



'ROUND THE ROUNDHOUSE



**New Mexico
STATE EMPLOYEES' NEWSPAPER**

Volume 37, Issue Number 1
January 13 to February 9, 2025

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Welcome to the
New Mexico Legislature**

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New Mexico STATE EMPLOYEES' NEWSPAPER

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'Round the Roundhouse is a local, family owned company that publishes a monthly newspaper for and about State and other government employees in New Mexico. We strive to be the most relevant source of information. Opinions expressed by some contributors do not necessarily reflect those of 'Round the Roundhouse. Send your stories and photos to us at the address above or submit to your PIO for their consideration in future issues. Enjoy!

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Aerial Assistance: Santa Fe County Fire Fighters Use Drone Technology to Rescue Hiker

By Olivia Romo



On the evening of December 30, 2024, the Santa Fe Regional Emergency Communications Center (RECC) received a call shortly after 5:00 PM reporting a lost hiker in the Ojo de la Vaca area of Cañoncito. The Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office (SFCISO) initiated the response and requested assistance from the Santa Fe County Fire Department (SFCFD), which deployed its advanced Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) to support the search.

The SFCFD's UAS program, led by Battalion Chief Salvatore Caputo and Emergency Management Coordinator Ignacio Dominguez, was established over the past year to enhance fire suppression and search and rescue capabilities. The department currently operates three drones equipped with thermal imaging cameras and one-way communication speakers.

Using this technology, SFCFD searched the area where the hiker was last reported. However, the hiker was not initially located. While continuing the search, SFCFD was dispatched at 6:06 PM to investigate an illegal burn in the hills north of Lamy. Suspecting a potential connection between the two incidents, the UAS team redirected to the Lamy area and deployed the drone to investigate.

At 8:24 PM, the UAS thermal imaging camera identified a small fire approximately one mile from the responders' location. Using the drone's speaker, SFCFD announced their presence and called for the hiker. Moments later, the hiker emerged, signaling for help.

SFCFD responders confirmed the hiker's exact location and assured them that assistance was on the way. Crews hiked into the area, rendered necessary care, and escorted the hiker to safety. The individual was subsequently transported to a local hospital for evaluation.

This successful rescue underscores the importance of advanced technology in emergency services and the seamless collaboration among Santa Fe County agencies, including the RECC, SFCISO, SFCFD, and administrative offices. Together, they exemplify a coordinated and effective response to emergencies.

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Let's Put Our Money Where Our Mouth Is!

OP ED by New Mexico State Treasurer Laura M. Montoya



My journey is similar to many other New Mexicans' in that it took a lot of hard work, hope, resilience, community, and prayer to keep

pushing forward to work towards something better for me and my family. Dreams were the hope that helped drive the determination to keep pushing forward, but survival was always at the forefront of every decision and job I undertook. Financial struggle, living paycheck to paycheck to make ends meet — a typical New Mexico story. Add limited resources, knowledge and opportunity, and you have an equation for failure or extreme disappointment. Unless you have a strong mental base, family/community network, extreme work ethic, and people that are willing to pour into you, it is really hard to change the outcomes of generational poverty.

Many know me to say, "teamwork makes the dream work," but rarely

know that it stems from my childhood and knowing that everyone in the family had to contribute to the household. Most know about my professional positions working for US and State Senators and State Treasurers, but my first jobs were cleaning houses, babysitting, working at gas stations, a grocery store, restaurants, work-study, and bars. These jobs started the foundation of a strong hustle mindset, working as part of a team, and familiarizing myself with long work hours and limited sleep. The hustle continued while earning a HS diploma, a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from my hometown college.

Given that most higher education students across New Mexico face challenges securing stable housing and enough nutritious food, there clearly exist systemic pitfalls that lead to poor outcomes and hold our state back from reaching its fullest potential. The last thing anyone needs when working to achieve their goals is to worry about how they're going to survive. When I say "survive", I mean basic needs like a safe place to sleep, food to

eat and safe transportation to work, to school or both.

We don't have to keep perpetuating this narrative.

That's why I'm advocating for the legislature and Governor to pass "New Mexico Baby Bonds" legislation, a revolutionary idea developed by world-renowned economist Dr. Darrick Hamilton.

If passed the way I envision, after July 1, 2025, every baby born in New Mexico would have \$7,000 secured in a government-funded trust account that would be invested by the State Investment Council. Recipients will be required to complete a financial literacy component approved by the State Treasurer's Office before being allowed to have indirect access after they turn 18. The fund (which is expected to have approximately \$20K/recipient by the time they are 18, \$35,000 if they didn't use it until they were 35) can be used for higher education, NM trade school, a down payment on a NM home, or retirement, just to name a few.

We have the need, and we already

have the money! NM is ranked the poorest state in the nation, yet, has the second largest permanent fund in the country (totaling appx \$58 Billion - \$9 Billion which is in the Early Childhood Education Trust Fund). \$1 Billion is calculated to allow for an investment for every baby born in NM until after 2060.

Generational Poverty does not have to be the typical narrative or everyday NM childhood story. Baby Bonds can give access to wealth, bridge the wealth divide, improve health outcomes and strengthen our economy. We say that our children are our greatest asset, resource and our future.... Now is the time to put our money where our mouth is and start investing in our babies.

Laura M. Montoya became New Mexico's first female State Treasurer on January 1, 2023, and the nation's first elected Latina State Treasurer, bringing the office over two decades of experience in banking, investments, and public policy. Under Treasurer Montoya's direction, the office manages the state's \$17 billion investment portfolio. The Treasurer serves on 13 boards, councils, and commissions with fiduciary responsibility for state funds exceeding \$90 billion.



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Ben Lopez Memorial Best Patrol Awarded to District One Cliff Patrol

By Ami Evans

The New Mexico Department of Transportation Ben Lopez Memorial Best Patrol Award was established in honor of Ben Lopez, a dedicated Patrol Supervisor who tragically lost his life on August 18, 2005.



Ben was killed in a random act of violence as he arrived for his shift at the North Urban Patrol yard in Albuquerque, becoming the first victim of a violent crime spree that day. His loss, alongside two motorcycle shop employees and two Albuquerque police officers, serves as a reminder of the daily sacrifices made by those in public service.

This year, with an impressive total of 153.2 points, the Cliff Patrol from District One has earned statewide recognition as the Ben Lopez Memorial Best Patrol of 2024. Competing against five other districts, the Cliff Patrol excelled in cleanliness, organization, equipment maintenance, and roadway management. Judges traveled statewide, evaluating patrols based on their upkeep and performance in key areas.

The Cliff Patrol team ensured all equipment was in top condition while responding to emergencies, repairing fences and guardrails, performing road maintenance, and managing unpaved roadways. They also resurfaced their patrol grounds and kept their areas clean and organized.

The dedicated members of the Cliff Patrol include:

- Supervisor: **Regan Carillo**
- Maintainers: **Richard Marquez, Miguel Apodaca, Carlos Medran, Steve Rodriguez & Juan Sifuentes**
- Area Maintenance Supervisor: **Curtis Jandt**

Congratulations to the Cliff Patrol for their outstanding achievement and continued commitment to excellence in service.

Gov. Lujan Grisham Releases Fy26 Budget Recommendation

Fiscally responsible spending plan balances past, future investments



On December 12th, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham released a FY26 executive budget recommendation that builds on progress made during her first six years in office while boosting investments in health care, child well-being and infrastructure across New Mexico.

The budget recommendation includes \$10.9 billion in recurring spending—an increase of 5.3% over current year spending. The budget contains an additional \$172 million for state employee pay raises, which includes additional compensation for New Mexico educators

The executive recommendation maintains reserves at 30.4%.

“This fiscally sound budget proposal prioritizes early childhood education, clean energy, infrastructure, affordable housing, and expanded healthcare access to build a stronger foundation for New Mexicans,” said Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham. “My administration looks forward to discussing these proposals with state lawmakers and reaching consensus on the priorities that matter most to our state.”

Today’s budget release comes more than a month before the Jan. 21 start of the New Mexico Legislature, providing lawmakers and the public as much time as possible to review the document and provide input.

“Transparency drives trust,” said Lujan Grisham. “Our early release of the executive budget ensures everyone has time to review our priorities for New Mexico.”

For more narrative detail on the governor’s specific budget proposals please consult the document link here, <https://www.nmdfa.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Executive-Budget-FY26-Digital-1.pdf>

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VOICES FROM THE PAST

By Robert J. Tórréz
Former State Historian
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The Donativo of 1809

Numerous times during New Mexico's history Spanish kings and Mexican-era governments appealed to their citizens for financial donations often referred to as donativos. The best known of the Spanish-era appeals was issued in 1780 in support of the American revolt against England and the other in 1793 in support of Spain's war with former ally France. In both occasions New Mexicans came forward and made significant, well documented contributions which have been the topics of previous columns.

Evolving world events of the early nineteenth century sparked additional appeals for funds from a Spanish government overwhelmed by its war against Napoleon. On February 13, 1809, the Spanish consulate in Guadalajara issued an appeal for contributions to provide for the widows, orphans, and soldiers disabled in the peninsular war. This appeal for contributions seems to have been received in New Mexico in late February or early March 1809 and quickly distributed throughout the province. A March 6 report by Ygnacio Sánchez Vergara from the Pueblo of Xemes jurisdiction acknowledged he had received and published the appeal for funds and indicated he would issue receipts to contributors and submit a report listing each contributor and what was collected as soon as possible. He also asked

for clarification as to whether the request for donations should be extended to the Indians in his jurisdiction.

A series of surviving reports dated through 1809 provide great details of the contributions made by the citizens of various jurisdictions. In an elegantly written, patriotic gesture, dated March 13, 1809, Fr. Joseph de Vera of Taos pledged one hundred pesos of his annual stipend for 1809 and fifty pesos for each subsequent year for the duration of the war. Fr. Joseph added that if the government declared such a need, he pledged the entirety of his stipend and all he possessed.

Governor José Manrique submitted his report and listing of the donativo made by the province's religious and citizens on November 20, 1809. He noted that the 3,599 pesos collected in cash was much less than he had hoped for due to the poverty of New Mexico's inhabitants. He added that a large quantity of donated goods had not yet been sold but would be sold at Paso del Norte for the best possible price. He added that eighteen mules were required to transport the goods and since only four were available in the royal herd, he had to hire fourteen others at the cost of ninety-eight pesos. Horses, cattle, and other donated livestock remained in New Mexico and would be sold locally because it would

cost more to transport them to Chihuahua than they were worth and the cattle could be used to feed allied tribes that visited the capital and the cost charged to the fondo de aliados (allied Indian fund).


Two surviving reports of the donativo, one from the villa of Santa Fe and the other from the jurisdiction of San Carlos de la Alameda, provide fascinating lists of names, amounts of cash and lists of donated goods, livestock, and crops. Major contributors from the capital included alcalde primero Antonio Ortiz (100 pesos), Rosa Bustamante (20 pesos), and Pedro Pino. However, most contributions were one peso or less.

The second extant report, submitted on April 29, 1809 by Cleto Miera y Pacheco, the alcalde at San Carlos de la Alameda, provides a detailed list of the donations made from his district, which extended from Alameda, located north of the villa of Albuquerque, to Peña Blanca, in the vicinity of the Pueblo of Cochití. The list is twenty pages long and contains the names of several hundred individuals who pledged a contribution to the royal government. The list submitted by Miera y Pacheco lists cash donations which range from the eleven pesos donated by Dionicio Gonzales of Corrales, to one real (there are 8 reales to the peso) contributed by Bartolo Chaves of Bernalillo. Most of the contribu-

tions, however, consisted of goods such as blankets, several types of cloth, livestock, and a variety of crops, often described as productos de la tierra (products of the earth). The following is a sampling of the contributions listed from Miera y Pacheco's jurisdiction.

In all, the contributions from the jurisdiction of Alameda included 218 sarapes, food items totaling more than 160 almures of corn, wheat, assorted legumes, eighteen ristras of chile and thirty eight ristras of garlic. Livestock included forty-nine cattle, four mules, seven horses and two burros. Goods included various types of cloth and clothing, six pairs of stockings, three pairs of boots, fourteen sashes and twenty-two buffalo hides. The value of the goods, crops, and livestock contributed in this jurisdiction were not appraised but the cash contributions totaled slightly more than 117 pesos. It is likely that the donations made from the remaining jurisdictions for which we have no reports were similar to those made by the individuals of the Alameda jurisdiction. In all, as Governor José Manrique's report indicated, New Mexicans contributed 3,599 pesos towards the Spanish government's latest appeal for funds. .

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Governor Appoints Former State Senator Greg Nibert to PRC

On January 1st, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced the appointment of former state Senator Greg Nibert to the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission for a six-year term beginning January 1, 2025.



Nibert will succeed Commissioner James Ellison, whose term concluded on December 31, 2024.

"I am honored to be nominated to the Public Regulation Commission," Nibert said. "My duty as a commissioner will be to regulate our utilities according to the laws of the land, which includes, first and foremost, the Energy Transition Act. The PRC plays a crucial role in ensuring we meet the renewable energy targets set forth in statute for the betterment of our state. I look forward to securing New Mexico's energy future for generations to come."

Nibert, whose tenure in the state Senate ended on December 31, was chosen from a pool of more than 30 candidates. The selection process was overseen by the Public Regulation Commission Nominating Committee, established by legislation signed by the governor in 2020 (NMSA 1978, Sec. 62-19-4). This seven-member committee evaluates and recommends qualified candidates to the governor and will continue to convene as needed to fill future vacancies.

New Mexico Public Regulation Commissioners earn \$190,000 annually.

Nibert, a partner at Hinkle Shanor LLP since 1987, specializes in real property, energy, and administrative law, contributing to major energy and natural resource projects across New Mexico. A former state legislator and community leader, he has served in the New Mexico Senate and House of Representatives, earning recognition for his legislative and public service.

2024 Statewide Best Project Award for NM 152 Emergency Landslide Repair Awarded to District One

By Ami Evans

The New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) has awarded District One the 2024 Statewide Best Project Award for their exceptional work on the NM 152 Emergency Landslide Repair project. This award honors projects developed and executed by NMDOT District personnel, showcasing the department's dedication to excellence through their planning, coordination, and expertise in addressing complex infrastructure challenges.



The NM 152 repair project stemmed from a critical safety concern identified by District One's Bridge Crew, who discovered significant cracks in the roadway near a hairpin curve at milepost 33.5, close to Emory Pass. Upon further inspection, the cracks expanded, threatening the stability of the hillside and raising concerns about the potential for a landslide. In response, NMDOT immediately closed NM 152 to ensure public safety while a thorough analysis was conducted by the NMDOT Drainage Section.

Investigation revealed that prolonged wet weather had saturated the soil beneath the road, causing the original roadbed to expand and crack. This compromised the hillside and posed a serious landslide risk. To address the situation, the Heavy Maintenance Crew 41-88 began removing the damaged asphalt and approximately 250 square feet of saturated base course, replacing it with dry, uncontaminated material. As advised by the NMDOT Drainage Bureau, a 24-inch drainage structure was removed and replaced. The repair included the installation of 2,000 tons of new base course and the salvage of geotextile material, placed in one-foot lifts with precise compaction and moisture testing at each stage.

The existing drainage channels along the road were regraded and lined with rip-rap to ensure proper water flow. Additionally, the Williamsburg Patrol Crew 41-53, alongside the Heavy Maintenance Crew, applied a final layer of four inches of asphalt to complete the repair, which was finished in just 45 days.

NM 152 is a vital rural arterial road, providing essential access to the US Forest Service, NM State Parks, ranchers, residents, and commuters. Due to the lack of a nearby detour—over 100 miles through Deming—this repair was of paramount importance for maintaining safe travel in the area.

The success of the NM 152 repair project is a testament to the exceptional teamwork, planning, and dedication of District One personnel, who coordinated closely with material suppliers, other NMDOT sections, and local patrol crews. All repairs were carried out by NMDOT staff, with expert guidance from the NMDOT Drainage Section.

Crews Involved-Heavy Maintenance 41-88: **Stephan Cordero, Raul Farias, Kleer Lewis, Ron Lewis, Gary Martellaro, Hugo Nieto, Kevin Wright, Jose Torres, & Jason Polanco**
Williamsburg Patrol 41-53: **Jonathan Terrazas, Lalo Medina, Isaac Armijo, Cleo Davis, Sam Wilson, Chris Castillo, Johnny Torres, Trevor Whitehead, Ramon Carrillo-Munoz, Cindy Torres, Isaac Fuentes, Curtis Jandt**
Engineering Tech 41-40: **Terri Borden**



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New Mexico Nears 2025 Climate Goals

Data highlights state emissions down by 29% by 2025

By Drew Goretzka

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) released two comprehensive reports analyzing greenhouse gas emissions across the state, providing the most detailed and accurate inventory of New Mexico's emissions to date.



Findings confirm that New Mexico is making significant progress in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions. The state is projected to achieve a 29% reduction in emissions by 2025 compared to 2005 levels, keeping on track to meet Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's climate goals.

The reports, developed by Eastern Research Group (ERG) and Energy and Environmental Economics (E3) include:

- 2005 New Mexico Oil and Gas Greenhouse Gas Baseline Inventory.
- 2021 New Mexico Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory and Forecast.

These reports, along with an overview presentation, are available on the NMED's Climate Change Bureau webpage, <https://www.env.nm.gov/climate-change-bureau/greenhouse-gas-emissions-inventories/> Key findings in the reports include:

- Greenhouse gas emissions from electric power plants in New Mexico have declined 60% since 2005. Renewable energy now contributes about 60% of current in-state electricity generation — surpassing the Energy Transition Act standard of 50% renewable energy by 2030.
- Current policies, including New Mexico's recently upheld ozone precursor rule and methane waste rule, lead to a projected 70% reduction in methane emissions in the oil and gas sector between 2005 and 2025.
- Greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector in New Mexico grew 6% from 2005 to 2021, primarily due to increased use of diesel fuel. Under current state policies, including new motor vehicle emissions standards and the clean transportation fuel standard, fossil diesel use is projected to decline 11% from 2021 to 2030 and gasoline use is projected to decline 29% over the same period.

Continued public and private investment in clean technology while New Mexico assures compliance with its laws and rules are key to meeting our ambitious climate goals.

As co-chair of the U.S. Climate Alliance, Gov. Lujan Grisham supports the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and New Mexico is committed to achieving a statewide reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of at least 45% by 20

NMED will use these findings for the development of a Comprehensive Climate Action Plan supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-funded Climate Pollution Reduction Grant. Public and private investment in clean technology are important to achieving New Mexico's ambitious climate goals.

State Rehabilitation Council Announces 2024 Award Winners

By Jeff Levine

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has presented its awards for 2024. This year, the SRC honored a program participant, two organizations, and two NMDVR employees.

"There were many deserving nominees from all across the state," says SRC Chair Tracy Agiovlasitis. "In selecting this year's honorees, we considered successful partnerships with community-based employers, commitment to inclusive hiring practices, empowering individuals, person-centered services, provision of high-quality services, and noteworthy achievement resulting from successful employment."

The 2024 SRC Award recipients are:

- Outstanding NMDVR Participant: Levi Heisinger, Alamogordo. Heisinger is employed as a full-time educator at the New Mexico Museum of Space History at the age of 19. He also is continuing his education at New Mexico State University-Alamogordo and is creating braille-like plates of all the major constellations for students at the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to learn about astronomy.
- Outstanding Employer: United Brotherhood of Carpenters Local Union 1319, Albuquerque. The union's paid apprenticeship can lead to a Journeyman's license for the many NMDVR participants they have hired, and in just two years they have become a key employer partner of NMDVR.
- Outstanding Nonprofit/Provider: Assistance Dogs of the West, Taos. This organization has shown that students can successfully hold a job with the skills they learn in their Pre-Employment Transition Services program.
- Outstanding NMDVR Supervisor: Lisa Jones, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Supervisor, Alamogordo. Jones is a patient and supportive leader and trainer for her staff, with a sense of humor—all while taking on vacant case-loads herself.
- Outstanding NMDVR Staff Member: Kim Archuleta, Business Analyst II, Santa Fe State Office. Archuleta worked tirelessly to overhaul essential financial operations within the agency during the past year.

Heisinger received his award during a ceremony in Alamogordo in early December. Other awards were presented at the Disability Employment Awareness Month Conference and NMDVR Statewide Staff Conference earlier in the fall.



Levi Heisinger outstanding participant award



Levi with coworkers

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The New Mexico Educational Board celebrates the retirement of Monica Lujan and Sandra Alva

By Renee Garcia

It is with great honor and gratitude that we celebrate the retirement of Monica Lujan and Sandra Alva, who both retired in December 2024.

A Warm Farewell to Monica Lujan- New adventure awaits as we bid

a heartfelt farewell to our esteemed Member Services Director, Monica Lujan, as she retires after a remarkable 9-year career at ERB. Monica's dedication to serving our members has been unwavering. Her extensive knowledge and expertise in retirement plans have been invaluable in guiding our organization. She has tirelessly worked to improve our members' experience, from implementing a new call center to streamlining processes with the new Pension Administration System (PAS).

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Monica's warm and supportive nature has made her a beloved colleague. Her leadership and mentorship have inspired many of us.

As Monica embarks on her well-deserved retirement, we extend our sincerest gratitude for her contributions to ERB. We wish her all the best in the years to come.

A Fond Farewell to Sandra Alva-Honoring a lifetime of dedication and service, we offer a sincere farewell to Ms. Sandra Alva as she retires from her position as Accounting and Employer Reporting Manager at ERB.

Sandra has been an invaluable asset to our team, consistently demonstrating exceptional dedication and expertise. Her keen eye for detail and her mastery of complex financial processes have ensured the smooth operation of our organization.

Beyond her technical skills, Sandra's warm and supportive nature has created a positive and collaborative work environment. She has always been willing to share her knowledge and mentor her colleagues, making a significant impact on our team's growth and development.

As Sandra embarks on a new chapter in her life, we extend our sincerest gratitude for her years of dedicated service. We wish her a long, happy, and fulfilling retirement.



Monica Lujan – Center. From left to right; Board members Antonio Ortiz, Dr. Reilly White, Vice Chair Mary Lou Cameron, Monica Lujan, Board Chairman Russell Goff, Matias Fontenla, Max Baca, (front right) Larry Magid



Sandra Alva – Center. From left to right; Board members Madame Treasurer Laura Montoya, Dr. Reilly White, Vice Chair Mary Lou Cameron, Board Chairman Russell Goff, Sandra Alva, Matias Fontenla, and Max Baca

Judge Jason M. Jaramillo Appointed Presiding Civil Division Judge of the Metropolitan Court

By Camille Baca

Effective December 31st, Judge Jason M. Jaramillo takes over as the Presiding Civil Division Judge of the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court after the recent retirement of Judge Frank A. Sedillo. Judge Jaramillo has served in the court's Civil Division since 2019, when he was appointed to the bench by Governor Lujan Grisham.



"I'm eager to get to work in this new role and look forward to working more closely with our dedicated Civil Division staff and administration to ensure that we continue to serve the citizens of Bernalillo County," said Judge Jaramillo.

Judge Jaramillo has dedicated his entire legal career to public service, having previously worked in the Bernalillo County Attorney's Office as an assistant county attorney. He began his career as a prosecutor and appellate attorney for the Second Judicial District Attorney's Office, prior to working for the Social Security Administration. As a former member and now honorably discharged veteran of the U.S. Army National Guard, Judge Jaramillo served in both Colorado and New Mexico. An Albuquerque native, Judge Jaramillo graduated from University of New Mexico School of Law and was admitted to the State Bar of New Mexico in 2007.

"Judge Jaramillo's dedication to service and our community will continue to move our Civil Division forward as we proceed with handling a large majority of the civil lawsuits filed throughout the state," said Chief Judge Joshua J. Sánchez.

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Longtime Presiding Civil Division Judge Frank A. Sedillo Retires

By Camille Baca



Presiding Civil Division Judge Frank A. Sedillo steps down from the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court bench

after serving as a judge in the state's busiest court for 24 years. His last day was December 31, 2024.

"It's been an honor to serve this community for more than two decades, and I am grateful to have worked alongside dedicated and hardworking jurists and staff here at the Metropolitan Court and throughout the state," said Judge Sedillo.

Judge Sedillo was elected to the Civil Division of the Metropolitan Court in November 2000, hearing thousands of small claims cases. He served as the Presiding Civil Division Judge for nearly 10 years.

"Judge Sedillo's leadership and experience as our court's most-se-

nior judge will be greatly missed. He tirelessly led efforts to improve processes in the Civil Division and has worked closely with administration and staff to identify and implement efficiencies to better serve the public and our court," said Chief Judge Joshua J. Sánchez.

In addition to his contributions leading the Civil Division in recent years, Judge Sedillo spearheaded the court's long standing Valentine's Day weddings event and voluntarily performed thousands of weddings for the public throughout the years. Known as the go-to volunteer mock trial judge and presenter for many schools and organizations, Judge Sedillo also dedicated his evening hours to coaching youth sports and regularly contributed to the Judge for Yourself monthly column in the Albuquerque Journal.

Throughout his career, Judge Sedillo served on numerous state-wide committees including; the New Mexico State Bar Association Legal Services & Programs Committee,

the NM Supreme Court Joint Rules Committee, the NM Supreme Court Data Standards Committee, the NM Supreme Court Metropolitan Rules Committee, and the NM State Bar Committee on Diversity, to name a few.

Immensely involved in the community and with his alma mater, Judge Sedillo volunteered for many years as an instructor with the University of New Mexico Continuing Education Department Children's Spring & Summer Law Camps and for the Adult Osher Lifelong Learning Institute Lecture Series. A member and donor of the UNM Lobo Club, he also served as the UNM Letterman Alumni Association President in 2005 and on the Board of Directors for 30 years.

Prior to serving on the bench, Judge Sedillo worked in private practice for 14 years, representing families, individuals and companies in the areas of real estate, small business, collections, personal injury, domestic relations and criminal law.

Before that, he served as a Court Clerk for U.S. Federal District Court, as an

Assistant in the United States Senate, and as a Legislative Assistant in the U.S. House of Representatives. Born and raised in Albuquerque, Judge Sedillo received his law degree from UNM's School of Law and earned his Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the University of New Mexico Anderson School of Management. He also played football and baseball for UNM and received several academic All-Western Athletic Conference (WAC) honors and the WAC Stan Bates Award.

The Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court Judicial Nominating Commission will convene early next year to interview applicants vying to fill the vacancy created by Judge Sedillo's forthcoming retirement.



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Grow Your Career in the New Year

By Jaime Phillips



The beginning of a new year is a great time to make a plan to advance your career. The State of New Mexico has an immense variety of different types of jobs, as well as job levels within a particular field of work to promote growth and advancement. You can advance through your full career span without leaving state government - continuing to enjoy all the benefits it has to offer, earning your retirement, and serving your fellow New Mexicans. If you'd like 2025 to be a year in which you promote up, or even make a complete change to a different type of work in state government, you can get started today by following these steps.

First, reflect on where you are now in comparison to where you would like to be. Do you want to stay in your current field of work and move upward, or maybe you want to pursue a new type of position entirely? Do you want to advance to a first-time supervisory or managerial position, or continue moving up to higher-level leadership roles? Assessing where you are now as compared to where you want to go is a key first step in determining how you should get there. Next, identify the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to move from where you are where you want to be. For example, if you want to move up in your current field, what do you need to know or be able to do? Do you need to work on your knowledge in a particular area, your ability to do analytical thinking, or your communication skills, for example? If you're not sure what would be best, you could try asking a manager for what they are looking for in the position you want to hold, or review job descriptions to see the responsibilities performed by those positions.

Once you've identified what you want to work on to help you bridge the gap, you can then determine how best to develop professionally. The State Personnel Office Learning and Development Bureau is here to help with its catalog of courses and learning programs. The full Course Catalog can be viewed at this link: <https://www.spo.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/SPO-Learning-and-Development-Catalog-Updated-08.07.24.pdf>. In it, you will find a full listing of all available courses, in both instructor-led (live) class formats as well as on-demand eLearning classes available on the SHARE ELM system. You can search the catalog for keywords to help you find classes that will be of benefit, and then build your own course plan for the upcoming year. You can also take advantage of Learning Tracks and Programs in which a path to certificate completion has been already planned out for you. For example, both the Successful Communication Skills and the Customer Service Excellence programs consist of a defined set of six eLearning classes that you can complete on your own, followed by a live, instructor-led class where you can review and practice the skills you learned with other participants. Once the final course is completed, you will have a certificate of learning program completion. You can then ask your HR department to place the certificate in your personnel file. You can also list the program completion on your resume and include a copy of your certificate in your job application packets when you apply for new positions. Including these certificates will highlight the knowledge and skills you have gained, as well as to demonstrate your commitment to your professional growth and success.

After choosing your courses or programs, your next step is to decide how to structure your learning schedule to meet your needs. You may find it helps to block out an hour on your calendar each week to "make an appointment with yourself," and use that time to complete one eLearning class. If you do that each week for a set number of weeks, you will have the eLearning portion of the program completed, and can then enroll in and complete the final course. Some learning programs, like the Project Management certificate series, can be completed fully online with no need to schedule a live class. Just create a schedule that allows you to complete the 10 eLearning courses at a pace that works for you. Finally, some programs, like Essentials of Supervision and Management (ESM), have the option of completion through a supported "virtual study group" cohort model. In these cohorts you will receive weekly assignments, reminders of your progress to help keep you on track, and interactive meetings to discuss the learning and network with others. You will then graduate from the program together upon completion of the final capstone course. Get on a waiting list to be notified when the next ESM cohort opens for enrollment by filling out the form here: <https://forms.office.com/g/2GFNLBNimg>.

Prioritize your career advancement in 2025 by starting your planning now, and then stick with your plan throughout the year. By this time next year, you'll be glad you did! Learn more about classes offered by the State Personnel Office on their website at <https://www.spo.state.nm.us/learning-development/>. Email for assistance at Learning.Development@spo.nm.gov.


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2025 Tax Changes Provide Opportunity for 529 Plan Contributors

By Carolyn Fittipaldi

As families begin planning for 2025, a recent federal tax adjustment provides an opportunity for 529 plan contributors to jumpstart a child or grandchild's 529 education savings account while utilizing gift tax exclusions, helping families invest more for the next generation. Effective for tax year 2025, the federal annual gift tax exclusion will increase from \$18,000 in 2024 to \$19,000 for a single individual and from \$36,000 to \$38,000 for married couples filing jointly.

Contributions to a 529 education savings plan account for a beneficiary are considered gifts for tax purposes. In addition to benefits including flexible investment options and a range of qualified expenses, families can make up to five years' worth of contributions to a 529 account in a single year and apply it against the annual gift tax exclusion equally over a five-year period. That means single individuals will be able to contribute up to \$95,000 under the 2025 qualified exclusion limits, while married couples filing jointly can contribute up to \$190,000 in one year. These tax year 2025 adjustments generally apply to income tax returns to be filed for the 2025 tax year, filing during tax season 2026, according to the IRS.

Friends and relatives can also make gift contributions to a loved one's 529 education savings plan and take advantage of the increased gifting limits in 2025.

The Education Plan® is a tax-advantaged 529 education savings program sponsored by the State of New Mexico and administered by the New Mexico Education Trust Board. 529 funds can be used to pay for education expenses at universities, colleges, trade schools, and professional schools. 529 plans offer flexibility, allowing funds to be used for a variety of qualified expenses including tuition, room and board, books, fees and computer equipment at eligible educational institutions nationwide. Funds may also be used to pay for K-12 tuition and apprenticeship expenses and more.

"The IRS 2025 tax adjustments give families an opportunity to save even more for future education and help make contributing to a 529 education savings plan a helpful tool in planning ahead for your family's future education," said Natalie Cordova, Executive Director of the New Mexico Education Trust Board. "Whether you choose to utilize accelerated gifting or space your contributions out over a number of years, a 529 education savings plan is a worthwhile way to save for the future."

For more information about The Education Plan® and its tax advantages, visit www.TheEducationPlan.com.



New Mexico Organized Crime Commission Reports Successes in 2024

By Michael Coleman

The New Mexico Organized Crime Commission created by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and led by Bernalillo County District Attorney Sam Bregman today released its annual report, highlighting significant achievements in disrupting criminal organizations across the state in its first year of operation.



The report also makes a strong case for additional resources to combat increasingly sophisticated criminal networks operating in New Mexico. Over the past year, the Commission coordinated multiple successful operations targeting human trafficking, drug trafficking, and the illegal firearms trade.

"Criminal organizations have infiltrated our communities, but with the right strategy and appropriate resources, we can continue to disrupt their operations and make New Mexico safer for all," Gov. Lujan Grisham said. "I urge state lawmakers to read this important report and provide the funding needed to continue the Commission's vital work."

Key achievements of the Commission in 2024 include:

- Rescuing more than 200 migrants from human trafficking organizations through "Operation Disruption," a coordinated effort involving more than 20 federal, state, and international law enforcement agencies
- Shutting down 10 illegal massage parlors involved in human trafficking operations and seizing approximately \$90,000 in illegal proceeds
- Assisting with the dismantling of major illegal cannabis operations, including the seizure and destruction of approximately 160,000 pounds of illegal cannabis worth an estimated \$200 million
- Identifying and mapping key fentanyl trafficking routes into New Mexico, revealing that most illegal fentanyl enters the state through Arizona and Texas rather than the southern border
- Disrupting dozens of human trafficking stash houses across the state through coordinated law enforcement operations
- Opening investigations against the dangerous Venezuelan gang, Tren De Aragua, which is responsible for significant amounts of human trafficking, drug trafficking, and gun smuggling throughout the country.

"I'm very proud of the Commission's work, including its aggressive approach to fighting the cartels in human trafficking, fentanyl, and cannabis," Bregman said. "Our success shows what we can accomplish when law enforcement agencies work together to combat organized crime."

To build on the success of its first year of operation, the Organized Crime Commission is requesting a special appropriation of \$4.5 million to cover fiscal years 2026 and 2027. This funding would:

- Allow the Commission to expand its team to 10 full-time employees, including special agents and intelligence analysts
- Allow for the purchase of necessary vehicles and law enforcement equipment
- Cover essential travel expenses for cross-jurisdictional operations
- Establish a centralized intelligence center under the New Mexico Department of Public Safety

The Commission is also recommending updates to state laws, including strengthening human trafficking statutes and addressing gaps in firearms legislation to better combat criminal organizations operating in New Mexico.

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SE HABLA ESPAÑOL

New Mexico Tourism Department Employee of the Quarter is Toby Martinez

By Tammy Martinez

Mr. Toby Martinez was recognized as Employee of the Quarter for the fourth quarter of 2024, for his commitment and outstanding contributions to the New Mexico Tourism Department (NMTD). Mr. Martinez has demonstrated dedication, commitment and a superior work ethic on behalf of the NMTD, as well as his remarkable customer service in all relations. Mr. Martinez is described as going above and beyond on tasks and projects resulting in positive outcomes. Mr. Martinez was instrumental in the Route 66 VIC initiative outfitting each of our Visitor Information Centers with commemorative and historical items. Additionally, Mr. Martinez contributed as a member of the application review panel for the Clean & Beautiful grant program, as well as the Tourism Event Growth and Sustainability program. Mr. Martinez has been a valued member of the Tourism Development Division growing relationships with fellow teammates and external partners, providing a great deal of support that is often in the form of ad hoc and/or high priority requests. Mr. Martinez also worked 11 days straight during the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta managing the New Mexico True sponsorship booth, the volunteer support from Destination Marketing Organizations and New Mexico True Certified program businesses from around the state, working tirelessly to ensure all on-site logistics worked smoothly. These are just a few examples of the “extra mile” Mr. Martinez provides while supporting the Core Values of the Department. The New Mexico Tourism Department’s Team True thanks Mr. Martinez for his enthusiasm and outstanding commitment to always getting the job done and then some.



NMDOT D1 Employees of the Month December 2024

By Ami Evans

Employee of the Month- Arnold Carrillo 41-35

Arnold consistent demonstration of excellence in customer service to his coworkers does not go unnoticed, and he continues to make an outstanding impact. Arnold consistently goes above and beyond by being approachable and willing to assist his colleagues with any challenges they face. His active listening skills and his ability to offer practical solutions ensure that everyone feels supported and valued in the workplace. It’s clear that Arnold takes pride in helping others and making a difference in their work experience.



On multiple occasions, Arnold has stayed late to assist his coworkers in finishing critical projects, even when working under tight deadlines. Not only did he offer technical support, but he also provides guidance and encouragement, ensuring his colleagues felt confident and capable throughout the process.

Arnold contributions are deeply appreciated. His hard work, dedication, and positive attitude make a profound impact on our team, and we are grateful to have him as a part of our workforce. Thank you for consistently going above and beyond.

Supervisor of the Month-Gene Vargas 41-57

Gene consistently demonstrates a deep understanding of the importance of customer service, treating everyone—whether they are members of the public, coworkers, or contractors—with respect and professionalism. Gene is approachable and has a helpful demeanor that makes him a go-to person for assistance, and he is always willing to lend a hand when needed. This quality contributes to a positive and supportive work environment for all. Gene always goes above and beyond in ensuring the safety of the traveling public by completing daily tasks with diligence and care. Gene’s proactive approach to safety shows his strong sense of responsibility, and his attention to detail is a key factor in the success of our operations.



Gene also takes the lead in managing the critical administrative tasks for the Socorro Patrol. From entering and approving time to processing paperwork for MMS, bulk, and A-506s, Gene thoroughness and dedication ensure that everything is handled efficiently and accurately. Gene’s leadership in this area helps maintain the smooth operation of the team and allows everyone to stay focused on their responsibilities.

Crew of the Month-Socorro Construction 41-19

Managing numerous projects in such a dynamic and challenging environment is no small feat, yet this crew has consistently shown resilience in handling the demands. On top of primary responsibilities, Crew 4119 has dealt with and successfully resolved conflicts with the traveling public and business owners.

Despite operating with limited manpower, the crew has stepped up to assist other teams, demonstrating a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration. Whether it’s lending a hand with material testing in the Williamsburg/TorC area or supporting other crews with their duties, your willingness to go above and beyond is greatly appreciated. Furthermore, this crew has managed to oversee projects across two project offices, showing exceptional multitasking abilities and a strong work ethic in managing a full workload with a reduced crew. Your dedication to getting the job done efficiently, no matter the challenge, is impressive and truly deserves recognition.

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Final Feasibility Study Released for Strategic Water Supply

Governor's 50-Year Water Action Plan to develop new water supplies

By Drew Goretzka

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) released its final feasibility study for the Strategic Water Supply (SWS), marking a significant milestone in Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's groundbreaking initiative in support of the state's 50-Year Water Action Plan.

"Our 50-Year Water Action Plan protects our drinking water, diversifies our water supply, and strengthens our economy as we face ongoing water challenges," said Gov. Lujan Grisham. "This study shows we can—and must—safeguard our freshwater supply while establishing new sources of water for our growing economy."

The SWS preserves freshwater for community drinking supplies by incentivizing the treatment of underutilized salt water for industrial applications.

Benefitting industries include hydrogen production, cement manufacturing, electric vehicle and battery manufacturing, solar panels and components, wind turbines, critical minerals, microchips, and data centers.

Examples of estimated freshwater savings per industry include:

- Advanced manufacturing (such as so-

lar or automobile): 3.65 billion gallons of freshwater saved per manufacturer per year.

- Data Centers: Over 218 million gallons of freshwater saved per year.
- Cement for wind turbines installation: Estimated freshwater saving of 105,000 gallons of freshwater saved per wind turbine.

New Mexico is the first state in the U.S. to take this novel approach to water conservation, blazing a trail that many other states, especially those in the arid west, will likely utilize as water scarcity becomes a larger threat.

Multiple categories of proven and emerging technologies feature in the feasibility study, including reverse osmosis, thermal distillation, and innovative chemical treatment methods. The SWS positions New Mexico as a leading incubator and progressor of these technologies, bringing good-paying jobs for New Mexicans with them.

"To expand our economy and lower carbon emissions without protecting and saving our freshwater for communities would be a reckless effort," said Environment Cabinet Secretary James Kenney. "Instead, New Mexico is meeting the moment for the gener-

ations of New Mexican families who will find employment in the industries that both solve climate change and ensure water security."

NMED issued a Request for Information (RFI) on Jan. 19, 2024, seeking technical and economic information related to the sourcing, treatment, delivery, storage, and industrial uses of brackish water and produced water. The RFI closed on March 31, 2024, and the responses are posted on NMED's Strategic Water Supply page.

In June 2024, NMED partnered with the New Mexico State University to host a symposium on the science of brackish and produced water treatment. The symposium, featuring researchers, advocates, and industry from around the country, focused on the state of technology, and fit-for-purpose uses for treated produced and brackish water.

Throughout 2024, NMED participated in three interim committees, discussed the SWS at 10 events — including industry conventions and academic summits — and conducted stakeholder outreach.

The final feasibility study presents a



comprehensive analysis of the technical, economic, and environmental viability of the SWS. Key take aways from the feasibility study are:

- The state's major rivers will have up to 28% lower flow over the next 50 years and reduced surface and groundwater supplies are expected to result in a shortfall of 750,000 acre-feet, or 244 million gallons.
- Treating 1% of available brackish water resources annually could supply an estimated 10 million acre-feet of water.
- Regions that will benefit from the SWS include some of New Mexico's largest population centers and biggest economic hubs, including Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Santa Teresa, as well as broader regions like the San Juan Basin and the Permian Basin.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation have dedicated funds to help enhance the country's water infrastructure. Over \$300 million are available in state and federal funding to finance projects focused on addressing our water needs. *For more info, visit, <https://www.env.nm.gov/strategic-water-supply/>*



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\$6.6 Million in Capital Outlay Funding Awarded to Public Infrastructure Projects in Six New Mexico MainStreet Districts

Eight Projects Matched Locally with \$8 Million to Support Revitalization Efforts

By Jessica Mraz

The New Mexico Economic Development Department (EDD) and New Mexico MainStreet (NMMS) awarded \$6.6 million in Capital Outlay funding to eight revitalization projects in affiliated NMMS Districts to improve safety, create vibrant destinations, and support local economies. The NMMS Capital Outlay Program funds infrastructure upgrades in targeted public investment areas to support economic growth, property renovation, public safety, business development, and job creation.

“The state’s MainStreet investments are vital to sustaining and growing robust, vibrant, people-centered commercial districts throughout rural New Mexico,” said EDD Secretary Designate Rob Black. “Communities and small businesses all over New Mexico will benefit from these important MainStreet investments.”

NMMS works with districts to

identify catalytic economic development projects based on the community’s Master Plan, Cultural Economic Development Plan or Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) Plan. Projects must impact the local economy, improve the appearance and functionality of the district, create connectors, and engage local property/business owners. Qualifying projects include improvements to streets, sewers, utilities, lighting, pedestrian safety, street amenities, wayfinding, landscaping, placemaking, and performance/gathering spaces.

“We thank the Legislature and the Governor for supporting the NM MainStreet Capital Outlay Program which supports community revitalization efforts. Congratulations to our award recipients and thank you to all the project partners for working diligently to improve New Mexico,” said NMMS Director Daniel J. Gutierrez.

Funded projects include:

- **Alamogordo MainStreet:** \$1M Great Blocks on MainStreet construction: pedestrian safety and streetscape improvements on 800 and 900 blocks of New York Avenue.
- **Clayton-Union County Economic Development Partnership:** \$1.09M Clayton entertainment & food container park, Phase 1 design and construction: small performance stage, splash pad, shaded seating areas, walking paths, landscaping, and provisions for food trucks.
- **Clayton-Union County Economic Development Partnership:** \$50K Historic Luna Theater: emergency digital projector replacement.
- **Clovis MainStreet:** \$1.7M Great Blocks on MainStreet construction & design updates, Main Street 1st to 7th Streets: lighting, bump outs/curb modifications, landscaping, and irrigation.
- **Tucumcari MainStreet:** \$1.7M Great Blocks on MainStreet: Phase 2 construction.



- **Santa Rosa MainStreet:** \$700K Mini Great Blocks: Community Crossroads on RT. 66 project construction.
- **Santa Rosa MainStreet:** \$130K Way Finding in the City of Natural Lakes: construction.
- Silver City MainStreet: \$300K Great Blocks on MainStreet Design: Bullard, Texas, and Yankee Streets.

Great Blocks on MainStreet projects are intensive infrastructure projects that dramatically upgrade a core two-three block commercial area in a district through the implementation of urban and landscape design, architecture, and creative economy projects.

The number of projects awarded is dependent on the Legislature’s appropriation to NMMS’s Capital Outlay Program. Capital Outlay funds are used to leverage/match other local, state, corporate, and foundation dollars to fully-fund projects.

Learn more at nmmainstreet.org.

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Alvarado Elementary and Tularosa Elementary Schools Recognized as National ESEA Distinguished Schools

By Janelle Garcia



Two New Mexico elementary schools are among only 100 schools nationwide to be named as 2024 National Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Distinguished Schools, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) has announced this month.

"I am incredibly proud of both Alvarado and Tularosa Elementary Schools for being selected as recipients of the ESEA Distinguished School Award," said Public Education Secretary-Designate Mariana D. Padilla. "This recognition reflects the hard work, dedication and excellence of their students, educators and communities."

A project of the National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators (NAESPA), the National ESEA Distinguished Schools Program publicly recognizes qualifying federally funded schools for the outstanding academic achievements of their students. The program highlights schools that have successfully used their ESEA federal funds to improve the education of all students—including economically disadvantaged students.

The program has been in place since 1996, showcasing the success of hundreds of schools in one of three categories:

- Category 1: Exceptional student performance and academic growth for two consecutive years
- Category 2: Closing the achievement gap between student groups
- Category 3: Excellence in serving special populations of students

The PED nominated Alvarado Elementary of Albuquerque Public Schools as a Category 1 school for exceptional student performance and academic growth in math and reading. Tularosa Elementary School was recognized as a Category 3 school for their excellence in serving students with disabilities.

District and school representatives from both Albuquerque Public Schools and Tularosa Public Schools are invited to participate in the National ESEA Conference in February, in Austin, Texas, where they will be honored as recipients of this prestigious award.

NMBHI Participated in the Las Vegas Electric Light Parade

By Jonathan Jordan

Staff and patients from the New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute (NMBHI), created and entered a float in the 2024 Las Vegas, NM Electric Light Parade. This was the third consecutive year NMBHI entered a float.



Ever since Dr. Shields became the Hospital Administrator, he has taken advantage of every opportunity to promote our facility in the most positive way.

The Electric Light parade is the one of the most viewed events in Las Vegas. Countless people from various cities and counties around Las Vegas, attend the parade. The streets along the entire parade route are lined with people of all ages. NMBHI collects donations of candy from staff which is handed out during the parade. In addition to candy, Dr. Shields has continued his original idea to hand out stress balls with a positive message, primarily to the adult population.

NMBHI's goal has always been to spread holiday cheer to members of our community. The smiles and cheers from spectators confirmed we accomplished that goal!

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State Job Training Funds Approved for 98 New Mexico Employees

JTIP set to reimburse 9 companies for up to \$1.57M

By Bruce Krasnow

Economic Development Department Secretary-Designate Rob Black announced that nine businesses have been approved for Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP) grants to assist in hiring and training up to 94 employees and four interns.

Each month, the JTIP Board reviews and authorizes training reimbursement dollars to qualified businesses. Awards approved a total of \$1.6 million with average wages ranging from \$20 to \$91 per hour.

"JTIP is a highly successful program that assists businesses with job training so they can hire employees faster or train existing workers with new skills at a higher wage," Black said. "These new awards highlight some of the innovative and future-proof companies that help to diversify New Mexico's economy."

The percentage of training costs that JTIP reimburses is a minimum of 50% with higher reimbursement afforded to companies hiring in rural and frontier areas and for

positions filled by recent graduates of New Mexico higher education institutions and veterans.

For more information about the program, visit the JTIP webpage at edd.newmexico.gov/JTIP.

The nine companies receiving awards totaling up to \$1.57 million for November are:

- **Flow Aluminum, Inc.**, Albuquerque, 2 trainees at an average wage of \$35. Flow Aluminum manufactures aluminum-based batteries for electric vehicles and microgrids. industries. Award amount: \$41,290.
- **Gridworks, Inc.**, Albuquerque, 11 trainees at an average wage of \$42. Gridworks provides turnkey solar and energy storage solutions for developers and utility clients through engineering, procurement, and construction as well as operations and maintenance. Award amount: \$245,244.
- **KiloNewton, LLC**, Albuquerque, 4 trainees at an average wage of \$35 and 4 interns at an average of \$25. KiloNewton is a service-based business providing technical and

engineering analysis and software design for the renewable energy sector. Award amount: \$154,624.

- **Pajarito Powder LLC**, Albuquerque, 22 trainees at an average wage of \$35. Pajarito Powder is a world leader in developing and commercializing advanced electrocatalysts for fuel cells and electrolyzers. Award amount: \$431,418.
- **Redwire Space, LLC**, Albuquerque, 5 trainees at an average wage of \$60. Redwire Space is devoted to space innovation, focusing on design, analyses, testing, and manufacturing aerospace structural systems and components, particularly those critical to the launch vehicle and satellite community. Award amount: \$172,242.
- **Spiritus Technologies PBC**, White Rock, 4 trainees at an average wage of \$91. Spiritus is a climate technology company at the forefront of Direct-Air-Capture (DAC) technology. Award amount: \$207,636.
- **Century Sign Builders**, Albuquerque, 1 trainee at a wage of \$29. Century Sign Builders designs,

manufactures, and installs interior and exterior signage nationwide. Award amount: \$15,080.



In business since 2004, Golightly has sold over 30,000 hats and has a mailing list of 18,000 subscribers. This is their 3rd JTIP application

- **Golightly Company, LLC**, Santa Fe, 5 trainees at an average wage of \$30. Golightly Co. manufactures hand-loomed cashmere knitwear and chocolate confections. Award amount: \$73,773.
- **EMPOCC, LLC** dba Oasis Cannabis Company, Albuquerque, 40 trainees at an average wage of \$20. EMPOCC, LLC employs over 166 Oasis Cannabis Co employees, with 45 being in the production and manufacturing facility in Albuquerque. Award amount: \$229,911.

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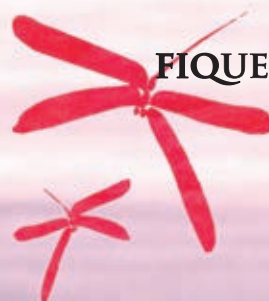
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Teacher Loan Repayment Program Continues to Assist more New Mexico Educators with Student Debt

By Tripp Stelnicki



The New Mexico Higher Education Department has increased the number of teachers receiving loan forgiveness through the state's Teacher Loan Repayment Program.

The agency this year awarded funding to 537 new applicants and renewed funding for 357 applicants.

The program pays up to \$6,000 per year for two years toward outstanding federal student loan debt and interest for licensed New Mexico educators working in high-need areas and schools within the state.

The program has grown enormously as the Lujan Grisham administration has prioritized debt relief for workers who have received their degrees in New Mexico. In 2019, the department provided loan forgiveness to just 10 teachers in New Mexico. Since 2020, the program has awarded debt relief to 2,533 working New Mexico teachers.

"Supporting New Mexico's workforce is an essential component of our mission," said Higher Education Secretary Stephanie M. Rodriguez. "Whether it's building new and exciting career pathways for young New Mexicans, or providing debt relief to hardworking individuals who are already contributing to our communities with their work, the Higher Education Department is committed to expanding opportunities."

"The Teacher Loan Repayment Program is a vital investment in our educators and their future," said Public Education Secretary-Designate Mariana Padilla. "By alleviating the burden of student loan debt, we are showing our hardworking teachers that we value their dedication to New Mexico's students and communities. This program not only supports our educators but also strengthens the foundation of our schools and helps build a brighter future for our state."

"New Mexico's Teacher Loan Repayment Program continues to be a shining example of state government prioritizing educators and the continued need to attract, retain, and support these hard-working professionals in high-need teaching areas," said President Whitney Holland of the American Federation of Teachers — New Mexico.

The program is funded by a \$7.5 million appropriation for Fiscal Year 2025.

Recipient teachers work in high-need areas, including science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), career technical education, bilingual education, early childhood education, special education, and those teaching in schools with free and reduced lunch programs. Recipients also agree to a two-year teaching commitment while benefiting from the program and can apply to renew the award every two years if they continue to meet eligibility criteria. Preference is also given to teachers who graduate from a New Mexico college or university and to teachers from historically underrepresented groups.

Educators and prospective candidates who want to learn more about the Teacher Loan Repayment Program are encouraged to visit this webpage.

Applications will reopen June 1, 2025.

Embrace Dry January And Go Alcohol-Free

By David Barre

Start the new year with a healthy reset by joining the growing movement of Dry January, a month-long commitment to go alcohol-free and focus on wellness.



Dry January is a global public health initiative encouraging people to take a break from alcohol for the entire month of January.

While no amount of alcohol is healthy, even just taking a month off can lead to improved health benefits such as better sleep, weight loss, improved mood and energy, healthier eating, improved liver function, saving money and reduced cancer risk. The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) is encouraging New Mexicans to participate in Dry January.

"Dry January can be a great time for self-assessment to reflect on how much one drinks, the reasons for drinking, and also look to adopt healthier decisions surrounding alcohol use in general" says Rebecca Neudecker, the section manager for the Office of Alcohol Misuse Prevention.

Some helpful tips for a successful Dry January include:

- Have non-alcoholic drinks on hand and remove alcohol from your home.
- Plan alcohol-free events and activities.
- Practice saying "no" when offered a drink and be willing to decline invitations where drinking will occur.
- Hang out with other friends and family members participating in Dry January to be supportive of one another.
- Be kind to yourself if you end up drinking and know that cutting back also has improved health benefits.

If you or someone you care about is struggling with alcohol misuse, please speak to your primary care provider and explore these resources:

- Try this free screening tool to learn about how alcohol affects your health and get linked to resources, including the free Connections App, if you're trying to cut down or quit drinking.
- Free self-help videos on alcohol and other substances can be found through the New Mexico Health Care Authority Behavioral Health Services Division's New Mexico 5-Actions Program website and can be used by people in recovery, by people who want to support loved ones, and adjunctively by healthcare professionals.

If you or someone you love thinks they may have a drinking problem, you can get support by calling the American Addiction Centers' confidential alcohol hotline at (313)-209-9574 or 988 for crisis support.

If you need help finding a provider, please call the NMDOH Helpline at 1-833-SWNURSE (1-833-796-8773).

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NM Baby Bonds

Investing in New Mexico's Future



What are NM Baby Bonds?

New Mexico Baby Bonds will create a government-funded trust account which will incur interest and provide startup capital to every baby born in New Mexico after July 1, 2025. Once they reach adulthood, Baby Bond recipients will have indirect access to the accumulated funds, which will provide them with the opportunity to invest in higher education, attend a trade school, put a down-payment on a home or reliable vehicle, capital to start a business, or save for retirement.

NM Baby Bonds: Our Vision

Every child born in New Mexico after July 1, 2025 will be provided with a trust fund of \$7,000, which will be tied to their name and social security number and invested on their behalf.



Prior to accessing the funds, recipients must complete a financial literacy course approved by the State Treasurer's Office.



After the age of 18, recipients can use the accumulated earnings from their Baby Bonds account towards education, home/car ownership, a business, or retirement.

"One of the biggest obstacles preventing young adults from building wealth is access to capital. We have an incredible amount of talent, ingenuity, and creativity in our state. Investing in our children is an investment into our families, our economy, and our future."



State Treasurer Laura M. Montoya

Why Baby Bonds?



Access To Wealth

Baby Bonds can break cycles of generational poverty. By providing access to start-up capital tied with financial education, Baby Bonds can provide opportunity and help recipients avoid unmanageable debt.



Bridge the Wealth Divide

Recipients, regardless of their income level or background, can access funds that reduce or eliminate economic disparities and allow for equal opportunities and resources to foster financial independence.



Improve Health Outcomes

Recipients would be less stressed and anxious about finances and have hope for the future, resulting in improved mental and physical wellbeing, greater life expectancy, and increased contribution to community.



Strengthen Our Economy

Baby Bonds creates opportunity, keeps money and people in our state, invests in our workforce, and builds our tax base, which will strengthen our economy and reduce reliance on public assistance.

Five Metropolitan Court Judges Renew Oath of Office

By Camille Baca

Five Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court Judges renewed their oaths of office on Jan. 1, 2025 signifying the judges' renewed terms of service after being retained or elected in the November general election.

The five judges included Presiding Criminal Division Judge Michelle Castillo Dowler, Judge Rosemary Cosgrove-Aguilar, Judge Renée Torres and Judge Asra I. Elliott, who all begin new four-year terms today after being retained by voters. Judge Shonnetta R. Estrada was elected to the court. Judge Estrada was appointed to the bench by Governor Lujan Grisham in 2022.

Metropolitan Court Chief Judge Joshua J. Sánchez administered the oaths during a ceremony with county officials.

"We are a state court but work closely with the County on many levels and are honored to be a part of today's ceremony," said Chief Judge Sánchez.

Metropolitan Court Judges Yvette K. Gonzales, Felicia Blea-Rivera and Nina Safier, who were also retained in the general election, renewed their oaths of office prior to the ceremony.



Metropolitan Court Judges Shonnetta R. Estrada, Michelle Castillo Dowler, Rosemary Cosgrove-Aguilar, Renée Torres and Asra I. Elliott are sworn in by Chief Judge Joshua J. Sánchez

Governor Announces Judicial Appointment of Bryan Fox

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced on December 19th the appointment of Bryan Fox as a Second Judicial District Court judge.

Fox's appointment follows the retirement of the Honorable Gerard J. Lavelle.

Fox is a welcome addition to the family court bench with nearly thirty years of practice in family law. Fox is a graduate of UNM School of Law. He was admitted to the New Mexico Bar in 1996.

His appointment commences December 21, 2024.



Photo credit: Wolf & Fox, P.C.

NMDVR Success Story: Hospitality is Tanya's Career

By Jeff Levine

In 2017, Tanya Vitela had two options for her Project SEARCH internship through the Albuquerque Public Schools: UNM Hospital or a brand-new program with Embassy Suites. "The hotel industry sounded really fun," Vitela recalls. As a kid, she had watched *The Suite Life of Zack & Cody*, a Disney Channel sitcom set in a hotel, "So I decided to go there."

Now 29 years old, Vitela is a night auditor and front desk agent at the Sheraton Albuquerque Uptown. As night auditor on weekends, she "balances the house;" works with third-party providers like Expedia; and checks on settlements for reservations, food charges, pet fees, and other miscellaneous things. Working the front desk three days a week, Tanya checks guests in, pre-blocks rooms, answers phone calls, makes sure housekeeping is on track, and handles special requests.

The hotel also hosts crews from seven different airlines that fly into the Albuquerque International Sunport, and she ensures they are taken care of.

"I make sure the guests are happy. I always felt I could help others and make people happy," says Vitela, who moved from California to New Mexico in 2005. "It's pretty fun seeing all my guests." She adds that, unlike many of her coworkers, she enjoys the paperwork involved in her full-time job. Vitela hopes her experience and knowledge of hotel operations will lead to a promotion to supervisor or manager one day. "I feel I have a purpose. I'm very determined," she says.

General Manager Damen Kompanowski says Tanya is already on track. "When you're night auditor, you're kind of the manager on duty. She makes a lot of big decisions and takes control of the hotel. We can always count on her." He notes Tanya redesigned the night audit checklist to make the task flow more practical and prepare the morning staff for the new day.

This career in hospitality was a direct result of her time in Project SEARCH a school-to-work transition program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Participants gain transferable work skills and receive supports for gaining competitive, integrated employment upon completion of their internship.

Tanya's year at the Embassy Suites included stints in sales, banquets, the kitchen, and the front desk. "I learned so much about the hospitality industry and how everything correlates to one another," she recalls. After Tanya's Project SEARCH internship was over, Embassy Suites hired her as a banquet server. She was hired by the Sheraton about two years ago.

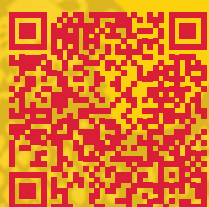
Vitela has an intellectual developmental disability and is deaf in her left ear. She overcame her challenges through speech therapy and learning to lip read. The hotel has not had to make any accommodations for her that they don't do for every new associate, according to Kompanowski. He says regular guests love when Tanya's there. "She makes them feel really welcome when they come in."

Her workplace success led to Tanya being asked to share her experience at the 2024 national Project SEARCH conference, held in Albuquerque. Although nervous speaking to more than 800 attendees, she did just fine with a message that "despite our disabilities, we can do anything we put our mind to. We're so determined."

Vitela recounts an incident when a guest couldn't breathe. She remained calm, called 911, and retrieved oxygen and a defibrillator from the lobby. The guest's family sent a letter of appreciation to the vice president of the hotel corporation, letting them know of Tanya's life-saving actions. "When Tanya came to work for us, she was timid and shy," says Kompanowski, adding she has learned to take charge. "We love seeing her continuing to grow in her job."



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NCRTD FTA Visit

By Rick L'Amie



The North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD) Blue Bus was pleased to host a site visit with the FTA on Dec. 4. District staff introduced the Rural Rapid Transit (RRT) project to FTA staff. The



Anthony Mortillaro, NCRTD Executive Director, Laura Wallace, FTA Director of Program Management and Project Oversight, Tony Ogholi, FTA Community Planner, Anna Brunson, NCRTD Transit Analyst, and Troy Thomas, FTA General

FTA team checked the progress of the project agreement and implementation plan and provided technical assistance. The District also provided a tour of the potential sites for RRT stations and the future Taos Operations and Maintenance Facility.

"I would say the visit went well! It was a great opportunity to build relationships with FTA staff and show off all the good things we are doing for our region, said Planning and Projects Manager, Byce Gibson.

Feast New Mexico: Legislators' Night at the Farmers' Market Pavilion

The Santa Fe Farmers Market Institute, in partnership with the New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association, The Food Depot, Farm to Table, and Reunity Resources, invites New Mexico state employees to join Feast New Mexico: Legislators' Night, an inaugural event celebrating the achievements of New Mexico's local food system.

The event will take place on January 29, 2025, at the Farmers' Market Pavilion in Santa Fe. It offers a unique opportunity to witness firsthand the public and private partnerships that support and enhance the local food infrastructure, contributing to the wellbeing of communities across New Mexico.

We invite state employees to join us in celebrating the vital role they play in fostering these partnerships that strengthen New Mexico's economy and ensure equitable food access for all.

"Whether you work directly in food systems, rural development, or community health—or simply support our mission through your role as a state employee—this event is an opportunity to connect with the broader network working toward a stronger, more sustainable New Mexico," said Manny Encinias, Executive Director of the Santa Fe Farmers Market Institute.

Event Highlights Include:

- VIP Hour (6:00 PM – 7:00 PM): A private session for legislators, key stakeholders, and state employees to engage directly with food system leaders.
- General Admission (7:00 PM – 9:00 PM): A festive celebration open to the public, showcasing the diverse contributions of New Mexico's food system partners.

Attendees will receive access to the Feast New Mexico: Legislators' Night Directory, a comprehensive guide to the organizations and networks supporting New Mexico's food system. This directory highlights how state initiatives and partnerships play a crucial role in advancing agricultural sustainability, economic growth, and food security.

General admission tickets will be available for \$10. For more information, visit https://www.feastnewmexico.com/legislators_night_2025.html.

State Announces First C-Pace Financing in Santa Fe

C-Pace financing helps businesses finance energy efficient upgrades
By Bruce Krasnow

The New Mexico Economic Development Department (EDD) announced today that New Mexico's first financing under a new program to boost clean and sustainable investments in commercial properties has closed on a historic property in Santa Fe County.

Nuveen Green Capital (NGC), a leader in sustainable real estate financing solutions, announced the closing on a \$76.2 million loan for Bishop's Lodge Auberge Resort.

Launched in New Mexico in 2023, C-PACE (Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy) is a financing structure enabled by state statute and local ordinance that provides eligible property owners with access to long-term private financing for a range of energy efficiency, renewable energy, water efficiency, and resiliency improvements. Eligible properties are any privately owned commercial, agricultural, industrial, or multi-family property of five or more dwelling units located within the boundaries of the region (including properties owned by a nonprofit organization).

"The rising borrowing and construction costs over the past three years creates challenges for those looking to make sustainability improvements in buildings," EDD Secretary-Designate Rob Black said. "C-PACE enables easier access to capital so commercial property owners can move forward today on projects that save them money, but also conserve water, reduce carbon, and benefit the entire community."

The Bishop's Lodge financing supports new LED lighting, high-efficiency HVAC systems, energy-efficient insulation, low-flow plumbing, wastewater reclamation, and desert landscaping.

The energy savings are estimated at 601,319 kWh in electricity, and 5.2 million gallons of water for a total reduction of CO2 estimated at 882,268 pounds.

"Santa Fe County is a champion of sustainability," County Commission Chairman Hank Hughes said. "We are pleased to be closing on the first C-PACE loan in New Mexico and look forward to supporting other county businesses by helping them access favorable financing to grow their businesses in a sustainable way."

New Mexico first enacted C-PACE legislation in 2009, followed by the Improvement Special Assessment Act in 2023, which authorized counties to impose, administer, and disburse special assessments to encourage the development of sustainable improvements. EDD administers the program and has contracted with Adelante Consulting Inc. to serve as the program administrator.

Bishop's Lodge originally opened in 1918. Original portions of the historic property were constructed in the mid-1800s and early-1900s, and the hotel's chapel was listed on the State Register of Cultural Properties in 1987 and the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.

In addition to Santa Fe County, the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County have adopted C-PACE ordinances, with other communities statewide looking at opting in to the program.

For more information on the New Mexico C-PACE Program, including the program guidebook, county ordinance language, program documents, and how to apply, please visit www.nmcpac.com.

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Top New Mexico Baby Names of 2024

By David Morgan

New Mexico's newborns are making their mark with popular names like Noah, Camila, Mia, and Liam leading the way.

The Department of Health's Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics has released its provisional list of the top baby names of 2024.

Trends in baby names:

- Eight each of the top 10 names for both boys and girls have stayed on the top 10 list for three consecutive years.
- Levi and Oliver rejoined the boys' list, replacing Josiah and Julian. Levi last appeared in 2021, and Oliver in 2022.
- Aurora and Emily returned to the girls' list for the first time since 2017, taking the spots of Aria and Luna.
- Sofia and Sophia have been top ten contenders, appearing in the girls' top 10 in seven of the last 10 years.
- Noah has reclaimed the top boy's name from Liam, continuing their long-standing back-and-forth competition for first place over the last seven years.

2024 top 10 baby names in New Mexico*

Girls		Boys	
1.	Camila	1.	Noah
2.	Mia	2.	Liam
3.	Emma	3.	Ezekiel
4.	Sophia	4.	Mateo
5.	Isabella	5.	Elijah
6.	Olivia	6.	Santiago
7.	Amelia	7.	Levi
8.	Sofia	8.	Ezra
9.	Aurora	9.	Oliver
10.	Emily	10.	Sebastian

Provisional as of Dec. 18, 2024. Final data may change as additional records are processed.

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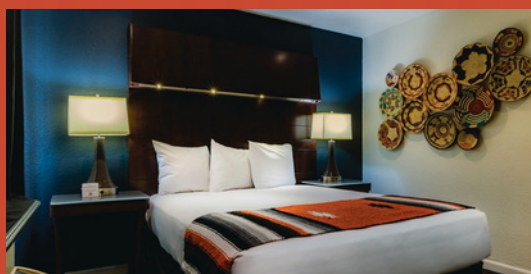
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*Legislative special session rates valid January 14–March 22, 2025

Third Annual Saving for Success College Savings Award Program Applications Now Open

By Carolyn Fittipaldi

New Mexico Community Trust (NMCT) is proud to announce that applications are now open for the third annual Saving for Success Award Program in New Mexico. The Saving for Success Award is a college savings award program administered by NMCT in partnership with the New Mexico Education Trust Board (NMETB), with a mission to make higher education more affordable and accessible, especially to students in New Mexico who have financial need.

The goal of the Saving for Success Award program is to help prepare eligible K-8 students in New Mexico for future success in higher education through financial literacy education, encouragement, and an award of \$1,000 in initial value invested in a 529 education savings account with The Education Plan®, a New Mexico 529 education savings plan administered by NMETB. 41 students throughout the state of New Mexico have received a Saving for Success Award since the program launched in 2023. The award application asks stu-

dents about school achievement, honors and awards, community involvement, and higher education goals.

The Saving for Success Award program, in partnership with Tutor Doctor Albuquerque, has created financial literacy basics materials that include topics like; What is a Bank, Fun with Budgeting Your Money, Checking vs. Savings Accounts, Understanding Paychecks and Saving for College. Each module includes a quiz that students can take to test their knowledge of the topics. Materials are available on the Saving for Success Award website www.SavingforSuccessNM.com.

"Partnerships like this are essential in creating opportunities for New Mexico's students and their families," said Randy Royster, President & CEO of NMCT. "By providing both financial literacy education and college savings opportunities, we are addressing two critical barriers to higher education—awareness and affordability. Access to funding is not just about paying for tuition; it's about giving



students the confidence to dream big and pursue their goals."

The Saving for Success Award will help those students and families that may not be able to save for college and will help with higher education expenses including tuition, books, and room and board at universities, community colleges, trade schools and professional schools.

Read what 2024 recipients had to say about the award:

"This award will help me focus on my academic goals without as much financial stress, said Amelia Chenier, awardee from Santa Fe. "This award is also teaching me the value of saving for the future. I am very honored to have been chosen for this award." "Thank you for this award," said William Hall, awardee from Rio Rancho. "I plan to use this money to attend an engineering college and make a difference in the lives of my family and community."

According to the U.S. Department of Education's website, college

remains the greatest driver of socioeconomic mobility in America, and higher education remains one of the best investments students can make for their future.

"We celebrate the third year of making higher education more attainable and accessible and helping New Mexico's families, especially those with financial need, take the steps to start saving early for an education," said Natalie Cordova, Executive Director of the NMETB. "We look forward to awarding a new group of deserving young students across New Mexico with an investment in their future."

Initial funding for this award program was provided by the Jack Beatty Educational Scholarship Foundation. Additional funding for the current award cycle includes donations from Nusenda Credit Union and other private donors.

For more information, visit savingforsuccessnm.com. If you are interested in helping to fund the Saving for Success Award, please visit nmctrust.org/saving-for-success-award.



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Winter Weather Driving Tips

Traffic updates will be posted on the NMDOT traffic advisory website at <http://nmroads.com> as they are reported and can be retrieved through our automated system at 511 in state, or 1-800-432-4269.

Tips to know:

- **Reduce your speed**

The best accident prevention on snow and ice is to SLOW DOWN and leave plenty of room between you and the vehicle in front of you for emergencies.

- **Practice good winter driving techniques**

Keep your gas tank full, turn on your head lights, keep your windshield washer fluid full with antifreeze, keep winter driving chains in your vehicle, have a winter survival kit which includes – flashlight, hand warmers packets, first aid supplies, high energy snacks, bottled water, medications and read your owner’s manual for special instructions on driving 4-wheel drive vehicles and vehicles with ABS on snow and ice.

- **Avoid driving in a snow cloud**

Large vehicles, such as semi-trailer trucks and snowplows, may produce dense clouds of blowing snow that make it difficult for drivers to see. When drivers encounter snow clouds, they should stay back to avoid the cloud.

- **Plan ahead and be patient**

Delays are common during bad weather. Leave a little earlier and be patient with delays.

- **Check before you pass**

Know where a snowplow and blade are before trying to pass. On multi-lane highways, the plow can be in your blind spot. Before attempting to pass make sure it is safe.

- **Pay attention to weather forecasts –trust them**

Winter storms in New Mexico can become severe quickly, so stay tuned to weather forecasts when planning your trip.

- **Don't use cruise control**

Never use cruise control when the roads are in slippery conditions. Using your cruise control can reduce your control of the vehicle if your tires begin to skid or slip.

- **Wear your seatbelt**

Wear your seatbelt and make sure all passengers also “buckle up”.



NMDOT is Dedicated to Child Passenger Safety

By Denise Peralta

Pierrot Bendegue has become the first NMDOT employee to earn the title Certified CPS Senior Technician. This accomplishment is a true testament to Pierrot’s dedication to the child passenger program and the passion he has to keep our children safe.



The National Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Certification Training is a four-day course intended for individuals who wish to become certified CPS technicians with the skills, experience, and knowledge required to educate parents and caregivers on the proper selection, installation, and use of their child safety seats. Pierrot was named a Senior Technician after being observed by CPS instructors at Car Seat Clinics in November.

“I can’t begin to express the gratitude and appreciation we have for Pierrot not just as a hardworking and knowledgeable employee, but for his commitment to the child passenger program. Over the years, Pierrot has put in so many hours to ensure that the young children in our state are safe and the parents are educated to ensure the safety of keeping their children properly secured.” -- Traffic Safety Staff Manager Leann Adams

If you are interested in becoming a certified child passenger safety technician, please email Jeremy Manzanares at jmanzanares@safernm.org

True Heroes: New Mexico Magazine, Meet the 2024 True Heroes

Meet 10 people who are feeding our neighbors, advocating for our children, stepping up during crises, preserving our cultural traditions, and making a difference in our communities.

This marks the fifth year of a partnership with the New Mexico Tourism Department and KOB4. In addition to the livestream YouTube event, each recipient’s story is featured in the December 2024 issue of New Mexico Magazine and KOB4 segments in December.

Watch the video story at YouTube @NewMexicoMag. Pick up your copy of New Mexico Magazine at local newsstands or at newmexicomagazine.org.



Top row: Raymond Sandoval, Fernando Ruiz, Ruth Gonzalez, Loren Anthony, Casey Otero
Bottom Row: Logan Flaherty, Nicole Gallegos, Greg Hallstrom, Michael McCann, Joaquin Lujan

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New Mexico's Film Crew Advancement Program highlighted as Global Best Practice in Workforce Development

By Dolores Martinez

The New Mexico Film Office (NMFO) announced that the Association of Film Commissioners International (AFCI) and Olsberg•SPI released an updated "Best Practices in Screen Sector Development" report. The report recognizes the New Mexico Film Office's Film Crew Advancement Program (FCAP) as a leading example of workforce development in the film industry.

"The NMFO skills and workforce development initiatives focus on developing technical, industry-relevant skills among the sector workforces," the report states. "Through its programs, it prioritizes training directly tailored to technical skills required in the industry."

"New Mexico's Film Crew Advancement Program is not just a local success story; it's a shining example of how targeted workforce development can transform an industry," said Economic Development Secretary-Designate Rob Black. "By incentivizing productions to invest in the growth of New Mexico residents, we've created a sustainable ecosystem of skilled professionals, boosting our economy and solidifying our state's position as a global film hub."

The report, a valuable resource for governments and industry stakeholders, showcases successful initiatives from around the world, including Austria, Colombia, Illinois (US), Kenya, Queensland (Australia), and Wales. New Mexico's FCAP was selected for its effectiveness in providing on-the-job training and career advancement opportunities for New Mexico residents working in film and television production.

"Being recognized globally for the Film Crew Advancement Program highlights New Mexico's commitment to workforce development, providing a path for continued crew training and growth," said New Mexico Film Office Director Steve Graham. "This program creates high-paying jobs for New Mexicans, and our thriving professional local crew base is one of the reasons our state is a premier filming destination."

FCAP is a win-win for both New Mexico residents and film productions. This innovative program provides incentives to production companies that hire and train New Mexicans in technical roles, helping build a skilled local crew base. At the same time, it offers residents valuable on-the-job training and skill development opportunities, empowering them to pursue careers in the film industry. By fostering this mutually beneficial relationship, FCAP helps attract productions to New Mexico, strengthens the local workforce, and contributes to the state's overall economic growth.

The "Best Practices in Screen Sector Development" report is free to download and offers actionable insights based on Olsberg•SPI's extensive global expertise. It provides a comprehensive guide for policymakers and industry leaders who want to develop and strengthen their local screen sectors.



EDD Awards Seven Science & Technology Business Startup Grants

By Bruce Krasnow

New Mexico Economic Development Department (EDD) Secretary-Designate Rob Black announced that the Office of Strategy, Science and Technology has awarded Science & Technology Business Startup Grants to seven burgeoning technology companies.

The grants are available to New Mexico-based for-profit science and technology companies with high-growth potential. Eligible businesses must work in one of the following fields: advanced computing, advanced energy, aerospace, bioscience, and water technology.

Award amounts for fiscal year 2025 were increased to a maximum of \$50,000 from a previous maximum of \$25,000, enabling the department to provide additional critical support for the commercialization of new technologies. The higher award amounts are made possible with the New Mexico Legislature and Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's continued support for economic development initiatives in science and technology.

"EDD's science and technology grants spotlight the innovative entrepreneurial activity happening right here in New Mexico," Black said. "The expansion of this program underscores the state's commitment to advancing homegrown technology and business growth."

The seven companies receiving Science and Technology Business Startup grants are:

- **EnviTrace LLC** (Santa Fe), awarded \$42,000 - EnviTrace LLC is developing cutting-edge Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) tools for Artificial intelligence (AI) analyses, characterization, and prediction of geologic reservoir processes.
- **SciVista, Inc. (Santa Fe), awarded \$42,000** - SciVista, Inc. was founded in Santa Fe in 2018 and has developed SummitVR™, an immersive and collaborative Virtual Reality, Data Visualization software engine, and is launching FireVista™ in the fall of 2024.
- **Sentiré Medical Systems, Inc.** (Santa Fe), awarded \$32,000 - Sentiré Medical Systems, Inc. is developing an intraoperative monitoring device to make the 15 million laparoscopic and robotic assisted surgical procedures performed annually safer, more efficient, and more cost effective.
- **Solstar Space Co.** (Santa Fe), awarded \$50,000 - Solstar Space provides internet-based communication solutions that keep people, spacecraft, and devices connected in space.
- **Spiritus Technologies PBC** (White Rock), awarded \$50,000 - Spiritus stands at the forefront of high-quality direct-air capture (DAC) carbon removal, bringing to life a groundbreaking solution that captures and sequesters megaton-scale CO2 from the atmosphere.
- **Undesert Corporation** (Los Alamos), awarded \$42,000 - Undesert's patented technology purifies dirty water into pure water and dry salt, condensing water eight times the concentration of seawater (200,000 PPM) to ultra-pure (5 PPM) water.
- **VastVision Technologies, LLC** (Albuquerque), awarded \$42,000 - VastVision bridges physical assets with digital automation that enables organizations to attach inexpensive passive chips to every asset in an environment and deploy a network of readers and antennas to monitor asset movement.



SciVista demonstrating their technology at the 4th Annual Southwest Fire Ecology conference. Photo courtesy of SciVista, Inc.

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NM High Schoolers Explore Apprenticeship, Career Opportunities On Workforce Development Bus Tour

By Tripp Stelnicki

High school students from New Mexico learned about New Mexico registered apprenticeships and other fast-track postsecondary credentialing opportunities by taking part in the biannual workforce development bus tour during National Apprenticeship Week.

The student bus tour of New Mexico registered apprenticeships was launched on the 10th anniversary of National Apprenticeship Week. The tour was organized by GEAR UP New Mexico in conjunction with the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions. According to NMDWS, there are more than 58 registered apprenticeship programs across the state.

"We could not have accomplished such a unique tour for the students of GEAR UP New Mexico without the incredible partnership and hours of cross-agency collaborations with the NMDWS Apprenticeship Office," said GEAR UP New Mexico Regional Coordinator Katherin Hinton. "I look forward to this becoming an annual effort between our two agencies to further increase high school students' understanding of the wide variety of high-quality and low-cost postsecondary training programs that lead to sustainable living wages and economic mobility."



Bernalillo High School students got a firsthand look at careers in the medical field during their workplace visit to the UNM Sandoval Regional Medical Center

Throughout the bus tour, students participated in immersive job shadowing and volunteering at Belen Meadows Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center and the Associated Builders and Contractors of New Mexico. They also received in-depth presentations from various registered apprenticeship leaders, such as NB3 Los Alamos, and the New Mexico Information Technology Apprenticeship Program at Central New Mexico Community College.

Students engaged in hands-on experiences with training programs like Assistance Dogs of the West and the CNM Ingenuity Electric Line Worker Pre-Apprenticeship Program. Further exploring the possibilities in post-secondary education across the state, students also toured the University of New Mexico at Los Alamos and CNM-Rio Rancho campuses.

"Working with Katherin and the Gear Up New Mexico team to coordinate National Apprenticeship Week tours and activities has been an amazing experience," said Robyn Trammell, NMDWS Apprenticeship Training Representative. "Our sites and vendors also expressed their appreciation of the Gear Up New Mexico student engagement. Gear Up New Mexico is truly making a positive impact on the youth and communities of New Mexico."

GEAR UP New Mexico partners with eight high schools in seven school districts: Albuquerque Talent Development Academy, Bernalillo High School, Capital High School, Española Valley High School, Los Puentes Charter School, Mountainair High School, Socorro High School, and Taos High School.

Santa Fe County Assessor's Office Receives 2024 ACE Award for Excellence in Community Service

By Ivan Berry

The Office of the Santa Fe County Assessor (OSFCA) is honored to have received the 2024 ACE Award for Excellence in Community Service from Aumentum



Technologies. This award was announced during the 2024 Amplify Conference in San Antonio, TX, and the OSFCA was officially notified of this award. The ACE Award reflects the OSFCA's commitment to innovation and community engagement during 2023-2024, which significantly enhanced public services and outreach efforts. Notably, the OSFCA conducted a complete overhaul of its website, aligning it seamlessly with the modern design and user experience of the Santa Fe County platform. This strategic update not only improved the user experience but also introduced a fresh, user-friendly interface, ensuring the continued delivery of high-quality customer service to the community.

In addition to online improvements, the OSFCA has prioritized building stronger relationships with Santa Fe County, the Board of Santa Fe County Commissioners, fellow elected officials, the New Mexico Counties Assessors' Affiliate, and the State of New Mexico Property Tax Division. These initiatives included a series of training sessions aimed at educating others about the essential roles and responsibilities of the Assessor's Office. Collaborative educational discussions were held on various platforms, from radio shows to office gatherings, including meetings with the Santa Fe Realtors Association and local title companies, as well as participation in Santa Fe County's podcast, Beyond County Lines.

"The 2024 ACE Award is evidence of our team's dedication to providing exceptional service to the community," said Isaiah F. Romero, Santa Fe County Assessor. "Our work is not just about property assessments; it's about ensuring that our community has easy access to information and resources."

The ACE Award for Excellence in Community Service joins four previous awards: the 2016 IAAO Public Information Program Award, the 2017 Thomson Reuters Public Sector Champion Jurisdiction of the Year Award, the 2019 IAAO Certificate of Excellence in Assessment Administration—awarded to the office for adhering to best practice standards and meeting all statutory requirements (making it the 47th jurisdiction in the U.S. out of 3,007 jurisdictions and the first county in New Mexico to receive this certification)—and the 2022 IAAO Distinguished Assessment Jurisdiction of the Year. The OSFCA's ability to engage with the community has been recognized over the years, as well as their commitment to providing easy access to information for community members from all walks of life.

"This award demonstrates how we continue to build on transparency, trust, and a maintain a connection with our community," said Ivan Barry, Chief Deputy Assessor. "We're incredibly proud of the Assessor's Office staff and we are motivated to continue evolving as a resource for our community."



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New Mexico State Police Participate in C.A.R.E. Operation Over the Christmas Holiday

By Amanda Richards

During the Christmas holiday, the New Mexico State Police participated in the Combined Accident Reduction Effort (C.A.R.E.) operation, which was implemented across all roadways in the state. The initiative aims to enhance motorist safety and decrease the number of crashes by maintaining a strong law enforcement presence.



Due to the increased traffic volume during the holiday, the New Mexico State Police (NMSP) enhanced patrol presence on roadways across all twelve State Police districts. This initiative took place during the busiest travel days leading up to the holidays, specifically from Tuesday, December 24th, 2024, to Thursday, December 26th, 2024.

The operation led to State Police officers issuing nearly 1,000 traffic citations, including 31 for failure to wear seat belts. Additionally, 9 arrests for DWI were made across the state. Officers also investigated 21 crashes. The Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Bureau conducted 11 commercial vehicle inspections.

The New Mexico State Police prioritize motorist safety, and officers will continue to conduct holiday travel operations into the new year. NMSP encourages the public to drive safely and follow all traffic laws while traveling on New Mexico's roadways.

Bernalillo County Celebrates Holiday Season at Newly Renovated Dolores Huerta Park

By J. Austin Munn

Bernalillo County, along with its partners New Mexico MainStreet and South Valley MainStreet, celebrated the holiday season with the South Valley community at the newly renovated Dolores Huerta Park. The celebration marked the culmination of a nearly



five-year-long process to plan, design, and construct enhancements to Dolores Huerta Park, which aimed to fulfill the community's vision to see it become the host of the La Familia Grower's Market, which is backed by New Mexico MainStreet and local South Valley farmers.

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 rroundhouse@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 January 31, 2025. Look in February's 'Round The Roundhouse for the winning announcement along with another photo contest to enter. Good luck!

Congratulations to the December's winner, Jerome Gurule, DOT. His name was selected in the drawing of correct entries. December's photo location was Santa Fe, the "Cognitive Enhancer" sculpture.

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Work Trends 2025

By Nick Mandel

With a new work year in place, the predictions, projections, and George Jetson fantasies of what may or may not become workplace norms and commonplace are interesting and abundant. Here are some selected predictions.

Return to The Office Maybe or Maybe Not

While several high-profile corporations, Disney, Google, Farmers Insurance mandated Return to Office (RTO) or similar edicts, it is still questionable whether it will be sustainable. For Microsoft, SpaceX, Apple, the RTO requirement resulted in an increase in resignations, especially among high-talent and difficult to replace employees joining direct competitors, according to research from the University of Michigan and University of Chicago as featured in the Washington Post.

While the national and state trend for public sector employees will probably continue to be empowered with mandatory in person office presence, especially under the empowerment of a second Trump Administration,

the research continues to site how employees prioritize a greater work-life balance that a hybrid model affords them according to research by Accenture.

Frank Weishaupt, CEO of Owl Labs, a video conferencing company, predicts the full return to the office is dead. Their data show that full-time office work is down 6% and remote roles have 57% year-over-year increase.

Those work organizations needing a full-time presence will see increased levels of paid leave requests and resignations, according to Deborah Hanus, CEO of Sparrow, and employee leave management platform.

That may be particularly true of the Baby Boom generation who, increasingly, find themselves with the obligations with aging parents, grandchildren, and other impediments and not always the needed resources. Gene Lanzoni, of Guardian Care, an organization focused on aiding the



Source: Getty Images

workforce with resources for the above predicts a rise in disability and caregiving leave requests to occur in 2025, as workers cite it as a pressing need.

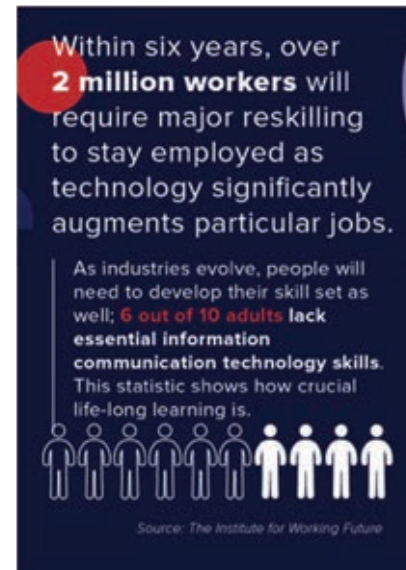
Unbossing

In my generation of work, there was a distinct chain of command, that included my direct reports, and the boss I reported to. No if, and, or butts. The boss was the boss. I was not at liberty to challenge or question, outside of extraordinary circumstances.

In another relic of lost baby boomer generations, a practice of Unbossing is appearing as a new practice in select organizations. Simply put, it is a trend to cut middle management positions that results in flattened hierarchies, less expenses and improved communication and productivity between decision makers and front-line employees.

The practice has been spotlighted by large pharmaceuticals. Bayer and Novartis as examples, and Citigroup as well.

While the organizations who use the practice will cite the benefits of faster and more efficient decision making, to be clear it is also about not spending a lot of money on mid-management employees. With more enabling technology, and the mantra of do more with less, it would be interesting to see if this practice grows.



Source: guthriejensen.com

AI and the Workplace

To no one's surprise, AI will continue to dominate workforce trends in 2025. Whether HR, everyday operations, decision-making, or other aspects at work, expect continued focus the use of AI.

For employees, that will include personalized training and devel-

opment that is customized for them in a manner that in previous years would have included a very extensive and expensive personalized career coach.

AI in HR will be reshaping how an organization looks at employee talent, drives engagement and helps adapt to the changing nature of an organization's challenges.

AI literacy among employees will become more in demand and soon a requirement for employment. Employees will be expected to understand the differences between Generative AI, Small Language Models, Agentic AI, AI Governance guidelines and a host of others. With the above, AI will increasingly augment an existing employee roles and responsibilities and not replace them, if that employee undertakes and develops the skill set necessary to do that.

With these future of work 2025 predictions, we expect to experience continued uncertainty and surprises in the work world ahead.

Nick Mandel can be reached at promandel@gmail.com



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New Mexico Film Office Announces Productions in Albuquerque

By Dolores Martinez

The New Mexico Film Office announced that the production of the feature **"Love is in the Air"** filmed in Albuquerque in December.

"Love is in the Air" is a romantic comedy that follows the unlikely romance between a free-spirited hot air balloon pilot and a grounded, by-the-book television reporter. Sparks fly when their paths intersect amidst a stunning backdrop, leading to a whirlwind adventure of love, laughter, and self-discovery.

"Love is in the Air" is directed by Larry McLean ("Vanished"), produced by Galen Walker ("Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles") and Tamas Nadas ("Boneyard"), and set to star Lorenzo Lamas ("Team of Two") Gail O'Grady ("Deadly Draw"), Paul Green ("Somewhere"), and McKenzie Westmore ("Star Trek: Insurrection").

With the world-renowned Balloon Fiesta and endless blue skies, New Mexico provides the perfect backdrop for a story that takes flight, both literally and figuratively. The production will employ approximately 40 New Mexico crew members, 4 New Mexico principal actors, and over 100 New Mexico background talent.

"Kidz at Play" Bites into New Mexico's Film Scene. The short film by local filmmakers finds comedy in parenting. Forget playgrounds and swing sets. The short film, "Kidz at Play," takes parenting to a whole new level in a post-apocalyptic world. This darkly comedic horror, which recently wrapped production in Albuquerque, explores the lengths a mother will go to protect her "unique" children—who happen to be zombies.

Director Brent Peterson ("Angeli-to") and producer Crystal Thomas ("Made for Her") bring a fresh perspective to the zombie genre, blending horror with heartwarming family dynamics. The film stars Vic Browder ("Rez Ball"), Arianne Martin ("Fancy Dance"), and Thomas herself ("The Stress is Killing Me").

"Parenting is a hard job, so I like to find ways to have fun while pouring my love into my family and to make sure I don't lose too much of myself along the way," Thomas said. "Kidz at Play" is a satire that pokes fun at our experiences as parents and our place in society by using zombies as our little 'monsters' that we love so much and would ruin the world for, if need be.

But "Kidz at Play" isn't just about flesh-eating monsters. It's a testament to New Mexico's thriving film community. The production showcases the state's raw beauty and the talent of its crew, with 16 New Mexico crew members, 8 principal actors, and 8 background actors contributing their skills. Even the makeup artists got in on the action, creating unique and heartwarming zombie looks.

"New Mexico is committed to building a sustainable film industry, and that means empowering our local filmmakers as well as those from out of state," Steve Graham, Director of the New Mexico Film Office, said. "'Kidz at Play' is a fantastic example of homegrown talent shining bright. By using the incentives to produce here at home, projects like this build our above-the-line talent and grow a more robust film community in New Mexico."

For more information, contact runningwolftalent@gmail.com

The Film Office also announced that the short film, **"Athena,"** began production in Albuquerque in December. The film is a chilling tale of vengeance, mythology, and modern-day

grief.

The New Mexico landscape sets the stage with wind-swept mesas and ancient ruins in "Athena," where a young woman grappling with a devastating family tragedy is confronted by a force beyond comprehension: a goddess driven by a thirst for retribution.

Directed and written by Gregory Scotiniadis and produced by Brent Morris ("Bleeding Love") and set to star Addison Bowman ("The Red Dahlia"), Jennifer Marshall ("Stranger Things"), and Alexander Ward ("Salem's Lot").

"New Mexico's stunning landscapes and supportive film community played a huge role in bringing this vision to life," Scotiniadis said. "The unique atmosphere here added so much depth to the story, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to create this project in such an inspiring place."

Twenty New Mexico crew members contributed their skills to bring this haunting story to life, and they sourced unique props from small New Mexico businesses to enrich the authenticity and atmosphere of the project genuinely.



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If you could have one wish, what would it be? That is the question we ask children across New Mexico each year, who are battling critical illnesses.

For these children, a wish come true can be a crucial turning point in their lives. A wish can be that spark that helps them believe that anything is possible and gives them the strength to fight harder against their illnesses. This impact is why we are driven to make every one of these wishes come true.

For wish kid, Phoebe, whose greatest passion is her favorite game show, the opportunity to experience The Price Is Right in person was her one true wish. Through the generosity of our community partner, Holmans USA, Phoebe's wish was granted in November, and she was sent off with a huge The Price Is Right themed party before experiencing the thrill of her favorite game show in person.



In 2023, HOLMANS USA donated over \$200,000 to local charities. We believe in celebrating organizations that make New Mexico a better place. By shining a light on our local nonprofits, we aim to raise awareness and support for those making a difference in our New Mexico community. To learn more, please reach out to community@holmans.com



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