 trainees at an average wage of \$21.80. F5 Theming & Design 2 is a scenic art design and manufacturing company focused on themed entertainment and commercial environments.

- **Advanced Manufactured Power Solutions**, Albuquerque, 1 trainee at an average wage of \$40.87 for a total award of \$24,627. Advanced Manufactured Power Solutions (AMPS) provides custom, high-quality, and high-reliability battery packs for the defense and space industries.
- **Franklin Mountain Packaging, LLC**, Santa Teresa, 61 trainees at an average wage of \$19.11 for a total award of \$623,923. Franklin Mountain Packaging (FMP) is engaged in the manufacturing of corrugated sheets and providing unique digital printing services for the corrugated box-making industry.
- **Olive Tree Pharmacy, Co.**, Rio Rancho, 3 trainees at an average wage of \$28.40 and 1 intern with a wage of \$19.75. Total award amount is \$66,990. Olive Tree Pharmacy, Co. is a C-corporation and the only compounding pharmacy.
- **Knight Scientific Systems, LLC**, Los Ranchos/Albuquerque, 1 intern with a wage of \$40 for a total award of \$12,800. Knight is developing multi-spectral Object Detection (OD) tools to bring the power of machine learning to all imaging wavebands.

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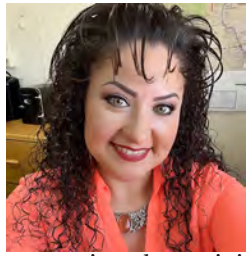
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NMDOT D1 Employees of the Month, February and March 2024

By Ami Evans



February Employee of the Month- Gil Gallosa 41

Gil works extensively with the Public,

overseeing the activities with Local Government Road Fund and TPF Grants. These projects are well over 100 open and active projects within our D1 Local Governments. Gil also continues to assist the GO with the Program Oversight Division. Everyone Gil works with knows exactly what needs to be done and by what deadline, and if there is a problem, Gil will effectively work it out and solve the issue in the most professional way.

Within Gil's first year here she has come to understand the processes required and has always been more than willing to step up and take on new challenges. An example of that is with the project ranking system, stepping up, learning, and now able to explain the process shows what a true asset she is. Also stepping up to learn and understand the Capital Outlay Grants process, being able to step in when needed. Gil is a true asset to the State Funding Programs and to the District.



February Supervisor of the Month- Tim Yeager 41

Tim has done a great job, from managing the District One

Safety Department alone to hiring two new employees. Both new to safety as a career, Tim has taken both employees and taught them everything they do today to help teach and make the district a much safer place to work.

Being responsive 24/7 for all employees needs and in the case of an incident Tim is often the first point of contact, taking action to ensure the employee is safe and well taken care of. Tim has sat at the bedside of hospitalized employees alongside their families. And in the event of an emergency Tim is always levelheaded and cool throughout. Others have commented on his excellent customer service and with fellow employees Tim always helps in any way possible. Please know you are very much appreciated, and all your hard work never goes unnoticed.

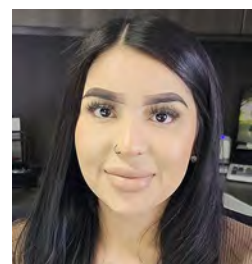


Brenda Leyba, Sabrina Gomez, Katy Martinez and Mirna Grado

February Crew of the Month-HR

This HR team provides great customer service. Anytime someone needs assistance, they always provide support and actively listen to the concerns or questions presented. In recent an employee shared her experience with us stating how grateful she was with her interaction and your professionalism. Because of you, we have the lowest vacancy rate in the Department and we are able to process transactions more efficiently.

Overall, many have noticed the significant changes in the HR department. You all work together to have a more positive, welcoming, and productive atmosphere. Thanks for all you do!



March Employee of the Month- Monica Grado 41-24

Since Monica started working as an

Advance Purchasing Agent she has become an integral part of our team. Monica's dedication, hard work and commitment was nothing short of exceptional. Always making sure to encourage her colleagues to develop a strong professional bond with all district personnel and promote a welcoming environment.

Monica stepped up this past year, when her supervisor had to take extended leave, she didn't hesitate to rise to the challenge but also to go above and beyond the demands of the day-to-day tasks and duties. Monica showed great leadership in the Purchasing department and with the Business Section. Quickly becoming the one that can be counted on by management and the 'Go to Person' based on her skills, knowledge, professionalism, and ability to resolve issues and inquires. Our team is incredibly fortunate to have Monica.

March Supervisor of the Month- Edward Misquez 41-25

Eddie has done a fantastic job as the stores supervisor. Working

to ensure the districts supplies are on hand and taking the initiative to order items which can be either cost or time saving.

Always ensuring to price check and reach out to multiple vendors to get the most for the money. If needed Eddie has taken the time to assist our crews in picking up and delivering supplies to ensure production never stops.

Eddie is supportive of his staff, making sure to take the time to teach them the job and how to always stay compliant with procurement, the

process it takes to purchase specialty items, and how to get new vendors added to our lists. Eddie is very much appreciated,

and all his hard work never goes



unnoticed.

March Crew of the Month- Heavy Maintenance 41-88

The Heavy Maintenance team provides great customer service. From routine work to emergency work, anytime someone needs assistance, this crew is always ready to provide support and makes sure to get the project done. Recently stepping up to aid the Las Cruces Patrol in sweeping shoulders, milling and paving bad areas on I-10, assisting with the litter pickup crew and helping with press events. Working day or night to ensure Las Cruces is well taken care of, always with a great attitude and a get-it-done state of mind.



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Thoughts on LinkedIn and Other Social Platforms

There are over 673 million users on LinkedIn, but "most people have an account because they've been told they should or need to have one—then they never use it or update it," said Andrew Selepak, Ph.D., director of the graduate program in social media at University of Florida. - From the Wall Street Journal -

By Nick Mandel

Guilty as charged. I am not a frequent user of many social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or others, but I have thought of LinkedIn, the professional business platform, as most aligned with my limited needs when using social media. It is considered the standard for recruiters looking for talent, and for employees interested in featuring their skills and presence in their professional field. Still, my LinkedIn profile has been gathering digital dust as well.

To those unfamiliar, LinkedIn promotes itself as a networking and career development website for business professionals. It appeals to younger working professionals with 60% of users aged between 25 and 34, the second highest group in their early twenties and professionals over the age of 55 accounting for only 3% of total users, of some estimated 645 million users worldwide. In contrast, Facebook reports some

3 billion monthly active users, Instagram 1.5 billion and TikTok with just over 1.1 billion users according to my AI Copilot.

That difference in user numbers is one appeal to a career professional. A site that focuses more on trends in business and professional development over a vacation in the Bahamas, an eloquent restaurant experience in Las Vegas or the latest novel dance craze. So, interesting, criticism in recent years has been that LinkedIn has declined to similar standards and characteristics common on Facebook or X platforms.

For example, visiting the Reddit link, r/linkedincling, and digging deeply, one will come across LinkedIn postings and discussion on preferences over Biden and Trump, complaints about obese people on



airplanes, transgender issues and why there are so many homeless people. My shocker? A woman admit-

ting to an affair with a co-worker using language suited for an adult website. Not what I expect on a professional business network site. Shame.

Another common annoyance is exaggerated, excessive, and embellished profiles and resumes. Over-used buzz words like thought leader, innovator, disruptor, visionary, and driven, often not accompanied by actual results and so broad it appears meaningless adding little value to a user's profile. Combine that with complaints of intrusive ads, spam, unauthorized sharing of email addresses etc., and other annoyances by LinkedIn, one can understand the response from the marketplace. Now users have a more specialized and alternative platform when looking for employment, networking or advancing professional skills. You have heard of sites like Indeed (<https://www.meetup.com/>), or ZipRecruiter (<https://www.ziprecruiter.com/>), focused on offering recruiters and job seekers employment opportunities, locally and beyond. Or Meetup (<https://www.meetup.com/>) and Alignable (<https://www.alignable.com/>) where entrepreneurs, small businesses and groups of people can better network with their specific



needs in mind. reddit Even those less business-like platforms, such as Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/>) or Medium (<https://medium.com/>) can promote professional photographers or self-employed writers when used in a skillful manner.

Any platform can be subject to abuse, overuse, and other slights in the wild west of social media and the WWW. Which leads to the flip side for those who do not use them to boast, brag or badger, but to honesty and authentically share with others their professional accomplishments, networking interests and interest in advancing themselves and their craft. But as the numbers show, many of us do not keep ourselves current in this arena. And when we do, we perhaps take liberties that we should reconsider. At the very least, you may want to revisit that dusty LinkedIn profile, if you have not been there in while. I know I will. One never knows when they may need to use it again.

What on your mind? Contact me at promandel@gmail.com

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New Mexico Courts Launches New Website

By Beth Wojahn

New Mexico Courts launched a new website to provide the public with an improved user experience and a fresh, new look. The website is nmcourts.gov.



“We really focused on understanding the needs of the public,” said Cassandra Hayne, Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) Chief Technology Officer. “The new website is more intuitive and makes finding information easier. People often go to our website for specific reasons, and now they should find what they need faster.”

Included on the main homepage are navigation tiles –blocks with images and links – that readily offer options most people are looking for, such as information about serving on a jury, self-representation, or paying fines. The tiles and the top menu bar have a standard look and feel with court-specific information. For example, all court webpages have a tile linking people to a schedule of court dockets. The Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court webpage includes access to virtual hearings, while the Eleventh Judicial District also includes a tile with information about Justice Stations in the Farmington, Gallup and Aztec area that allow people to appear remotely in a court hearing.

New features on the website include:

- Judicial districts and individual courts are clearly organized and presented.
- Webpages are clearly marked in the upper left, with prompts to alert visitors when they navigate to a specific judicial court or program.
- A robust search engine to help people quickly find what they are looking for on the website, including the ability to search for a court by zip code, county, or court name.
- Go to the main homepage from anywhere on the website by pressing the logo in the upper left corner.

“One of the best improvements to the website is a more mobile-friendly interface,” said AOC Director Artie Pepin. “Most people are using smartphones to come to our website so it’s important to have a product that delivers a better viewing experience on their phone.”

The website, designed by Astriata, also has a new color palette and pictures of courthouses and New Mexico landscapes throughout. A website banner photo contest was held judiciary-wide last summer to find the captivating photo for the main homepage. Out of 81 entries, the Supreme Court voted on the top five and Monica Rodriguez from the Second Judicial District Court had the winning photo of Abiquiu Lake.

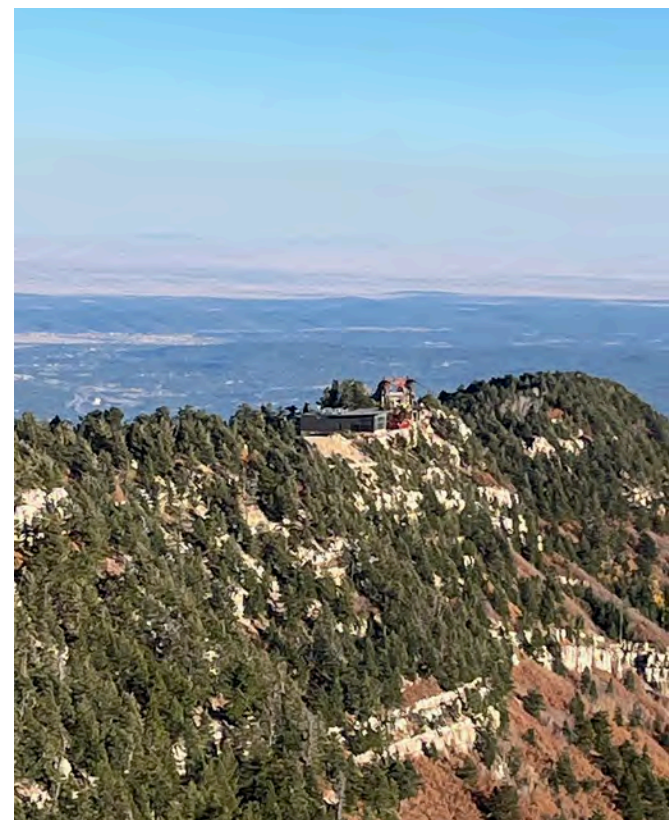
“This photo was taken in July of 2022 when the world was collectively rebounding from the pandemic,” said grand prize winner Monica Rodriguez. “It amazed me that nature did not seem to notice the human impact of a tiny virus on humanity. The sunshine and the reflections of the sky on water are eternal.”

Please visit nmcourts.gov to find schedules of hearings in courts across the state, to request an interpreter, and access self-representation resources.

Where in New Mexico is Cooper?

Can you identify the location of this picture? If so, you may be a winner of \$25 Gift certificate from **Joe’s Dining, 2801 Rodeo Rd.**

Please submit the photo location to rtroundhouse@gmail.com with the email title of *Photo Contest*. All correct entries will be placed into a drawing to select a winner. Entries must be submitted by April 26th, 2024. Look in May’s ‘Round The Roundhouse for the winning announcement along with another photo contest to enter. Good luck!



Congratulations to the March’s winner, Michelle Carreno, DPS. Her name was selected in the drawing of correct entries. March’s photo location was in Santa Fe at the former St Francis Cathedral School and New Mexico School of Arts Bon Appetit!



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Where's my Notice of Value, Santa Fe County?

By Ivan Barry

If you live in Santa Fe County, you may be asking yourself, "Where is my Notice of Value? I'm supposed to receive it in April, right?" Typically, the response is, "yes". However, this year, the Property Tax Division (PTD) granted the Office of the Santa Fe County Assessor an extension because our Office has undertaken many substantial improvements to better serve you. The valuation of short-term rentals, the implementation of several in-office workflows, and, as previously stated, we have been working with the PTD and the New Mexico Counties Assessor's Affiliate to reconstruct your Notice of Value (NOV) in order to become more consistent with NOV's across New Mexico. Having said that, **your NOV will be mailed out on May 1st** and the deadline to file for benefits, exemptions, and property valuation appeals has been extended to 30 days after the revised mail out date.



Santa Fe County Assessor staff

We would also like to introduce the new and improved website for the Office of the Santa Fe County Assessor! Our upgraded website brings significant benefits, with a strong emphasis on enhancing user-friendliness and reintroducing our online chat feature with upgraded chatbot services. Our primary goal was improving the user experience and ensuring seamless and intuitive browsing for visitors from all walks of life. We think that the user-friendly navigation, clean information structure, and modern design, make it easy for you to find what you're looking for quickly. For more information, visit us today at www.santafecountynm.gov/assessor.

Elephant Butte Lake State Park Set for Million-Dollar Upgrade

Improvements aim to elevate visitor experience at popular New Mexico destination

By Sidney Hill

The State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) is embarking on a \$1 million project to upgrade comfort stations at Elephant Butte Lake State Park.



The project, to be completed in stages, will begin April 1, 2024, and is anticipated to continue through August of 2024. It will entail demolishing an antiquated comfort station at the park's main entrance and completely renovating two campground comfort stations.

"We will have to close these stations as they are being worked on," said Park Superintendent Chris Bolen. "We ask our visitors for patience and understanding during this process, which ultimately will produce facilities that enhance the overall park visitor experience for years to come."

Vault and portable toilets will be available for campers during construction.

The construction schedule is outlined as follows:

- Renovation of the Ridge Road comfort station will commence on April 1, 2024, with completion projected for mid-May.
- Renovation of the Desert Cove comfort station is scheduled to run from May 20 to the end of July.
- Demolition of the comfort station located at the park's main entrance is set to begin August 9, 2024, and should be completed within a week.

In addition to the comfort station improvements, State Parks is undertaking several other capital improvements at the park, including:

- Improvements to the RV dump station.
- Connection to City of Elephant Butte sewer services.
- Development of a new Aquatic Invasive Species check station.
- Improvements to Ridge Road infrastructure.

These projects, part of the State Parks' Five-year Capital Improvement Plan, are in various stages of planning and completion. The \$18 million Lakeshore Road improvement project, funded with a combination of state and federal funds, also remains ongoing, with completion estimated for spring 2025. Improving this road will enhance the safety of and provide easier access for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians traveling to Elephant Butte Reservoir.

For more information about the State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), visit our website at <http://www.emnrd.nm.gov/>.



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White House Investment Set to Make New Mexico a Vital Domestic Epicenter for Advanced Chip Manufacturing

By Bruce Krasnow

On March 20th, New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham applauded the White House announcement that will make New Mexico a vital domestic epicenter for silicon chip manufacturing.

President Joe Biden announced on Wednesday, March 20th that the U.S. Department of Commerce and Intel Corporation have reached a non-binding preliminary memorandum of terms (PMT) to provide up to \$8.5 billion in direct funding, under the CHIPS and Science Act, to strengthen the U.S. supply chain and re-establish American leadership in semiconductor manufacturing.

“New Mexico has been the proud home of Intel manufacturing for more than 40 years, and just recently we celebrated the completion of a cutting-edge manufacturing facility that is providing thousands of jobs to New Mexicans,” Gov. Lujan Grisham said.

“The historic CHIPS and Science Act, signed into law by President Biden, is bringing a fresh wave of investments to our state. I am thrilled that Intel will benefit from this legislation and continue to be at the forefront of technological innovation.”

Intel expects its investments in the United States to exceed \$100 billion, as it expands capacity and capabilities in Arizona, New Mexico, Ohio, and Oregon. In addition, Intel is estimated to directly create over 10,000 manufacturing jobs and nearly 20,000 construction jobs.

The Intel facility in Sandoval County is set to receive support for the modernization of two fabs (aka fabrications, semiconductor production facilities) into advanced packaging facilities to close an important gap in the domestic semiconductor supply chain. When it is in full production, this facility will

be the largest advanced packaging facility in the United States.

To support engineering students in New Mexico, Intel established endowment scholarships to support STEM education initiatives, as well as mentoring and internships for students in two-year certificate programs.

The New Mexico Economic Development Department (EDD) Acting Cabinet Secretary Mark Roper said Intel’s success in New Mexico is a result of strong partnerships within the state, Sandoval County, the City of Rio Rancho, and now the Federal Government. Intel has not only leveraged state assistance via the Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) but has also utilized EDD’s Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP) with training assistance for over 400 jobs. Many of these jobs were filled with hiring events last year co-sponsored by Intel, EDD, and



Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham speaks to Intel employees on Jan. 24th at the company’s Rio Rancho campus. Attendees include Rio Rancho Mayor Gregory Hull, Sandoval County Commission Chairman David Heil, U.S. Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández, and U.S. Rep. Melanie Stansbury. (Credit: Intel Corporation)

the Department of Workforce Solutions.

“Since 1980, Intel has invested over \$16 billion to support New Mexico operations; Intel currently employs more than 2,600 people and has an annual economic impact in the state of \$1.2 billion,” Roper said. “This is a great example of how our incentives and partnerships with businesses positively affect the lives of New Mexicans, creating career paths and opportunities. Intel expects to hire 700 new employees because of our investments – the majority of them New Mexico residents.”



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25TH ANNIVERSARY





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