



# ROUND THE ROUNDHOUSE



New Mexico  
STATE EMPLOYEES' NEWSPAPER

Volume 37, Issue Number 2  
February 10 to March 9, 2025



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New Mexico's State Employees**

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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!

**Next publication date is March 10th**  
**Deadline is Friday, February 28th, 2025**

Mail Subscriptions are available for \$25 per year.

## Governor Appoints Taylor Cook as Director of Homeless Initiatives

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has named Taylor Michelle Cook as director of homeless initiatives. Cook brings extensive experience in homeless service system design, project management, and applied research to the role.



"Taylor has dedicated her career to building equitable systems that support the most vulnerable populations," said Gov. Lujan Grisham. "Her deep knowledge, combined with her hands-on experience, will strengthen our state's efforts to combat homelessness and expand access to housing."

Cook, a doctoral candidate in Community and Regional Planning at the University of Texas at Austin, has led advocacy efforts as chair of the Texas Homeless Network and contributed to national research on housing systems. Her work in Austin included designing innovative solutions to homelessness and improving access to social services.

As director of homeless initiatives, Cook will lead New Mexico's efforts to address homelessness through coordinated strategies, leveraging public-private partnerships, and ensuring that solutions are community-driven and sustainable.

"I am honored to serve in this capacity and contribute to advancing New Mexico's goals of reducing homelessness and increasing access to critical services," Cook said. "By fostering collaboration and innovation, we can make meaningful progress toward building a more inclusive and supportive community for all New Mexicans."



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# NMDVR Spotlight Awards Honor Outstanding Employees

By Jeff Levine

The New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NMDVR) presents quarterly Spotlight Awards to recognize employees for outstanding work in support of the agency’s mission to help New Mexicans with disabilities achieve their employment goals and thrive in their communities. Congratulations to the 2024 Fourth Quarter Spotlight Award honorees: Amber Carillo, Kryss Duran, Estrellita “Star” Martinez, Nicholas Romero, Jenna Seigel, Isabel Villa, and Jenna Wisemann.

• **Amber Carillo**, Disability Adjudicator II, Disability Determination Services (DDS)

“Despite having a busy caseload to manage, Amber is always eager and willing to volunteer to help out anywhere help is needed and does it with a smile,” Team 5 Supervisor Kia Navarrete says. “She is a part of many committees geared towards helping to improve the work environment for her fellow coworkers, which showcases her caring spirit.”

Navarrete also notes Carillo’s positive attitude and says she is always a team player.

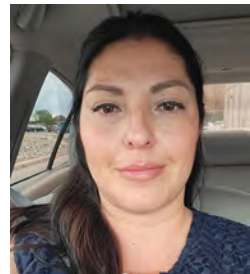
• **Kryss Duran**, Professional Relations Supervisor, DDS

Kryss has three roles at Disability Determination Services: assistant to her supervisor, Greg Duran; head of the professional relations piece of the Special Programs Unit; and handler of the team of contract medical consultants. “She is very knowledgeable in all these areas,” says Scott Spoor, MD, Chief Medical Consultant with DDS. “She knows the geography of New Mexico, Consultive Exam providers, and available services. She is easily able to troubleshoot issues around DDS-directed testing, what’s available in what areas, and what can be done with a claim if certain testing may not

be possible.”

Dr. Spoor continues, “Even more critical is her functioning as assistant to and liaison with the medical professionals. The medical cadre is a mixture of psychologists, psychiatrists, and physical medical doctors. This takes a high-level skill set to handle egos, difficult consultants, and conversations (at times), and relate to medical professionals at an even level. Her prior experience as an adjudicator continues to help the medical docs when they call with questions on claims (e.g., agency workflow, development issues). She also provides invaluable assistance in handling the medical contractors’ monthly invoicing.”

Dr. Spoor started with DDS during COVID. He didn’t know anyone nor how DDS really works. “Kryss very patiently fielded all my calls, handled any repetitive and stupid questions, and essentially ‘held my hand’ as I got on board, and she continues to do all this today! Without question, Kryss is ‘above and beyond,’ and is an invaluable piece of the functioning of Special Programs.”



**Estrellita “Star” Martinez**, Vocational Rehabilitation Technician, Santa Fe

“Since returning to NMDVR, Star has boosted moral in the office through her can-do, will-do attitude,” says Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Alix Dean.

Martinez had previously worked for NMDVR for more than five years, returning to the agency in March 2024 after about 2½ years away.

“She provides excellent customer service with a bright smile to participants, One-Stop partners, and NMDVR staff alike,” Dean adds. “We are grateful for

her flexibility and inspiring attitude. We could all use a Star in our work day!”

• **Nicholas Romero**, Disability Adjudicator Supervisor, DDS

“Nick has been a phenomenal supervisor,” says Disability Adjudicator I Sheri Boldt. “He has a wealth of knowledge and experience that he is willing to share very patiently with new adjudicators. He is very supportive and is always positively encouraging and supporting you to do better.” Romero, who is Boldt’s supervisor, is open to people completing their tasks in different ways, and if something is done incorrectly, he treats it as a learning opportunity.

“He understands that everyone has a different personality, and he works with each person individually, so they are successful,” Boldt adds. “He feels that he is not successful unless the people working with him are successful as well. Nick always goes the extra mile to make things in the office run smoothly and seamlessly.”

• **Jenna Seigel**, Disability Adjudicator II, DDS

“Jenna has excelled in her position by providing excellent customer service,” says her supervisor, Kia Navarrete.

“She consistently keeps her caseload actions up to date, completes her tasks timely and takes on extra claims without sacrificing the quality of her work. She is always willing to provide assistance to her peers and has a positive attitude.”

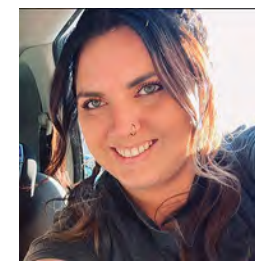


**Isabel Villa**, Vocational Rehabilitation Technician, Albuquerque-Lomas

“Isabel consistently goes above and beyond by demonstrating exceptional knowledge, efficiency, and

a genuine willingness to help others,” says Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Irene Sena. “Not only is Isabel an excellent problem solver who ensures that every task is completed thoroughly from start to finish, she also goes the extra mile to educate vendors, ensuring that everyone involved is empowered with the right information.

Sena, who works with Villa at the Albuquerque-Lomas office, continues, “Her ability to share insights, troubleshoot complex issues, and maintain a positive attitude is truly commendable. Isabel’s dedication fosters a collaborative and supportive environment. She embodies the very best qualities of a teammate, and I believe she deserves to be celebrated for her invaluable contributions to our team.”



**Jenna Wisemann**, Executive Secretary/Administrative Assistant, DDS Professional Relations Unit

“Jenna is exceptional in her role in the Professional Relations Unit,” says Disability Adjudicator III Emily Savoie. “She continually goes above and beyond to bridge the gap between disability adjudicators and the vendors across New Mexico who provide the DDS with consultative exams and medical records.” Savoie adds that “Jenna is highly successful in obtaining outstanding medical records that can make a decisional difference in disability claims. This also helps avoid unnecessary consultative exams, which saves money for the agency and stress for claimants. Jenna’s continued dedication to her role greatly increases accuracy and processing time of disability claims, providing outstanding customer services.”

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Dr. Kathleen Romero

# Governor Delivers 2025 State Of The State Address

By Michael Coleman

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Tuesday, January 21st delivered her seventh State of the State address, laying out 2025 legislative priorities for 2025 that include public safety, affordable housing, child welfare, health care, economic development and more.

“Working with the legislature over the past six years, we’ve achieved so much in New Mexico from reducing child poverty, to ensuring free college for every New Mexican to adding a record number of jobs and strengthening health care and environmental protections,” Lujan Grisham said. “Of course, there is still more to do. That’s why I’m proposing new initiatives to tackle our crime problem, expand affordable housing, protect at-risk children, improve our health care system and more. I look forward to working with lawmakers over the next 60 days to create an even better New Mexico.”

Some of the governor’s specific

proposals for the New Mexico Legislature’s 60-day session include:

**Public safety:**

- Updates to criminal competency laws to ensure individuals repeatedly cycling through New Mexico’s courts receive treatment instead of being released.
- Stronger penalties for convicted felons in possession of a firearm in the commission of a crime.

**Housing and homelessness:**

- Establishing a state Office of Housing supported with funding and expertise.
- \$50 million in development subsidies to build houses for people who are priced out—making homebuying more affordable in New Mexico.
- \$50 million to fight homelessness with dedicated services that lift individuals up and help them become stable, productive members of society.

**Climate and energy:**

- Updates to the Oil and Gas Act.
- Establishing a state-sponsored fire insurance program outside

the private market to protect families and their homes – and to help make people whole when tragedy strikes.

- A strategic water supply for clean energy projects, advanced manufacturing, and even putting out wildfires.

**Economic development:**

- Providing \$20 million to assist in expanding or relocating qualified business entities that are stimulating economic development and producing public benefit.

**Health care, behavioral health & child well-being:**

- Establishing an independent Child Protection Authority, jointly appointed by the legislature and the executive, that ensures CYFD adequately resolves all complaints from families and foster parents.
- Moving the responsibility for CARA—the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act that helps pregnant mothers and newborns affected by substance abuse—to the Department of



Health.

- Investing an additional \$50 million in the Rural Health Care Delivery Fund and \$100 million in behavioral health expansion.
- Establishing a state-sponsored medical malpractice program.

**Education:**

- Making the new Office of Special Education permanent in law—establishing consistent statewide standards for all K-12 special education students.
- Establishing a \$50 million annual investment in the Indian Education Fund.
- Creating a comprehensive math and STEM program to match our strides in literacy.

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# VOICES FROM THE PAST

By Robert J. Tórréz  
Former State Historian  
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## The 1870 Roy Frank Execution

During the past decades I have spoken and written extensively about New Mexico's judicial systems and crime and punishment in general. My book, *Myth of the Hanging Tree* attempted to provide a look at how the judicial system functioned during our territorial period, specifically related to capital punishment. My research has found that between 1849 and 1908 there were fifty-two legal executions in New Mexico. At least two other legal hangings may have taken place, but I have not been able to document them conclusively.

Most legal hangings were carried out on scaffolds or gallows that dropped the condemned prisoner from a platform, and a few were done with the condemned standing on the back of a wagon which was driven forward, leaving the unfortunate dangling at the end of the rope. On two occasions, however, a device described as a "jerk" model was utilized because it was thought to be a more efficient and merciful method of execution. Instead of the victim being dropped from an elevated platform, the condemned stood at ground level attached by rope to a lever that was connected to a weight that "jerked" the condemned upward when the weight was released.

The best known (and last) use of

this device in New Mexico was in the execution of Milton Yarberry in Albuquerque in 1883. However, a version of this "jerk" device was utilized earlier in Las Vegas at the September 12, 1870, execution of Roy Frank (aka Roy French). Gabino Rendón, a well-known Presbyterian minister and author, was a boy of about twelve when he witnessed Roy Frank's execution. In his book, *Hand on My Shoulder*, Rendón recalled the gallows was a crude "home-made affair" that had been erected not far from his home. Rendón indicates a pole was "hinged to a cross-bar, longer at one end than the other. At the end of the longer section hung a rope with a noose in the end of it. At the end of the shorter section hung two gunny sacks full of stones. To keep the long bar from flying upward until the proper time, it was held down by a rope attached to a stake driven into the ground."

Roy Frank, a former slave and one of five Black men hanged during the territorial period, was convicted of first-degree murder of an unidentified man in June 1870. His case is a textbook example of the "swift justice" so common to that era. Indicted by a San Miguel County grand jury on August 8, 1870, his trial was held the following day, August 9, and a jury

returned a verdict of guilty in the first degree the same day. A week later the presiding judge imposed the only sentence allowed by territorial law – death by hanging. The judge's words are preserved in the court record - Roy Frank was to be taken to the San Miguel County jail and held there until September 12, 1870 and "on that [day] between the hours of ten o'clock A. M and four o'clock P. M. he [shall be]...be taken ... to the place of execution ...and then and there be hanged by the neck until he be dead."

Public executions attracted large crowds and this day was no different. Rendón says a great number of onlookers crowded around the site where the hanging was to take place but he managed to squeeze through the crowd as San Miguel County Sheriff Juan Romero and his deputies cleared a space around the device. A black cap or hood was slipped over Roy Frank's head and the waiting noose was dropped over his head onto his shoulders. A deputy stood by with a hatchet ready to sever the rope that released the lever that would jerk the condemned man upward.

Rendón's recollections are among the few other sources of information about the events of that day. Newspapers are usually

great sources, but I have not found any issues of Las Vegas papers for the dates of Roy Frank's execution. According to a report in Albuquerque's *Republican Review*, he approached his death calmly and expressed confidence he would soon be in the presence of his Maker. As John I. Annin, a Presbyterian missionary who operated a "free school" in Las Vegas spoke the words "The Lord have mercy on your soul," the rope was cut and the bar flew upward, taking up the slack of the rope and tightened the noose. Young Rendón recalled "the stopping of my breath and the horror that went through me" as Roy Frank's body swayed limply, and the crowd began to leave.

There is no record of how the San Miguel County Sheriff heard of and decided to forgo the traditional gallows and execute Frank with this "jerk" device. This type of execution had been utilized as early as 1807 in New York and it is possible local officials had heard of it through newspaper reports but how or why they decided to utilize this device in Las Vegas remains a mystery.

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# ECECD Employee of the Quarter FY25 Q2

By Angela C'de Baca

## Administrative Services



**Blanca Sena, Financial Manager, ASD**

Blanca is very knowledgeable, patient, and helpful. She is a great mentor and has been covering many job duties that are for other vacant positions. She has a great smile and personality, fitting well into our work environment and culture. She is always willing to help!

## Early Care, Education, and Nutrition



**Mandee Chavez, Child Care Compliance Officer, ECEN**

Mandee has been a Compliance Officer with the Regulatory Unit for almost 3 years. During this time, she has shown dedication to the Child Care Services Bureau by ensuring the health & safety of our children at daycare and pre-schools. She goes above and beyond by attending every training possible, including getting NARA certified in January 2024. She is thorough when investigating complaints, her administrative action letters are thoughtful and well written. She works at our satellite office in Farmington and proves she works well independently and is always there to support her teammates at other locations; whether she is training new employees or performing visits while we have been short-staffed.



**Devi Gajapati, Policy and Development Bureau Chief, ECEN**

Devi has been with ECECD since 2021. Devi has led the Prospective Payments for Providers workgroup, ensuring compliance with federal regulations and she has collaborated with subject matter experts to establish a comprehensive recoupment policy. She played a key role in updating the FFY 2025–FFY 2027 Child Care Development Fund State Plan, aligning it with federal requirements and state priorities. Devi has also been analyzing PreK and child care data to identify and eliminate service overlaps. This ensures the appropriate use of federal and state funds while enhancing coordination between PreK programs and child care services. Devi is open to feedback and process improvement in relation to her management skills and improving outcomes for her team. She is a true asset to ECECD, and we are very fortunate to have her on our team.

## Family Support and Early Intervention



**Rebecca Garcia, Families First Medical Secretary II, FSEI**

Rebecca is helpful, reliable, efficient, as well as productive. And the icing on the cake is, she is very friendly. In other words, not only is Rebecca a task-oriented person, but she is also a people

person. She goes above and beyond with her dedication to not only Families FIRST but her dedication to the division. She is always kind and very courteous when dealing with anyone on the team. She is a pillar of our program, and we value her dearly!!

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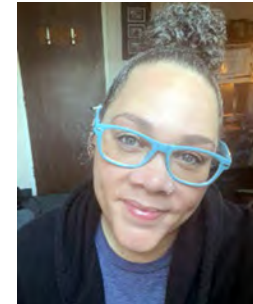


**Emily Nitschke, Assistant General Counsel, OTS**

Emily is constantly juggling multiple projects and tackling high priority issues that all have strict deadlines. She completes them with a fastidious eye all the while being extremely courteous and kind. She is a paragon of professionalism and a genuinely good person.

## Policy, Research and Quality Initiatives

**Casey Lafferty, Deputy Division Director, PRQI**



Casey always goes above and beyond for her employees and the PRQI Department. Her contributions to ECECD

are endless. Casey is truly passionate about her job and always steps up to the plate, even in the most stressful times. She is an amazing leader and sets the bar high for the rest of the department. Casey's knowledge, background and education in early childhood is evident in her work and she maintains a high standard of excellence, always getting the job done, whether it be on her own, or through teamwork. Her work with internal and external partners is second to none. Casey is always calm and professional, no matter the situation, she represents ECECD and PRQI with grace and dignity and is very deserving of this award. I appreciate her leadership and dedication to PRQI.



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## Secretary Toulouse Oliver Grants Two New Mexicans the John Lewis Youth Leadership Award

By Alex Curtas

The award was established in 2021 by the National Association of Secretaries of State under Secretary Toulouse Oliver's leadership to honor the extraordinary accomplishments of Congressman John Lewis

Earlier this month at a ceremony in Santa Fe, New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver presented the 2024 John Lewis Youth Leadership Award to two exceptional New Mexico youth leaders.

The 2024 recipients of the John Lewis Youth Leadership Award are Lila Quezada and Thanh Nguyen.

"I am thrilled to congratulate Lila Quezada and Thanh Nguyen for their extraordinary commitment to making a difference in their communities," said Secretary Toulouse Oliver. "Their leadership, vision, and dedication to advancing equality and civic engagement embody the values of the late Congressman John Lewis, who was and is a deep personal inspiration to me. These young leaders are not just shaping the future—they are inspiring us all to create a more just

and inclusive world today."

The John Lewis Youth Leadership Award is an annual award established in 2021 by the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS), under the leadership of Secretary Toulouse Oliver who was NASS President at the time, that recognizes gifted, civic-minded young people in each state. The recipients demonstrate leadership abilities, have a passion for social justice, and are motivated to improve the quality of life in their communities.

Lila Quezada was nominated by Girls Inc. of Santa Fe. As a member of Girls Inc.'s Teen Leadership Council, Lila organized and presented at the 2020 3rd Congressional District Candidate Forum and was a leading advocate for the successful passage of a New Mexico bill requiring affirmative consent education. Over four years, she testified in committee sessions, spoke on the House floor, co-MC'd the 2021 Pro-Choice Women's March, and advocated for social justice through the Women

of Color Collective at the New Mexico School for the Arts. Her efforts earned her

roles on Girls Inc. National's Teen Advocacy Council, as a Brand Ambassador, Youth Advisor for Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez, and the 2021 Girls Inc. of Santa Fe Girl of the Year, as well as the prestigious 2022 Yale Bassett Award for Community Engagement.

Thanh Nguyen was nominated by the New Mexico Asian Family Center (NMAFC). Thanh has demonstrated exceptional leadership in civic engagement and gender-based violence prevention within the Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian community. In 2024, she facilitated discussions on sexual assault awareness, domestic violence, and their intersection with civic engagement, while leading dialogues on issues like



Lila Quezada, left photo, and Thanh Nguyen, right photo with Secretary Toulouse Oliver

voter registration, anti-Asian hate, mental health advocacy, and reproductive justice. Thanh has actively participated in NMAFC events, voter outreach, and advocacy initiatives, and collaborates with organizations like Planned Parenthood and the NM Coalition on Sexual Assault Programs. As a Vietnamese-American, Thanh is deeply committed to supporting marginalized communities through civic engagement and victim advocacy.

Lila and Thanh were recognized along with other state recipients of the 2024 John Lewis Youth Leadership Award, during an awards ceremony at the 2025 NASS Winter Conference in Washington, D.C.

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## Supreme Court Honors Retired Justice H. Vern Payne

By Beth Wojahn

The New Mexico Supreme Court honored retired Justice H. Vern Payne with a published commemorative compilation of opinions he wrote while serving on the Supreme Court from 1977 to 1983.

"We are honored to present Justice H. Vern Payne with his commemorative volume of opinions," said Chief Justice David K. Thomson. "This volume illustrates his major contribution to the rule of law in New Mexico on the state's highest court."

Senior Justice Michael E. Vigil presented the volume to Justice Payne during a ceremony on January 29th at the Valencia County Courthouse in Los Lunas, NM.

"Justice Payne is an inspiration to all of us," said Senior Justice Michael E. Vigil. "During his long and distinguished career, Justice Payne has served on state courts and is still representing clients in many areas of law."



New Mexico Supreme Court Senior Justice Michael E. Vigil presents Justice H. Vern Payne with a commemorative volume of opinions the retired justice wrote while on the Court

Justice Payne gave his law clerks credit for their role in helping to draft the opinions, and said he wanted them think of themselves as the author. He also said he wanted to know about his mistakes. "I told them if I have gone off on the wrong trail, I want you to correct it and red mark it," said Justice Payne. "The only thing that will make me angry is if you work on a case and see an error or problem, and don't tell me. Then it will make me angry. And they all honored that."



Justice Payne listens to a few kind words from son-in-law and Thirteenth Judicial District Court Judge Allen Smith.

Justice Payne is from Lordsburg, New Mexico, and received his law degree from the University of New Mexico School of Law in 1964.

Justice Payne served as judge at the Second Judicial District Court in Albuquerque from 1971 to 1976, and began his term on the New Mexico Supreme Court on January 1, 1977. His father, U.S. District Court Judge H. Verle Payne, swore in Justice Payne. Justice Payne became Chief Justice in January 1983 and served in the position until his retirement in December 1983. During his tenure on the court, Justice Payne held the Roberts seat.

Justice Payne becomes the fourth justice to receive a commemorative volume of opinions. Justices Edward L. Chavez, Richard E. Ransom, and Tony Scarborough are also honorees.

## State Agencies Collaborate In Centralizing IT Purchasing To Streamline Operations

By Renee Narvaiz

The General Services Department and the Department of Information Technology will consolidate information technology (IT) purchasing to streamline and improve government operations through its State Purchasing Division starting Jan. 17.

The move transitions all IT purchasing and contracts processes from the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to the General Services Department (GSD)—creating a one-stop shop for all state purchasing.

"I am committed to ensuring a seamless transition of purchasing and contracts to GSD is seamless and will be a significant step forward in simplifying processes for all Departments," said Manny Barreras Cabinet Secretary DoIT.

By modernizing and transitioning these processes, DoIT ensures state agencies can deliver IT projects more efficiently, effectively and on time.

"This consolidation benefits state agencies, vendors, and New Mexico taxpayers alike," said Anna Silva, GSD Acting Cabinet Secretary. "Centralizing procurement eliminates redundancies, boosts accountability, and simplifies processes, marking another step toward modernizing state government."

The consolidation reduces the number of contract templates from 12 to five, significantly simplifying the process for agencies and vendors alike. Additionally, it streamlines the tracking system into one agency. The move will provide faster processing times with streamlined workflows ensuring processes are completed more efficiently, saving time for state agencies.

GSD is committed to providing exceptional service to state agencies while upholding transparency and accountability in procurement. The department looks forward to working with its partners to ensure a seamless transition.



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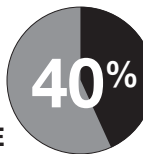
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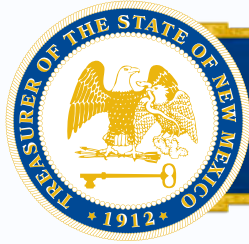
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**UPDATE**

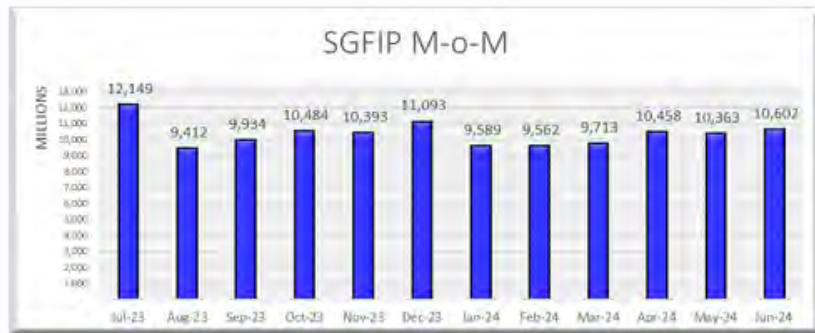
▶ The New Mexico State General Fund Investment Pool (SGFIP) are assets managed by the New Mexico State Treasurer's Office (STO). The SGFIP had a record-breaking earning year for Fiscal Year 24 (FY24). STO is implementing two new software systems to improve efficiency, a Portfolio Order Management System to streamline the trade process and improve compliance by adding pre-trade compliance, and a Treasurer Management system to forecast cash activity in the state to maximize the state's investments.

**BALANCES**

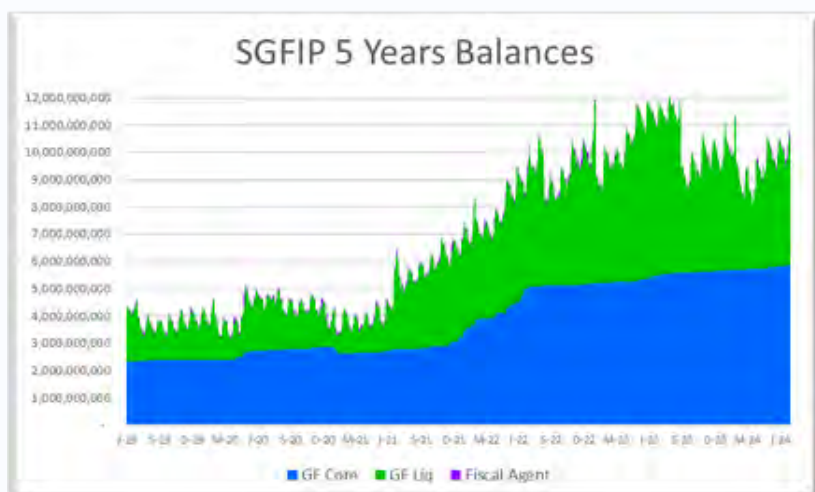
▶ The SGFIP closed with a balance of over \$10 billion. This is down from the previous year but over the last five years the SGFIP has more than doubled in size. The SGFIP balance has remained consistent even after the large statutory transfers to either the Early Childhood Trust Fund (\$2.1 billion in August 2023 and \$1.2 billion in January 2024) and the Tax Stabilization Reserve (\$724 million January 2024).

**EARNINGS**

▶ The SGFIP had a record-breaking earning year for FY24. SGFIP earnings for FY24 totaled approximately \$403.1 million. This total is an increase of 38.8% from FY23 where the SGFIP earned \$290.5 million and an increase of 664.1% from FY22 where the SGFIP earned \$52.8 million. Higher balances and higher interest rates were big factors in this FY earnings.



▶ FY24 revenues show continued strength after a record-breaking FY23. The strength is shared across revenues, with income taxes, the gross receipts tax, selective sales taxes, and investment income. This has led into higher balances in the SGFIP, as you can see in the chart below.



**JUNE 2024 HIGHLIGHTS**

- ▶ The SGFIP balance closed the month of \$10.419 billion.
- Balances are down -10.6% or -\$1.240 billion from the same period prior year.
- Balances are UP .5% or \$54.8 million from prior month-end.
- Tax revenues receipts are up 3.5% or \$51.8 million in June compared to prior year.
- Tax revenues receipts are down -4.2% or -\$812.3 million for FY24 compared same period in FY23.
- Oil and gas revenues are down -.04% or -\$147 thousand in June compared to prior year.
- Oil and gas receipts are down -13.0% or -\$575.0 million for FY24 compared same period in FY 23.
- Oil and gas revenues were \$338.9 million for the month of June.
- SLO Royalties are down -13.4% or -\$27.7 million in June compared to prior year.
- SLO Royalties are down -2.7% or -\$4.9 million from prior month.
- Federal Mineral & Leasing (FML) are up 15.0% or \$34.2 million in June compared to prior year.
- Federal Mineral & Leasing (FML) are up 27.2% or \$56.2 million from prior month.

## New Mexico State Land Office Announces the Retirement of Six Valued Employees!

By Robert Duran

It is with mixed emotions that we say “so long” to six recently-retired New Mexico State Land Office (NMSLO) employees. The agency will never be the same without them, but we are better for having known them all these years!



**Brenda Trujillo, Application Developer (IT Division)-**  
Farewell to our dear col-

league and friend Brenda Trujillo, who retired on December 31, 2024. Brenda most recently served as an Application Developer. She started working for the State of New Mexico in August 2001. She was hired by the Taxation and Revenue Department (TRD) for an assignment on the team supporting the ONGARD system – an online portal for oil and gas information. In July 2018, most of the ONGARD team was transferred from TRD to NMSLO.

Brenda consistently demonstrated her ability to work effectively with her customers, cultivating strong, well-established relationships. She proactively followed up on requests, ensuring that end users received the support and resources they needed in a timely manner. Her dedication to customer satisfaction not only enhanced our service delivery but also fostered trust and loyalty among our clients.

We are sad to lose her talents but wish her well in retirement. Brenda plans to do a lot more camping with her newfound free time!



**James White, Economic Development Representative (Commercial Resources Division)**

Farewell to our wonderful friend James White, who retired on December 31, 2024. He was a dedicated and experienced team member who could always be counted on.

James' knowledge of urban land use planning and land use regulations is unmatched. He brought common sense solutions to complicated real estate transactions when he started with the agency in September 2015. James used his immense expertise to ensure the NMSLO and its beneficiaries received true value in all projects. James skillfully

navigated the complex landscapes of real estate, finance, and economics associated with his assigned projects. His expertise ensured that all economic development implications were thoroughly addressed, while also considering the unique aspects of each initiative. Through strategic planning and meticulous management, he was able to align project goals with broader economic objectives, fostering sustainable growth and development in the communities he served.

In addition, James was an excellent team member who mentored others and readily shared his knowledge with staff. Before working for the State Land Office, James was a senior-level planner for both City of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County and the former Director of Real Estate for Bernalillo County. Beyond his professional achievements, James has been a wonderful friend to many. As James steps into this exciting new phase of his life, we know he will embrace it with the same passion and enthusiasm he brought to his work.



**Randy Kepler, Deputy Director (Records Management Division)**

Randy Kepler, Assistant Director in Records, retired December 31, 2024

Randy began his journey with the NMSLO in December 2009. After almost six years as a Title Examiner in Records, he left us briefly in 2015. However, as most of us who have been here any length of time know, the State Land Office is a stellar place to work, so he came back to us in September 2017 and was promoted to Deputy Director of Records in October 2018.

During his time with us, Randy's patience and sense of humor have created a positive atmosphere that alleviated stress and uplifted the spirits of the Records team and the entire agency. His ability to bring joy to the workplace has made a lasting impact on all of us.

Randy has been an invaluable asset to the State Land Office, and his presence will be greatly missed. As he embarks on this new chapter of his life, we wish him all the best in his retirement, filled with adventures traveling around the U.S. in his RV.



Enjoy the journey, Randy!  
**Jeanette Salazar, Compliance Officer (Oil, Gas & Minerals**

Division) Jeanette Salazar retired on December 31, 2024 after working just over 27 years for the State of New Mexico. When Jeanette joined the NMSLO, she brought with her a wealth of knowledge and a positive and friendly attitude.

She began her career with the State of New Mexico in October 1997, serving as a secretary with the Department of Health. In October 2006, she transferred to the NMSLO, where she took on the role of Legal Assistant. In 2010 she transferred within the agency to Commercial Resources, taking on a role as a Management Analyst for Business Leasing. In 2021 she was promoted into the Compliance Officer position in the Oil, Gas and Minerals Division (OGM). In OGM, Jeanette evaluated, examined, and enforced compliance related to a broad array of rules and lease requirements pertaining to the oil and gas industry.

As Jeanette begins this new part of her life, we know she will still carry the same smile and positive disposition with her everywhere she goes. Whether she's traveling to new destinations or pursuing hobbies, we have no doubt she will also cherish spending more time with family. We wish you all the happiness and fulfillment in your retirement!



**Will Barnes, Deputy Director of Stewardship (Surface Resources Division)**

Will Barnes, the Deputy Director of Stewardship in the Surface Resources Division, has retired, effective January 31, 2025. He began work with the NMSLO on October 19, 2013 and has remained for just over 11 years.

Will's passion for the flora and fauna of the natural world fueled his vision for creating lasting stewardship of state trust lands. His leadership and knowledge were integral to the early stages in drafting and the implementing the Cultural Properties Protection Rule for state trust lands. He drafted the Natural Resources

Protection Standards for renewable energy leasing, and crafted best management practices for leasing across state trust land. Through a grant obtained from the Hewlett Foundation, he established the position of a landscape level planner, which allows the agency to think more holistically about resource development and restoration.

Commissioner Garcia Richard's newly created Environmental Compliance Office was managed by Will with thoughtful guidance and is now a fully-functioning unit in the Surface Resources Division.

Anyone who had the pleasure of working with Will, however briefly, will remember him for his contagious optimism and advocacy for an agency and a mission he fully embraced. We are grateful for his contributions and wish him all the best during this next phase of his life.



**Barbara Griego, Executive Administrative Assistant (Commercial Resources Division)**

Barbara Griego announced her retirement from NMSLO effective January 31, 2025.

Barbara began working for the state with the Public Education Department in 2006 as a Business Operations Specialist. She then transferred to the NMSLO in July 2014.

During her time with the State Land Office, Barbara provided high-level administrative support to the Commercial Resources Division's three business units: Business Leasing, Rights-of-Way, and the Office of Renewable Energy.

As Barbara steps away from her professional commitments, she now has the wonderful opportunity to focus on her personal pursuits. One of the most joyous highlights of this new phase is the recent arrival of her granddaughter. There's nothing quite like the bond between a grandparent and grandchild, and we know Barbara will cherish every moment spent with her new little one. In addition to family time, Barbara looks forward to creating beautiful memories at her cabin near Chama.

As she embarks on this journey, we wish her the very best. We look forward to hearing all about her adventures and the stories that will surely come from this exciting new chapter.

### NMDOT Employee Recognition Program December 2024 Selections

By Kristine Mihelcic

We are only as good as our employees and NMDOT's are the best!

- General Office:  
Supervisor: Lee Cabeza De Vaca  
Employee: Pierrot Bendegue  
Team: Environmental Bureau Roadside & Community Design Team
- District 1:  
Supervisor: Gene Vargas  
Employee: Arnaldo Carillo  
Team: Socorro Construction
- District 2:  
Supervisor: Arron Auld  
Employee: Robin Carey  
Team: Service Center and Equipment
- District 3:  
Supervisor: Adrian Garcia  
Employee: Victor M. Martinez  
Team: Sign Crew 43-33
- District 4:  
Supervisor: Christopher Garcia  
Employee: Art Romero  
Team: Raton Project Office
- District 5:  
Supervisor: Max Vigil  
Employee: Thomas Royston  
Team: Taos Patrol
- District 6:  
Supervisor: Thomas Council  
Employees: Matilda Leake  
Team: Pavement Preservation Crew



### Retired Us Air Force Colonel Chosen To Lead Office Of Military Base Planning And Support

By Nruce Krasnow



Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has appointed Colonel Megan A. Cornett, a retired U.S. Air Force officer with experience in government relations, as director of New Mexico's Office of Military Base Planning and Support.

Cornett most recently served as Albuquerque operations officer for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency and has extensive experience in civil and commercial airfield management at Kirtland Air Force Base, as well as locations in North Dakota, Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, Florida, Oklahoma, Idaho, Korea, and Washington, D.C.

She holds a BA degree from Texas A&M University, and a Master of Public Administration from the University of Oklahoma as well as Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base. She served as a legislative fellow with Georgetown University's Government Affairs Institute and supported Congressional legislative initiatives for the Air Force.

The Office of Military Base Planning and Support is a liaison between the state and the federal congressional delegation on military planning and support issues. It also supports base representatives and communities around military bases with access, infrastructure operations, planning, and logistic concerns. The office is administratively attached to the New Mexico Economic Development Department (EDD), which provides budgeting, legal, and human resources support.

"I am pleased that Megan Cornett can continue to serve," EDD Secretary-Designate Rob Black said. "Col. Cornett knows the military community in New Mexico and will continue our work on economic development investments around our bases so these communities can thrive, and military retirees can remain or relocate to New Mexico, finding post-mission opportunities as they contribute to the economy."

"I want to learn more about the communities surrounding New Mexico's military bases and find solutions to the challenges that impact military operations and the quality of life for service members," Cornett said. "This includes bringing increased benefits to those who need affordable housing, more options for education, and an overall better quality of life."

In 2022, EDD undertook a first-of-its-kind study on the economic impact of military installations and retired military veterans in New Mexico. It showed that the sector supports 52,268 jobs, \$2.8 billion in annual labor income, and more than \$14 billion in industrial output. At the time, New Mexico had 141,558 veterans residing in the state with military retirees in all 33 counties. The military is the 17th largest employer in the state and veterans earn incomes 164% greater than nonveterans, accounting for 8% of total state employment.

Cornett assumed her duties on January 6. She replaces Richard Glover who resigned at the end of 2024.

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## Norovirus Cases Rising in New Mexico and Nationwide

By David Morgan

New Mexico is seeing a rise in norovirus cases happening nationwide. Norovirus outbreaks occur throughout the year but are most common from November to April.

Norovirus is a common, highly contagious virus commonly referred to as a “stomach bug” or even “stomach flu.” Norovirus should not be confused with flu. Flu is caused by the influenza virus and causes respiratory illness. Norovirus causes gastroenteritis, which is inflammation of the stomach or intestines that causes nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps and diarrhea.

“The most important thing you can do to prevent spreading norovirus is to wash your hands — especially before you eat,” said Miranda Durham, NMDOH Chief Medical Officer. “If you're sick, be sure to stay hydrated and don't prepare or share food with others.”

Norovirus can be passed person-to-person by infected people, contaminated food or water, or just touching contaminated surfaces.

Hand sanitizer does not work against norovirus – that is why everyone should wash their hands with soap and water. Clean and disinfect surfaces by using detergents with bleach.

If exposed to norovirus, you will typically become sick within 24 to 48 hours. In addition to the symptoms listed above, some people may have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches and fatigue. Illness typically lasts one to three days. There isn't a specific treatment for norovirus, but anyone sick should be sure to drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.

If you develop norovirus symptoms, stay home if possible and contact your healthcare provider, urgent care or emergency room if you're unable to stay hydrated. Where possible, don't go to work or school until 48 hours after symptoms have completely gone away.

If you do not have a medical provider or have other questions, contact the NMDOH Helpline at 1-833-SWNURSE (833-796-8773) for assistance.

For more information visit NMDOH website or [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)



## 2025 PERA Board Election

By Christina Gauthier



On January 14, 2025, the PERA Board adopted a resolutions calling for nominations for one state member position, and one municipal member position.

PERA Board members are fiduciaries to the various PERA funds and must prudently administer the retirement systems for the sole and exclusive benefit of PERA members, retirees and beneficiaries.

The state position has a four-year term to begin January 1, 2026. Only vested members with five or more years of PERA service credit employed by a State employer may run for this position. Candidates must obtain a minimum of 150 valid signatures on their nominating petitions (PERA Rule 2.80.200.70 (A) (3) NMAC). The five candidates with the most signatures will be included on the ballot for the 2025 election.

If you are a vested PERA state member and would like to request nominating petitions, please contact Automated Election Services at 1-800-833-5568 ext. 6534. Nominating petitions with original signatures must be received at Automated Election Services, 7000 Zenith Ct., Rio Rancho, NM 87144-6467 **by 5:00 pm Monday, April 14, 2025** to be counted.

Please visit <https://www.nmpera.org/board-of-trustees/elections/> to learn more.

## Five New Mexico Educators Receive Presidential Teaching Awards

By Janelle García



Five New Mexico educators are recipients of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST), the nation's highest honor for teaching in science, technology, engineering and math.

The New Mexico awardees are:

- **Kimberly Conell** from Albuquerque Public Schools, a 7–12 math national awardee.
- **Heather Harrell** from Espanola Public Schools, a K–6 science national awardee.
- **Tara Palomares** from Albuquerque Public Schools, a 7–12 math national awardee.
- **Lesha Rupert** from Albuquerque Public Schools, a 7–12 science national awardee.
- **Christopher Speck** from Albuquerque Public Schools, a 7–12 science national awardee.

“Congratulations to the awardees and thank you for the high-quality STEM instruction you bring to your classrooms,” said Public Education Secretary-Designate Mariana D. Padilla. “Our students thrive when they learn from educators who are passionate and well versed in content knowledge.”

The Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching are bestowed by the United States government specifically for K–12 math and science (including computer science) teaching. The award recognizes those teachers who develop and implement a high-quality instructional program that is informed by content knowledge and enhances student learning.

Each year, a national committee of prominent mathematicians, scientists, mathematics/science education researchers, district-level personnel and classroom teachers recommends up to 108 teachers to receive the PAEMST. The National Science Foundation administers the awards on behalf of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

Teachers who are selected as PAEMST awardees receive a trip to Washington, D.C., where they attend a series of recognition events and professional development opportunities. They also receive a \$10,000 award from the National Science Foundation, a presidential certificate, and membership in an elite cohort of award-winning teachers who influence STEM teaching at local, state and national levels.

Since 1983, more than 5,200 teachers have been recognized for their contributions in the classroom and to their profession.

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## State's Geospatial Information Officer Receives NM Women in Tech Award

Broadband office employee among eight honorees

By Mike Curtis

The Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE) proudly announces that Natalie Runyan, New Mexico's Geospatial Information Officer, has been named a 2025 New Mexico Women in Technology Honoree by the New Mexico Technology Council. This prestigious award recognizes dynamic women who exhibit extraordinary ambition, passion and talent in their tech careers.



Runyan, a true trailblazer, is the chief mapping and spatial data administrator for the state's broadband expansion program. She provides vital data through various geospatial and integrated systems, including GPS and GIS, to provide best ways to expand high-speed internet. Her high-tech skills and data analysis are crucial in providing broadband to rural, tribal and other areas in the state.

"I am honored to win a 2025 Women in Tech Award," said Runyan. "It is empowering to stand alongside other women turning technology into creative solutions. I thrive on making data accessible to decision-makers, leveraging technology to tell complex stories, and OBAE has embraced this as we race to get broadband internet to all New Mexicans. I hope that these awards inspire others to pursue their passions in tech."

Thanks to Runyan's achievements in data production management, analysis projects and geodatabase design, families and businesses are receiving high-speed internet, allowing them access to telehealth, education, government services and other online opportunities to improve their lives.

Runyan, a driven leader, empowers a team of specialists from multiple lines of business and areas of expertise to be creative while also working within operational standards and procedures to develop a system for the broadband office using powerful technologies and data. As technical lead and mapping project manager, Runyan writes technical work plans, produces special projects and budgets, manages contract awards and oversees planning and risk assessment.

Runyan is a South Carolina native who has made New Mexico her home for more than 30 years. She currently lives in Albuquerque.

Seven other dynamic tech leaders in New Mexico received the award.

The New Mexico Technology Council has given out the New Mexico Women in Technology Award for 17 years, honoring the many contributions of women who drive innovation and progress in the state's tech industry.

The 2025 New Mexico Women in Technology Awards ceremony will be held on March 13, at the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque.

## NMDOT Announces Winners for 2025 Name a Snowplow Contest... and the Winners are

By Ami Evans

The New Mexico Department of Transportation is excited to announce the 2025 Name a Snowplow contest winners. Drumroll please.

The Winning names are:

- District 1: Snow Bueno, Snow Way, José!
- District 2: Scoop Dogg, Chips & Que Snow.
- District 3: Alice Scooper, Taylor Drift.
- District 4: Blizzard of Oz, Red Chilly Brrrr-ito.
- District 5: Clear-o-Pathra, Blizzard Wizard.
- District 6: Zia Later, Snow, En-CHILL-ada.



Thank you, New Mexico for the most unique, fun, and New Mexico-inspired names for our hardworking snowplows. These trucks play an important role in keeping our communities connected and our roads safe during the winter months—look for our newly named plows on roads near you.

## Overdose Deaths Declined In New Mexico Again

By Robert Nott



New Mexico mortality data show a decrease in drug overdose deaths statewide for the second consecutive year since 2021.

Overdose deaths have declined 8% statewide since 2021 when the number of overdose deaths peaked at 1,029 deaths, according to data compiled by the epidemiology team at the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH).

In 2022, New Mexico had 997 overdose deaths. That number has fallen to 948 overdose deaths in 2023.

"These decreases are welcome news, but there is still much more to do to reduce the problem of substance misuse in New Mexico," said NMDOH Interim Secretary Gina DeBlasie. "Substance misuse is a multifaceted and complex public health issue, and we need to continue to aggressively attack this problem."

Fentanyl was involved in 65% of overdose deaths in 2023. Methamphetamine involvement also remains high and was involved in 51% of overdose deaths.

In 2023, most overdose deaths (84%) occurred among New Mexicans aged 25-64 years, with 26% of overdose deaths occurring in the 35-44 years age group.

Less than ten drug overdose deaths occurred among individuals younger than 15 years or older than 75 years.

Counties that had both a high number of overdose deaths (>20 deaths) and an overdose death rate greater than the statewide age-adjusted rate (46.3 deaths per 100,000 population) in 2023 include Bernalillo, Santa Fe, Rio Arriba, and San Miguel.

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## State Offers Free Help For NM Homeowners To Avoid Foreclosure

By Henry Valdez



The state of New Mexico offers homeowners free assistance to help prevent foreclosure. The program provides government-funded Housing Counseling and legal support for homeowners facing financial difficulties with their mortgage payments.

In partnership with United South Broadway Corporation (USBC), eligible homeowners can access HUD-certified Housing Counseling and legal services to navigate their foreclosure options, including loan modifications, mediation, and loan reinstatement. This program provides expert assistance to help homeowners stay in their homes and regain financial stability.

"While we work hard to help New Mexicans buy their first homes, it's equally important that we help them avoid foreclosure," said Daniel Werwath, director of the Office of Housing for Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham.

"Homeownership is the single biggest source of wealth for most New Mexico families, and we want to ensure that their investment is protected for the long-term."

"Many homeowners across New Mexico face significant financial challenges, and we are pleased to offer this vital service to help families keep their homes," said Diana Dorn-Jones, executive director at USBC. "Through free Housing Counseling and legal support, we are helping families avoid foreclosure, get back on track, and protect their financial futures."

To be eligible, homeowners must reside in New Mexico and face challenges with their mortgage payments or foreclosure. There are no income caps for Housing Counseling services, while legal representation is available for income-qualified homeowners.

For more information on how to access free Housing Counseling and legal services, visit USBC's website or call (505) 764-8867 or 575-449-8930 for a free consultation.

## NMSP Make Record Number DWI Arrests for 2024 in Albuquerque, Surrounding Areas

By Amanda Richards



DWIs are a major concern for New Mexico, and combatting this issue remains a priority for New Mexico State Police. According to the New Mexico Department of Transportation, alcohol-related crashes account for a large number of all traffic collisions in the state.

However, New Mexico State Police District 5, which includes the counties of Bernalillo, Valencia, Torrance, Sandoval, and a small portion of Santa Fe County, has worked relentlessly to make this less of a concern for the public.

New Mexico State Police is proud to announce that in 2024, officers arrested 803 impaired drivers, a significant increase from 673 in 2023.

New Mexico State Police will continue to fight against DWI by conducting sobriety checkpoints, saturation patrols, and various other proactive patrol operations through 2025.

NMSP will continue to bring awareness to the issue of DWI, helping to change society's attitude about driving while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs.

Hundreds of lives could be saved each year if every driver had the courage to make the right decision not to drive impaired.

## State Suicide Rate Decreases in Key Groups in 2023

By David Barre



New Mexico 2023 suicide death numbers declined significantly from 2022 among women and Indigenous Peoples.

New data released by the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) Center for Health Protection show the number of New Mexico women who died by suicide decreased 42% from 116 deaths in 2022 to 67 deaths in 2023. The number of New Mexico American Indian/Alaska Native residents, both male and female, who died by suicide decreased 43% from 77 deaths in 2022 to 44 deaths in 2023.

Overall, the New Mexico suicide death rate decreased 9% in 2023. While the 2023 decline is a positive sign, it does not yet indicate a sustained trend. The state's suicide death rate is still 9% higher than it was a decade ago.

"Suicide is a serious public health problem that can have lasting effects on communities," said Dr. Miranda Durham, NMDOH Chief Medical Officer. "Preventing suicide requires many strategies, but everyone can help by learning the warning signs, promoting prevention and working to foster healthy connections and safe environments."

Continued efforts to prevent suicide deaths, particularly among men are needed. From 2022 to 2023, the statewide male suicide death rate has had no significant change.

According to the National Council for Suicide Prevention, risk factors are characteristics that make it more likely a person will attempt or die by suicide. They include:

- Alcohol and other substance use disorders.
  - Mental illnesses.
  - History of trauma or abuse.
  - Family history of suicide
  - Easy access to lethal means.
  - Stigma or a sense of isolation associated with asking for help.
- The National Council references the following protective factors:
- Accessible and affordable physical and behavioral health care.
  - Connection to school, community and social institutions.
  - Close relationships.
  - Access to healthy meals.
  - Reduced access to lethal means.
  - Suicide Prevention Trainings.

If you or someone you know is struggling and needs help, please call or text New Mexico's 988 Lifeline for 24/7 free and confidential emotional, mental health and substance use support. More information on the lifeline can be found online at <https://988nm.org/>.

Additional resources are available at the New Mexico Suicide Prevention Coalition website. Learn more about NMDOH's work to prevent suicide deaths at NMDOH's Office of Injury and Violence Prevention.

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## Chief Justice Asks Lawmakers To Address Funding Needs Of State Courts

By Barry Massey

Chief Justice David K. Thomson urged the Legislature on January 23rd to provide funding to upgrade court security and technology, cover the costs of jury trials and improve employee pay to lessen turnover in court staff.

In his State of the Judiciary address to a joint session of the Legislature, the Chief Justice stressed the need for adequate funding for state courts to carry out their essential day-to-day functions of resolving civil and criminal cases. State courts in New Mexico heard about 354,000 cases in the most recent fiscal year.

“The overwhelming majority of individuals seeking justice through the courts seek justice in state courts,” Chief Justice Thomson said in his prepared remarks. “Above all else, when you enter these doors, it is our obligation to bring a just resolution of these cases in a timely manner, with no prejudice toward status or position, applying reasoned and reliable facts to the rule of law.”

The Judiciary’s top budget priority, the Chief Justice explained, is \$14 million to improve the pay of employ-

ees such as court clerks. Judicial workers in the lowest pay range currently receive nearly 25 percent less than employees in comparable job classifications in executive branch agencies.

The requested money for employee compensation is necessary “to level the field so the Judicial Branch can reduce costly turnover and more efficiently maintain our workforce,” the Chief Justice said.

The Judiciary also is requesting:

- An additional \$2.2 million in recurring funding in the next fiscal year to pay for jurors. Without that increase, courts could run out of money for jury trials. District, magistrate and metropolitan courts conducted about 740 jury trials in the 2024 fiscal year.
- A one-time allocation of \$25 million to pay for security upgrades at courthouses over six years. The Chief Justice noted that courts in Farmington closed for several days last week after a man threatened to kill a judge. “The security funding we ask



Chief Justice David K. Thomson delivers the State of the Judiciary address.

for is also to keep our citizens safe,” he said.

- \$3.5 million for monitoring criminal defendants who wear electronic location tracking devices while

awaiting trial and to expand pretrial justice services in four additional judicial districts covering 12 counties.

- \$3 million for technology, including improvements for cybersecurity, email systems and internet connectivity.
- \$40 million to implement a new speech-to-text system in courtrooms to provide real-time accurate transcripts of hearings and trials. Courtroom audio and video equipment must be upgraded for the speech-to-text system, which will help judges and justice partners work more efficiently in resolving cases.

The Chief Justice outlined the Judiciary’s recent accomplishments, including implementing competency diversion pilot programs last year to help individuals with a history of mental illness when they are arrested

for misdemeanors. The programs in three judicial districts divert people from the justice system and connect them to needed community-based treatment and support services. A fourth pilot program is expected to begin operating this year.

Chief Justice Thomson also announced the start of an assisted outpatient treatment program in the First Judicial District, which covers Santa Fe, Los Alamos and Rio Arriba counties. The program will provide for treatment under a civil court order for people struggling with mental illness. The Second Judicial District Court also is relaunching an assisted outpatient treatment program.

“The Judiciary does not sleep on the Courts’ work as a community problem-solver,” Chief Justice Thomson said. “Courts have a front row seat for the many challenges facing our local communities, and work every day to help address these issues with innovative solutions like eviction diversion programs, guardianship programs, specialized dockets for veterans, mental health initiatives and rural justice initiatives.”

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## NMSP Sergeant Gabe Luna Selected to Teach at Prestigious FBI Hazardous Devices School

By Ricardo Breceda

The New Mexico State Police Department proudly announces that Sergeant Gabe Luna, Commander of the Bomb Squad, has been re-invited to instruct at the FBI's prestigious Hazardous Devices School (HDS) in Huntsville, Alabama. This esteemed position highlights Sgt. Luna's exceptional expertise in bomb disposal and his unwavering commitment to public safety.



Sgt. Luna and K9 "Duuk"

Sgt. Luna, who has served on the New Mexico State Police Bomb Squad since 2011, brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to his role at HDS, where he has instructed since 2019. Over his 13-year career, he has earned numerous certifications, including Tactical Bomb Technician, Advanced Ordnance Recognition, and Certified Explosive Specialist—a title achieved through a rigorous two-year program hosted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF). Since its founding in 1971, the school has prepared over 20,000 bomb technicians to handle explosive threats, ensuring uniformity and excellence across local, state, and federal agencies.

Teaching at HDS is a prestigious honor, reserved for the most skilled and trusted professionals in the field. Sgt. Luna has been instrumental in instructing advanced courses, including Tactical Bomb Technician Techniques and the Crisis Response course. His role at HDS allows him to share his expertise with bomb technicians nationwide, shaping the next generation of specialists who safeguard communities from explosive threats.

"Being invited to teach at HDS is both an honor and a responsibility I take very seriously," said Sgt. Luna. "It's a privilege to contribute to the training of our nation's bomb technicians and ensure they're equipped to handle today's evolving challenges."

Sgt. Luna's leadership has been pivotal to the success of the New Mexico State Police Bomb Squad. Since being promoted to Bomb Squad Commander in 2017, he has overseen the certification of numerous technicians and spearheaded efforts to advance training standards.

The New Mexico State Police congratulates Sgt. Luna on this remarkable achievement, expresses pride in his dedication to protecting the community and helping advance the field of bomb disposal.



Sgt. Luna on left

## New eLearning Option Created for State Tribal Collaboration Act Cultural Competency Training course

By Jaime Phillips



The State Personnel Office (SPO) is pleased to announce that thanks to a collaborative partnership with the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department (IAD), the "State Tribal Collaboration Act Cultural Competency Training" course is now available on-demand as an eLearning course on the Enterprise Learning Management (ELM) system (course code SoNM-2019). This course is mandatory for state employees under the State-Tribal Collaboration Act, which states that "All state agency managers and employees who have ongoing communication with Indian nations, tribes or pueblos shall complete a training provided by the state personnel office with assistance from the Indian affairs department, which training supports: (1) the promotion of effective communication and collaboration between state agencies and Indian nations, tribes or pueblos; (2) the development of positive state-tribal government-to-government relations; and (3) cultural competency in providing effective services to American Indians or Alaska Natives." Through this training, participants will develop an understanding of the State-Tribal Collaboration Act and how it applies to agencies and employee work, tribal sovereignty and the relations between state and tribes, the role of consultation, collaboration, and communication with tribes, and the history, systems, policies, and laws that impact American Indians.

Access to this course is consistently in high demand, and the addition of the on-demand learning option ensures that all state employees will be able to compete the course in a timely manner and at a time that best fits their work schedule. The eLearning version of the course consists of a video recording of the training being presented by an IAD facilitator, followed by a course review and then a 14-question quiz. The presenter in the video may be heard using your device's speakers or headphones. Closed captions for the video are also available, and the course was designed to be fully accessible for users of screen readers. At least 10 questions must be answered correctly to pass the quiz and get credit for the course. Completion certificates may be downloaded directly from the ELM system. For state employees who lack access to the ELM system, an alternate course delivery method is available upon request. Register and complete the course directly using the Enterprise Learning Management (ELM) system at <https://elm.share.nm.gov/> or email the SPO Learning and Development Bureau for assistance at [Learning.Development@spo.nm.gov](mailto:Learning.Development@spo.nm.gov). Learn more about classes offered by the State Personnel Office on their website at: <https://www.spo.state.nm.us/learning-development/>.

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## Rochelle Bussey Joins the Association of Film Commissioners International Board

*The appointment of New Mexico Film Office's Senior Program Manager showcases NM's leadership in film*

By Dolores Martinez

The New Mexico Film Office (NMFO) announces that Senior Program Manager Rochelle Bussey has been appointed to the Association of Film Commissioners International (AFCI) Board of Directors. This prestigious appointment recognizes Bussey's outstanding contributions to the film industry and dedication to promoting New Mexico as a premier filming destination.



Bussey will join a geographically diverse group of 16 candidates who ran for the six two-year terms, representing Africa, Canada, Europe, the Oceanic territories, South America, and the United States. Bussey's appointment to the AFCI Board strengthens New Mexico's presence in the international film industry and showcases the state's leadership in developing film-friendly policies, programs, and partnerships.

A native of Santa Fe, New Mexico, Bussey has been a cornerstone of the state's film industry for over 20 years. Her career at the NMFO has been dedicated to creating opportunities for crew, local talent, and businesses, building sustainable film programs, and fostering relationships that have helped make New Mexico a premier choice for filmmakers worldwide.

"Rochelle's expertise and leadership have been instrumental in the growth of New Mexico's film industry. This is a well-deserved recognition of her dedication and a testament to the high caliber of talent within the New Mexico Film Office," NMFO Director Steve Graham said.

Bussey brings a wealth of experience to the AFCI Board. In her role at NMFO, she has managed relationships with productions, spearheaded training opportunities for New Mexicans, and provided critical support to filmmakers. She is a respected leader in the industry, known for her expertise, professionalism, and commitment to fostering a thriving film community in New Mexico.

"I am deeply honored to join the AFCI Board of Directors," Bussey said. "Growing up in Santa Fe and working in this industry for over two decades, I've seen firsthand how film can transform communities and create opportunities. New Mexico is a place of rich culture, diverse talent, and breathtaking landscapes. I'm excited to bring those stories to a global stage while working with my peers to ensure film production remains a powerful force for economic and creative growth worldwide."

The current board will serve throughout 2025. In September 2025, an election will occur for board officers whose two-year terms conclude at the end of the year.

## NMSD Wellness Fair

By Kimm Wiens

The New Mexico School for the Deaf (NMSD) hosted its inaugural Wellness Fair in January, offering a variety of activities designed to promote health and well-being. Students from PreK to 12th grade participated



in engaging sessions held at multiple locations across campus throughout the morning. The event featured a diverse range of activities, including physical activities like dance, walking, and yoga, as well as mindfulness exercises such as puzzles, weaving, and coloring. In addition, health-focused sessions covered important topics like dental care, nutrition, and hygiene. The event was a resounding success and we hope it will become an annual tradition for NMSD.



## UNM Clinical Law School Program Returns to the Metropolitan Court

By Camille Baca

UNM Clinical Law School students were sworn-in on Jan. 17 to practice misdemeanor criminal cases under the supervision of licensed attorneys in the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court.

The collaboration between the Court, the Second Judicial District Attorney's Office, and the UNM School of Law had been on hold since the pandemic. Two supervising attorneys from the Second Judicial District Attorney's Office, who now also serve as professors for the class, helped in reviving the program.

"We are excited that the UNM School of Law brought this program back. This is an opportunity for law school students to get hands-on experience in a courtroom, prosecuting DWI and Domestic Violence cases. It's beneficial not only to students but also to the community," said Adjunct Law Professor and Supervising Attorney of the Metro Division Elizabeth Bates with the Second Judicial District Attorney's Office.

As the program again gets underway, the law school students will be practicing subject to Rule 5-110 in two of the court's Criminal Division courtrooms throughout the spring semester.

"I remember the invaluable experience of participating in the clinic myself years ago as a UNM Law School student and having the opportunity to work through cases instead of just reading how it may play out. It better prepared me and so many others for practicing in a detail-oriented and often times demanding profession. We are pleased to see the return of this program," said Chief Judge of the Metropolitan Court Joshua J. Sánchez.



Metropolitan Court Chief Judge Joshua J. Sanchez, Elizabeth Bates and Theresa Romero pose with UNM Clinical students

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## Governor Announces Judicial Appointment of Crystal Lees

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced on January 16th the appointment of Crystal Lees as a Second Judicial District Court judge.

Lees' appointment follows the retirement of Judge Debra Ramirez.

Since 2018, Lees has served the state of New Mexico as a domestic relations hearing officer for the Second Judicial District Court, presiding over hearings in child custody, divorce, and child support matters. A graduate of Texas Tech University School of Law, Lees was admitted to the New Mexico Bar in 2012.

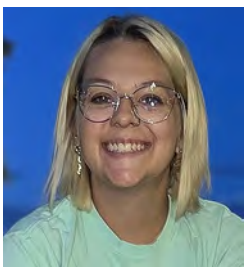
Lees' appointment commenced on Jan. 18, 2025.

## Two New Mexico Historic Sites Get a Boost with New Proven Leadership

By Greg Gurulé

A step up the ladder for NM Department of Cultural Affairs employees who bring their education and talents to a pair of New Mexico Historic Sites. Emily Wilson and Wendi Laws, who already had positions with Historic Sites, have new roles serving New Mexicans.

Emily was promoted to Regional Site Manager for Taylor-Mesilla and Fort Selden Historic Sites in southern New Mexico in December of 2024. She had served as Instructional Coordinator Supervisor at Fort Selden, so she is very familiar with the Sites.



Emily is originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, where she graduated from Ohio University in May of 2022 with a BA in Anthropology-Cultural focus, along with minors in Classical Civilizations, World Religions, and Sociolinguistics. Additionally, she earned certificates in Islamic Studies and Museum Studies. Since graduating, she has interned at Ohio History Connection and the Cincinnati Museum Center. Wilson also worked as a Content Specialist at the online auction house Everything but the House. Before joining

the NM Department of Cultural Affairs, she served as the Curator and Director of the Pueblo Heritage Museum in Pueblo, CO.

"I am overjoyed to play a larger role in the southern region of New Mexico Historic Sites," said Emily. "From preservation efforts to community outreach and reopening the Taylor-Mesilla home to the public, there will be no shortage of excitement. I look forward to each day in my new position."

Since November of 2024, Wendi Laws has directed operations and planning as Regional Site Manager for the Coronado and Jemez Historic Sites. Wendi transferred from the southern Sites, where she was the Regional Site Manager for Taylor-Mesilla and Fort Selden Historic Sites.



Wendi Laws was born in New Mexico and attended Texas Tech University, where she graduated with a BA in English Literature and Education. After many years of teaching, she also obtained a BA in Anthropology from Texas State University and then graduated with an MA in Museum Studies from the University of Oklahoma. Laws launched her career working for park systems in Texas, where she served for more than 10 years as an

interpretive ranger. Those parks were also home to historic sites where she researched, presented programs, and designed exhibits to highlight the history of the locations. After serving as site manager for two historic house museums in Austin, she returned to New Mexico to continue her career at historic sites. "I am looking forward to working with staff at Jemez and Coronado Historic Sites and to continuing to forge bonds with our community and developing visionary programs, events, and exhibitions so that we can continue to tell the stories of New Mexico and provide a place for visitors to learn and grow," said Wendi.

"We are fortunate to have both Emily and Wendi working at our Sites," said New Mexico Historic Sites Deputy Director Matt Barbour. "They not only have the education and experience to build on what we have already established at the locations, but they also have the determination to help New Mexico residents and out of state visitors understand the full impact of what they mean to the state's history and culture."

## New Mexico Workforce Connection Rebrand to America's Job Center New Mexico

By Stacy Johnston

The New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions alongside State and Local Workforce Development Boards is excited to announce the official rebranding of New Mexico Workforce Connection to America's Job Center New Mexico. This name change reflects a nationwide alignment with the American Job's Center network, ensuring consistency and recognition for workforce services provided throughout the state.



NMDWS Secretary Sarita Nair cutting ribbon in front of the America's Job Center in Hobbs New Mexico.

NMDWS Cabinet Secretary

Sarita Nair officially launched the rebrand with ribbon-cutting ceremonies in Hobbs, Artesia, and Roswell, New Mexico on January 8-9, 2025. The events marked the beginning of the transition and highlighted the Department's commitment to providing exceptional workforce services that meet the needs of all New Mexicans, employers, and partners statewide.

"The new name for the local offices connects New Mexico to a nationwide network and emphasizes our mission to assist individuals with finding the right career and businesses with the finding the talent they need to succeed," said NMDWS Cabinet Secretary Sarita Nair. "While the name and look have evolved, the dedication to serving New Mexicans remains unchanged and stronger than ever."

The transition to the new refreshed logo will take place over the next few months, with local offices and online platforms gradually adopting the updated identity. The new name will also help the public with confusion between the Department of Workforce Solutions (DWS), and the services that multiple workforce partners, including DWS, provide in the local offices.

Services provided by America's Job Center New Mexico include:

- Adult and dislocated worker job and training resources
- Specialized programs for veterans, including disabled veterans
- Youth career exploration, job searches, skills training, and pre-apprenticeship
- Businesses services including recruitment, job postings, and hiring solutions tailored to their needs
- Job and hiring fairs
- Resource rooms where the public can access labor market information and other tools for applying for jobs
- Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assistance (RESEA) workshops and resources for people who are utilizing unemployment insurance
- Assistance with unemployment insurance claims and tax issues
- Foreign labor certification and migrant and seasonal farmworker programs (in agricultural regions)
- Guidance on filing wage and hour claims
- Help with programs during emergencies and natural disasters

There are 25 workforce offices located across New Mexico who remain dedicated to providing exceptional support, whether in-person or online. Job seekers and employers can access services online through New Mexico Jobs at <https://www.jobs.state.nm.us>. For more information, visit your nearest America's Job Center New Mexico location <https://www.dws.state.nm.us/en-us/Office-Locations>.



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# SPOTLIGHT

On New Mexico Leadership

## Health Care Authority



Ms. Kari Armijo, Cabinet Secretary of the New Mexico Health Care Authority, exemplifies a profound dedication to public service with over two decades of experience in the department. Appointed by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham in October 2023, Armijo spearheaded the transition from the Human Services Department to the New Mexico Health Care Authority. Under her leadership, the agency serves over half of New Mexico's population, advancing policies that strengthen the state's health care and safety-net system. A lifelong New Mexican, Armijo was born and raised in Santa Fe, where she lives with her husband and two teenage sons. Her career is defined by significant contributions to health care policy, public service, and the management of care systems to improve the health and well-being of all New Mexicans.

### Tell us about the New Mexico Health Care Authority (HCA)?

We're excited to introduce the New Mexico Health Care Authority, a new agency that launched on July 1, 2024. This groundbreaking development is the result of merging the New Mexico Human Services Department, the State Employee Benefits team from the General Services Department, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division and Division of Health Improvement from the New Mexico Department of Health, and the Health Care Affordability Fund from the Office of Superintendent of Insurance. This marks a significant milestone for the people of New Mexico as this new agency will work toward our vision of providing health care and safety net services to all New Mexicans. The New Mexico Health Care Authority will leverage purchasing power, partnerships and data analytics to create innovative policies and models of comprehensive coverage for New Mexicans. The New Mexico Health Care Authority is a testament to our state's commitment to a brighter, healthier future. Together, we will make a difference. This isn't just a name change; it's a bold step towards a healthier New

Mexico.

### Where are your offices located?

The HCA operates 59 offices throughout our vast state to serve our clients. Our main office is at 1474 Rodeo Road in Santa Fe.

### How many employees does HCA have?

We have nearly 2,000 staff members that provide vital services and support to over 882,000 New Mexicans.

### Mission and vision of the agency?

The mission of the New Mexico Health Care Authority (HCA) is to ensure New Mexicans attain their highest level of health by providing whole-person, cost-effective, accessible, and high-quality health care and safety-net services. The HCA's vision is that every New Mexican has access to affordable health care coverage through a coordinated and seamless health care system.



HEALTH CARE  
AUTHORITY

### What is a public misconception or lack of awareness of what the HCA does?

The HCA is often confused with the Department of Health, which focuses on public health. The HCA directly serves over 50% of the state's population by providing health care coverage and safety-net services. The Health Care Authority administers key programs including Medicaid, SNAP, behavioral health, child support, health care coverage, health-care licensing and certifications, the state health benefits, support for people with intellectual & developmental disabilities, financial and utility assistance.

### Can you share a major accomplishment or significant achievement of HCA?

Since our creation on July 1, 2024, we are committed to strengthening our programs and services to better serve New Mexico's diverse communities. We've raised Medicaid provider reimbursement rates, which are cur-

rently among the nation's highest, resulting in more than 2,700 new providers joining the Medicaid program since July 2024. We are implementing a Health Care Affordability Fund that today covers about 65,000 New Mexicans receiving premium assistance on BeWell, the State Health Insurance Marketplace. Our Rural Health Care Delivery Fund is delivering more than \$80 million dollars for new and expanded primary care, behavioral health, maternal-child health, and specialty care services in rural communities. We recently launched Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics serving seven counties across New Mexico. Over the last 7 months as a new agency, we have also expanded SNAP eligibility to 200% of the federal poverty level, providing food benefits to up to 67,697 more households in New Mexico. SNAP food benefits for older adults and people with disabilities were raised from \$32 to \$100 per month.

### Other information to share?

Yes, we offer a broad array of services and programs that serve New Mexicans. To learn more about our services or apply visit our website, <https://yes.nm.gov/>

HCA's programs have had the following social impact:

**255,115,151** meals provided to New Mexicans through Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) over the last 12 months



**841,494** individuals provided the ability to visit a doctor, afford medication and immunizations through Medicaid in December 2024



**30,219** homes heated and cooled for New Mexico families through Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) in Federal Fiscal Year 2023



**6,752** families provided shelter and necessities through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in January 2025



**\$133.92\*** per month on average through child support to help kids be happy and healthy over the last 12 months



**211,959** New Mexico adults supported by Behavioral Health programs and services\*\* from December 2023 - December 2024



last updated: 2/3/25

\*\*BH services include those covered through Medicaid and other sources (federal and general funds). The total is affected by a 3 month claim lag and therefore this measure is updated quarterly.

## New Team Members Bring Fresh Perspectives to Exhibits at State Museums and Historic Sites

By Greg Gurule

The Museum Resources Division (MRD) of NM Department of Cultural Affairs (NMDCA) is excited to announce the addition of two new team members to its Exhibit Services Bureau staff.



Lila Pickus has been named Head of Exhibit Services for the Museum Resources Division. Lila is an architectural designer and project manager with experience in public, private, and non-profit sectors. She has served as an exhibition designer with the Museum Resources Division since 2022, after working as an exhibition designer for Meow Wolf and a project manager for JenkinsGavin development management firm.

“New Mexico’s museums are an incredible asset to locals and visitors, and I am grateful to work in support of their collective mission,” said Lila. “I am excited for this opportunity, as Head of Exhibit Services, to continue advocating for the highest quality exhibits and for the people who bring them to life.”

Lila holds a Master of Design in Interior Architecture, Adaptive Reuse from the Rhode Island School of Design and a Bachelor of Studio Art from Colorado College.

Exhibit Services’ new Supervisor of Fabrication and Preparation is Kurt Beardsley. Kurt comes to Exhibit Services with 40 years of experience in Concert and Theater Production, where he served as a carpenter, props fabricator, rigger, lighting technician, and production manager. “I am thrilled to be joining Exhibit Services,” said Kurt. “As I am happiest when creating in service of the arts.”

David Rohr, Division Director of Museum Resources, commented, “I enthusiastically welcome Lila and Kurt to their new roles on the Exhibit Services team. I know that their talent and leadership will enhance both the visual quality and visitor experience for exhibitions in the Santa Fe state museums.”

## NM Education Trust Board Announces New Member of Board of Directors

By Carolyn Fittipaldi

New Mexico Education Trust Board (NMETB) the state agency that administers New Mexico’s 529 Education Savings Program, announced that Valerie Valles-Pedroza has been appointed to the Board of Directors by the Speaker of the New Mexico House of Representatives, Javier Martinez. The Board is responsible for making rules and regulations for the continued development and implementation of the Education Trust Act.



Valles-Pedroza currently serves as the Interim Director of the Center for Excellence in Social Work at New Mexico Highlands University. With over 20 years of commitment to transforming communities across New Mexico, her career spans social work education, practice, and policy, with a focus on advancing culturally responsive and equity-driven approaches that honor lived experiences and build pathways to wellbeing. Valles-Pedroza has worked with diverse funding partners to create and establish innovative resources and programs that serve both the student body and the broader community.

Valles-Pedroza has spent over a decade in higher education teaching undergraduate and graduate social work courses, specializing in human behavior and the social environment, family systems, and critical multiculturalism. Prior to her current position, she was the Director of NMHU’s Social Work Educational Enhancement Project-Raíces.

Valles-Pedroza holds a Master of Social Work degree in Clinical Practice from New Mexico Highlands University and is a licensed Clinical Social Worker in the State of New Mexico. She was born and raised in Albuquerque’s South Valley community.

“Valerie is a welcome addition to the Education Trust Board,” said Gary L. Gordon, Board Chair. “She brings a strong commitment to supporting New Mexico communities and fostering student success in higher education. Valerie’s expertise will be beneficial as we continue our mission of making a variety of education options attainable for families by offering a flexible, low-cost, tax-efficient way to save for future education expenses.”

## Native American Specialty Court Hosts Winter Feast in Recognition of Renewed Year of Recovery

By Camille Baca

The Metropolitan Court’s Urban Native American Healing to Wellness Court hosted its annual Winter Feast on Weds. Jan. 22 to recognize a renewed year of recovery for program participants and to celebrate their progress.

The Feast began with a traditional prayer, and program participants and their families enjoyed a meal prepared by the Specialty Court Team. A former graduate of the program, who is now the Alumni Coordinator for Specialty Courts and a national speaker, spoke to participants about her journey of recovery, and a current participant of the program performed a traditional drum song.

“Our feast days give us the opportunity to come together in a traditional and meaningful way to celebrate the progress of participants who are working hard to achieve and maintain sobriety and to recognize their families who support them throughout their journey,” said Judge Renée Torres, who has presided over the Urban Native American Healing to Wellness Court for nearly eight years.

The Urban Native American Healing to Wellness Court takes a holistic approach to recovery, while also focusing on individual case management for self-identified Native Americans with two or more DWI convictions. The intensive year-long program follows the national model for treatment courts while also using a cultural values reinforcement approach to meet the needs of its participants, who are from numerous tribes. Participants engage in groups such as Food As Medicine, Women’s and Men’s Wellness Groups, Cultural Enrichment, Healing Arts, Horse Medicine, Nature Fitness, Talking Circles and other sessions designed to strengthen participants’ cultural values.

Thirty-one participants have graduated from the Specialty Court since January of 2024.



  
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# Governor Announces 26 Additional Rural Health Care Delivery Fund Recipients

*\$40.6 million awarded to rural health care organizations*

By Michael Coleman

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced on January 28th that 26 additional rural health care providers will receive a combined \$40.6 million from the Rural Health Care Delivery Fund, part of the \$46 million allocated during the 2024 legislative session.

Last fall, \$5.4 million was awarded to four rural health care organizations that demonstrated their ability to immediately implement services.

"Every New Mexican deserves access to quality health care close to home," said Gov. Lujan Grisham. "My administration is committed to supporting and strengthening the health care provider network. By reducing financial barriers for rural providers, this fund will expand access to care and positively impact the health of New Mexicans."

The funding supports a range of services statewide, including behavioral health, primary care, and maternal and child health care. This includes autism diagnostics, urgent care, mobile crisis response, diabetes clinics and more. These investments address rural health providers challenges, including geographic isolation and financial constraints, ensuring more New Mexicans can access quality care close to home.

"This funding empowers us to deliver essential healthcare services to the residents of Lea County, ensuring our community has access to comprehensive and timely primary care," said Nichole Chambers, CEO of the Guidance Center of Lea County. "This support allows us to address the unique needs of our rural population, improve health outcomes, and enhance the overall well-being of our community."

Qualified Medicaid providers who provide services including but not limited to primary care, behavioral health, maternal child health services, and specialty care were eligible to apply.

Around the country, rural health providers encounter geographic isolation and financial strain, making access to critical health care services difficult. Gov. Lujan Grisham is committed to growing rural health care infrastructure and ensuring access to these essential services for all New Mexicans.

## Funded Projects by Region Multi-Region

- Behavior Change Institute: Opening an autism diagnostic and treatment clinic in Chaves County and expanding telehealth services statewide. Estimated award \$1,003,966.

- Home Modification Solutions, LLC: Expanding home/environmental modification services in Mora, San Miguel, Socorro, and Torrance Counties. Estimated award \$216,908.
- New Mexico Premier Health, LLC: Expanding urgent care services in Cibola, Socorro, Torrance, and Valencia Counties. Estimated award \$3,296,709.
- Presbyterian Healthcare Services dba Lincoln County Medical Center: Developing behavioral health services in Lincoln and Otero Counties. Estimated award \$943,527.
- Roadrunner Home Health, LLC: Expanding home health and palliative care services in Cibola, Rio Arriba, Socorro, Torrance, and Valencia Counties. Estimated award \$4,489,500.

## Northwestern Region

- Changing Women's Initiative: Opening maternal child health clinics in Cibola and McKinley Counties and in multiple tribal communities. Estimated award \$1,019,250.
- Gallup Community Health: Expanding preventative health, radiology, and dental services in McKinley County. Estimated award \$1,221,860.
- Justice, Access, Support & Solutions for Health dba Casa De Salud: Expanding behavioral health and primary care services in Valencia County. Estimated award \$3,263,484.
- Pueblo of Jemez: Opening a diabetes wound clinic in Sandoval County. Estimated award \$4,522,000.
- To'Hajiilee Navajo Chapter: Expanding of dental services, behavioral health services, mobile health services, and traditional healing services in the Navajo Nation. Estimated award \$2,542,235.

## Northeastern Region

- Family Practice Associates of Taos: Expanding primary care services in Taos County. Estimated award \$1,000,000.
- Sunrise Clinics: Establishing school behavioral health services in Guadalupe, Mora, San Miguel, and Torrance Counties. Estimated award \$176,645.
- Peak Behavioral Health: Opening Assertive Community Treatment services in Rio Arriba County. Estimated award \$1,565,007.
- Pinwheel Healing Center, LLC: Expanding community mental health and addiction services in Union County. Estimated award \$461,600.
- Presbyterian Española Hospital: Expanding adult addiction medicine services in Rio Arriba County. Estimated award \$912,600.

## Southwestern Region

- Border Area Mental Health Services dba Southwest Counseling Center: Expanding behavioral health services and beginning children and youth

services in Doña Ana, Ana, Grant, and Hidalgo Counties. Estimated award \$967,814.

- Families and Youth, Inc.: Expanding behavioral health and family services in Doña Ana County. Estimated award \$905,248.
- Hatch Ambulance Service: Expanding non-emergency transportation services in Luna, Otero, and Sierra Counties. Estimated award \$354,204.
- Hidalgo Medical Services: Expanding primary care, behavioral health, mobile crisis response, neurological testing, and dental services in Catron, Grant, Hidalgo, Luna, Sierra, and Socorro Counties. Estimated award \$1,378,993.
- Mimbres Valley Medical Group RHC a part of Mimbres Memorial Hospital: Expanding primary care and urgent care services in Luna County. Estimated award \$427,899.
- Sierra Vista Hospital and Clinics: Expanding behavioral health services and creating a mobile crisis response service in Sierra County. Estimated award \$811,446.
- Vida Midwifery: Open a birth center



Office of the Governor

**MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM**

with maternal child health, certified midwives, well/Gyn, and contraception services in Doña Ana, Grant, Luna, Otero, and Sierra Counties. Estimated award \$615,548.

## Southeastern Region

- Guidance Center of Lea County: Expanding autism services in Lea County. Estimated award \$432,783.
- Lovelace Regional Hospital: Establishing women's health, mammography, ultrasound, and bone density services in Chaves County. Estimated award \$502,000.
- Plains Regional Medical Center: Expanding inpatient dialysis services in Curry, De Baca, Quay, and Roosevelt Counties. Estimated award \$658,000.
- Quay County: Expanding dental services in Quay County. Estimated award \$1,361,145.

To learn more about the New Mexico Rural Health Care Delivery Fund and this year's funding recipients, visit the department website at <https://www.hca.nm.gov/primary-care-council/>

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# New Mexico launches 'Careers Remediating Environmental Waste' Program to Tackle Cleanup and Workforce development

By Drew Goretzka

In a strategic move to enhance environmental sustainability and workforce development, the New Mexico Environment Department, San Juan College, and the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions have launched the Careers Remediating Environmental Waste (CREW) program. This initiative focuses on educating and training jobseekers in environmental cleanup, with an emphasis on uranium reclamation and remediation.

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) is leading the collaboration, leveraging its environmental protection and restoration expertise to develop an impactful curriculum. The department will provide technical guidance and help potential employers in environmental remediation field.

San Juan College (SJC) in Farmington will host the training program, offering state-of-the-art facilities and a supportive learning environment. SJC will play a role in preparing a skilled workforce to meet the state's environmental challenges. The first classes are

scheduled to begin in February 2025.

"We are excited to be a part of this partnership opportunity. San Juan College has a rich history of innovation, industry collaboration, and preparing our graduates with the in-demand skills," said Dr. Lorenzo Reyes, San Juan College Dean of Workforce and Economic Development.

The New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions (DWS) will coordinate Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act activities, ensuring participants the training necessary to meet the state's broader employment and economic goals. Eligible participants may be receiving a \$2,000 monthly stipend along with assistance for childcare, housing, and travel expenses. See below for information on how to schedule an appointment with SJC staff to determine program eligibility.

"Through a collaborative and inclusive process, the state workforce plan identified climate resilience and natural resource management as two top areas for workforce development," said DWS Cabinet Secretary Sarita

Nair. "CREW will be a strong step towards meeting our goal to invest in the talent that will take care of the state that we love."

CREW is designed to address dual objectives: environmental restoration and job creation. By focusing on practical skills for environmental cleanup, the program prepares participants for careers in a sector that is increasingly crucial for the state's environmental and public health.

State Representative D. Wonda Johnson, representing McKinley and San Juan Counties, sponsored legislation in 2022 that the governor signed, directing NMED to lead statewide efforts to cleanup and reclaim former uranium mine and mill sites.

"Witnessing the CREW program come to life is a dream realized for many of us who have been at the forefront of environmental advocacy in our communities," said Rep. D. Wonda Johnson "This program is not just about cleaning up; it's about empowerment, about offering meaningful careers to our people while caring for Mother Earth. My heart swells with



pride and gratitude for this achievement, and I am thrilled for the opportunities it will create for our communities."

Crew is a forward-thinking effort to address New Mexico's environmental and public health challenges while fostering job growth in an important sector, particularly the legacy of uranium mining. Participants will gain hands-on experience and be equipped for careers in environmental science and remediation, areas of increasing importance to the state.

The program emphasizes New Mexico's proactive approach to addressing the environment legacy of uranium mining and demonstrates the state's commitment to ecological restoration and sustainable practices.

For more information about the CREW program or to learn how to participate, please Email: [careercenter@sanjuancollege.edu](mailto:careercenter@sanjuancollege.edu) or call: 505-566-3252 (Center for Student Careers & Employment).

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## Higher Education Regent Nominations

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced 11 regent nominations for eight higher education institutes across the state. These board appointments fall under Eastern New Mexico University, New Mexico Highlands University, New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, New Mexico Military Institute, New Mexico School for the Deaf, New Mexico State University, Northern New Mexico College, and the University of New Mexico.

The nominees, a cohort of insightful individuals with diverse experiences in the education field, will contribute knowledge and perspective vital to the cultivation and growth of higher education in our state.

Following recent resignations, an announcement regarding nominations for the Western New Mexico University Board of Regents will be released in the near future.

Gov. Lujan Grisham announced the following appointee nominations:



Eastern New Mexico University

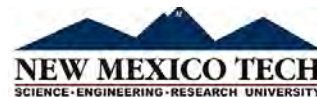
- The reappointment of Lance A. Pyle, he currently serves as Curry County manager. He has an associate's degree in business administration from Clovis Community College and a bachelor's degree of business administration from Eastern New Mexico University. He served on the village of Melrose city council and was mayor of Melrose from 2006 to 2010.



New Mexico Highlands University

- Gary Tripp has an extensive background in education and administration, including roles such as director of development for New Mexico at Physical Science Research Associates, Ltd., and a consultant for Cooperative Educational Services. He has also served as human resource director and chief strategy planning and engagement officer for Rio Rancho Public Schools, superintendent and principal at the Bureau of Indian Education, and

executive director of the New Mexico Activities Association.



New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology

- The reappointment of Dr. Yolanda King holds a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from the University of New Mexico and currently serves as a senior technical and programmatic advisor for Engility

Corporation. She has extensive experience, including roles as technical director at the Defense Threat Reduction Agency and director of Engineering & Technical Management at the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center. Dr. King is a fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and has received numerous awards for her contributions to science and technology.



New Mexico Military Institute

- Thomas E. Jennings brings a wealth of experience to his candidacy for the Board of Regents of the New Mexico Military Institute. With a strong background in public service, including his tenure as mayor of Roswell and as a city council member, Jennings has demonstrated leadership in local governance and community development.

His extensive involvement in various organizations, such as the Roswell Chaves County Economic Development Foundation, Roswell SERTOMA Club and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southeastern New Mexico, highlights his commitment to community service. Jennings' career also includes significant contributions to the oil and gas industry as a petroleum land manager, showcasing his versatility and dedication to both public and private sectors.

- Brigadier General Kallie D. Kuehl is a highly accomplished military leader with over 20 years of experience across military, federal, and corporate sectors. With a distinguished career as a senior military officer and legal expert, she has expertise in acquisition and contract law, government fiscal law, and complex civil litigation. Currently serving as senior center attorney at Kirtland Air Force Base, Kuehl provides strategic legal counsel and manages a team of legal professionals. Her extensive military service includes roles as chief of staff and state staff judge advocate for the New Mexico Air National Guard, where she oversees strategic vision and legal guidance for over 1,000 personnel.

Continued on page 26

## Higher Education Regent Nominations



New Mexico School for the Deaf

- Rosemary J. Gallegos has extensive experience in

the field of education for the deaf and hard of hearing. She served as superintendent of the New Mexico School for the Deaf from July 2015 to June 2021 and previously held various roles including assistant superintendent and director of Early Childhood Programs at the same institution. Her career spans over three decades, including roles as a teacher, coordinator, and consultant, with a strong focus on early intervention and special education. She also holds a doctoral degree in educational leadership from the University of New Mexico and has contributed significantly to professional organizations and publications in her field.



New Mexico State University

- Ricardo F. Gonzales is a seasoned public policy and communications leader with over

two decades of experience in legislative and regulatory strategy. Currently serving as the regional vice president for New Mexico at El Paso Electric, he leads government affairs and community engagement efforts across multiple states. Gonzales has a strong track record of negotiating impactful legislation, such as the Energy Transition Act, and developing economic development strategies for Southern New Mexico and El Paso, Texas. His previous roles include director of state legislative affairs at New Mexico State

University and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, where he successfully secured significant funding for statewide improvements. Gonzales is also recognized for his expertise in public relations, corporate advocacy, and non-profit development.



Northern New Mexico College

- Ron J. Lovato has extensive experience in leadership and management within

tribal and educational settings. As the chief executive officer of Tsay Corporation since 2021 and from 2013 to 2018, he has overseen the development of numerous business ventures, including casinos, construction services, and retail developments. Lovato previously served as governor of Ohkay Owingeh on two separate occasions (2011-2012 and 2019-2020), where he managed all aspects of tribal government and collaborated on key financial matters. His earlier roles include directing educational programs at Santa Fe Indian School, where he managed academic and operational aspects of the school, including significant development initiatives.

- The reappointment of Erica Rita Velarde is a seasoned energy engineer with a robust background in both engineering and project management. Currently serving as an energy engineer with the General Services Department's Facilities Management Division, she has a proven track record in assessing and improving facility energy efficiency. Previously, she worked as a mechanical engineer and program manager with the Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department, where she managed DOE competitive grants

## (Continued from page 25)

and led energy efficiency projects. Her experience also includes roles at the New Mexico Department of Transportation, where she handled bridge construction projects and legislative coordination. Velarde holds a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of New Mexico and an associate's degree in business administration from Northern New Mexico College.



University of New Mexico

- Christina R. Campos, MBA, FACHE, is a seasoned

healthcare executive with extensive experience leading Guadalupe County Hospital in Santa Rosa, where she has served as administrator since 2004. Under her leadership, the hospital successfully transitioned to a new facility in 2011 and consistently achieved high standards in patient satisfaction and financial strength, earning multiple awards. In addition to her role in healthcare administration, Campos has been actively in-

involved in various professional and civic activities, including serving on the Board of Trustees for the American Hospital Association and participating in numerous state and national health-related committees.

- Patricia G. Williams is an experienced civil litigator with over two decades of legal practice at Wiggins, Williams & Wiggins, P.C. in Albuquerque. Her expertise spans complex commercial litigation, including contract and construction law, business torts, and employment law. Williams is particularly knowledgeable in tribal law, regularly representing Navajo Nation entities and schools in legal matters. Her previous experience includes serving as an assistant city attorney for Albuquerque, where she handled civil litigation for the city. Williams holds a J.D. from the University of New Mexico School of Law and has been actively involved in various community organizations, including the Navajo Nation Bar Association and the New Mexico Biopark Society.

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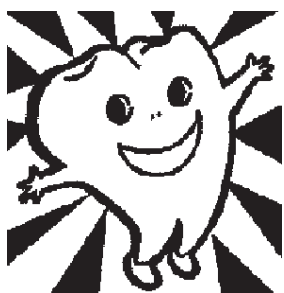
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## Turning Funding Into Homes Across New Mexico

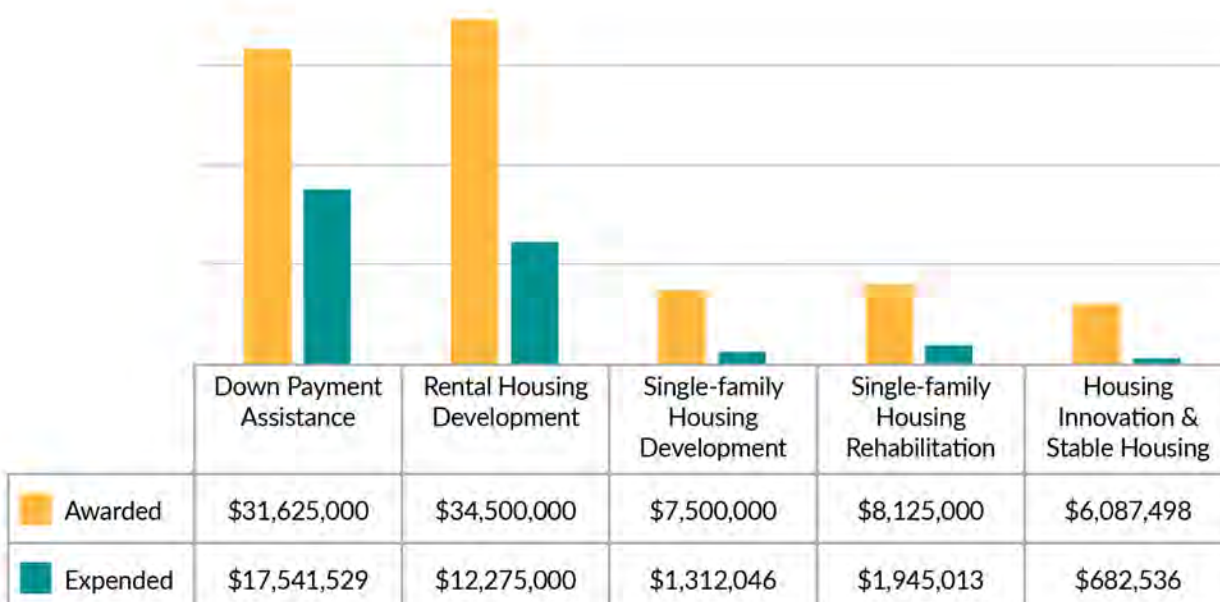
In the 17 months since funding from the New Mexico Housing Trust Fund severance tax bond earmark legislation became available, Housing New Mexico has allocated **85%** to various programs and activities, awarded **73%** to grantees, and expended **28%** of the **\$122.15 million** allocations. This includes \$88.57 million from the severance tax bond earmark (state fiscal years 2024 and 2025) and the one-time \$50 million appropriation made available July 1, 2024. These performance metrics demonstrate Housing New Mexico's capacity to urgently deploy funding and serve households in need.

### 2024 Production Highlights



- 18,981** Families served
- 5,769** Homes produced, financed or preserved
- 940** New rental and single-family homes financed
- \$736,970,000** Total funding administered

*Funding Awarded and Expended Since July 2023 from the 2024 General Fund Appropriation, and State Fiscal 2024 and 2025 Severance Tax Bond Allocations*



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# Who Do You Trust?

By Nick Mandel

With the legislature now in session and recent national and regional events taking place, the topic of trust and confidence is timely.



Meanwhile, for the rest of New Mexico's retired public sector employees and educators, the annual cost of living increases, first at 3% annually,

then 2%, have all been eliminated. Now, most retirees have received a minuscule 0.5% in the last two years, at best. The explanation for this is to keep the pension fund solvent. It should be noted that educators (ERA) pension and their overall retiree benefits are much less generous than the PERA. Disclosure, I am a retired public sector employee.

Gallup polling provides research and data that further reinforces the mistrust, skepticism, and negativity highlighted above. If you are a congressional member, lawyer, office holder, or newspaper reporter, the public views these professions with an extremely low level of ethics and honesty. While I am not a reporter, does that low ranking apply to me? Let me know.

Going up the scale are medical doctors, military officers, and pharmacists with levels in the mid-fifties of trust and honesty.

But the stars are grade school-teachers and nurses with trust levels in the low sixties and seventies. Yes, my grandson has a star, second-grade teacher. Appreciation to all the dedicated educators in Santa Fe and the state.

While the Gallup polling is only a snapshot in time and feelings will change, it is uncomfortable to ask why our elected officials, our local and state officeholders, and even the media are held to a lower level of trust and honesty than nursing home operators and auto mechanics. Nothing wrong with those professions. Rather the question asked is why is the work that has a broader impact on society perceived more negatively and with distrust? What is being done wrong or needs to be improved upon? Collectively we have a state of trust- or perhaps mistrust among each other.

In polling dating back to 2018, Pew Research reported that distrust makes the act of problem-solving harder, not only in carrying out the responsibilities of government, but among each other as citizens. That low trust makes it more difficult to solve the bigger problems that exist among us.

Recently, the Trump administration issued an order pausing federal programs. This order caused a lot of confusion and worries about select programs. Can we trust the federal government? Or will Lucy pull the football from under Charlie Brown, again?

At the higher education level, can we expect New Mexicans to trust the university regent system, particularly the former Western New Mexico University regents? How does a university president resign after financial malfeasance, and is then offered a \$1.9 million dollar severance buyout followed by a teaching position of \$200,000 annually for five years by the same regents? His contract structure allowed for a buyout of less than \$600,000 according to reports.

Closer to home at our state capitol, Senate Joint Resolution SJR01 introduced by Democratic senators and representatives would create a commission to amend the state constitution allowing New Mexico legislators a paid salary. While some argue that New Mexico, being the only state in the nation that does not pay legislators a salary is a practice that should change and is long overdue, that thorny issue of trust resurfaces.

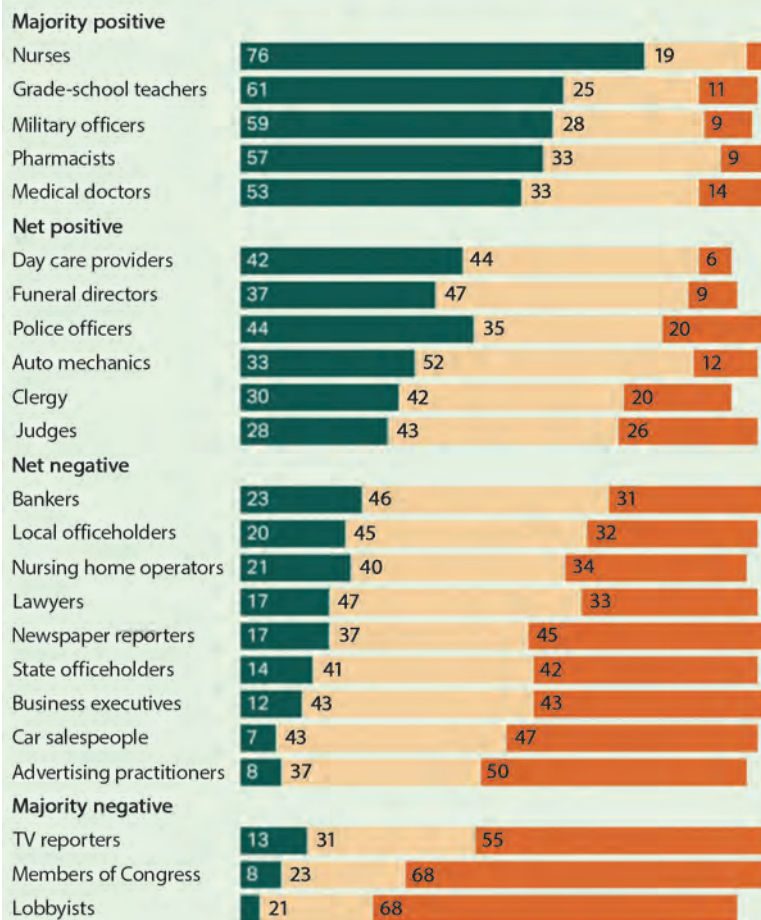
For example, in 2022 and 2023, legislators passed an enormous increase in pensions for themselves. Milan Simonich columnist for the New Mexican provides the details. While legislators created a modest pension benefit for themselves in the 1960s, with two recent increases in 2022 and 2023, lawmakers have struck gold. In 2022, legislators passed a 27% bump in pension benefits. In 2023, they followed that with a 50% increase in pension benefits. It is like betting on Apple, Amazon, and Google before the stock explodes with a guaranteed revenue for life.

Given these two increases, he writes, a senator or representative after 20 years of service would receive a \$62,000 salary, and one with 30 years of experience would exceed a \$92,000 pension. Hefty pension for thirty or sixty plus some extra days of part-time work. How many New Mexicans have those kinds of benefits?

## 2025 Honesty and Ethics of Professions Ratings

Please tell me how you would rate the honesty and ethical standards of people in these different fields - - very high, high, average, low, or very low?

■ % High/Very high ■ % Average ■ % Low/Very low

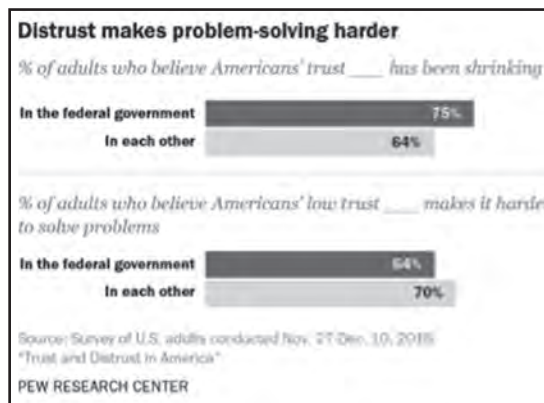


Professions are listed in order of new % high (%high/very high minus % low/very low). % No opinion is not shown.

Dec 2-18, 2024

Gallup

Unfortunately, that trend continues to accelerate leading to a future with uncertainty and questions. It is reported that in the countries of Columbia and Peru, there is a less than 10% trust factor for government and established authorities. While our institutions are still considerably far and away from those percentages, the data and evidence show us falling in that declining, failing direction.



Authors William Eggers, Bruce Chew, Joshua Knight and, RJ Krawiec writing in Deloitte Insights describe the failure in the trust of government, but among each other, as a "crisis of trust."

They offer four signals of trust, reminding us that trust can be rebuilt with the following;

- Humanity- the belief that we care for each other offering fairness and empathy, whatever our individual preferences,
- Transparency, - sharing information, our motives, decisions, and those choices as it relates to budget, policy and, other items in language that is straight and forward,
- Capability, -the expectation, to carry out the policy and intent in the language as described, and,
- Reliability- that we will do what we say we will do and be trusted to do so.

Our trust towards government, institutions and among each other needs to be rebuilt. We need to change the direction of this fundamental pillar to advance and flourish. Our current path of mistrust is not only unsustainable, but it also leads to further polarization, skepticism, and cynicism. By maintaining our current path, we will continue with the downward spiral all of us are so dissatisfied with.

Nick Mandel can be reached at [promandel@gmail.com](mailto:promandel@gmail.com)

# Managing Investments At Any Age

By Karyn Lujan

Your plans and goals may change as you move through your life. So, too, should your investing strategy. No matter your age, it's important to regularly review your investment strategy to remain aligned with your financial goals and risk tolerance. Here are some key considerations for managing investments at any age.

## Build a strong foundation in your 20s and 30s

In the early years of your career, you may be learning to manage expenses and build a life for you and your family. While retirement probably feels far away, one of the most important moves you can make financially is to treat your investments as long-term instruments meant to help achieve your long-term financial goals. Investing at this stage means that your portfolio can handle more risk and withstand short-term market volatility to potentially generate returns over time. With longer to invest and remain invested, you can also potentially

benefit from compounded growth, which can help boost your investing power and build a strong foundation for your future. Be sure to also take your current needs, risk tolerance, and any changes in your financial circumstances into account when you're assessing your investments.

## Grow and protect your wealth in your 40s and 50s

As you progress in your career and your income increases, it's important to continue growing your investments while also protecting what you've accumulated. This may be a good time to reassess your risk tolerance and make any necessary adjustments to your portfolio. That could mean beginning to transition from a more aggressive to a more conservative portfolio to reduce some investment risk. With preservation in mind, it's also wise to review your insurance coverage and estate planning documents to ensure your assets are protected.

## Preserve and distribute wealth in your 60s and beyond

As you approach retirement, preserving your wealth becomes more important. You'll want to plan your retirement distributions for maximum tax-efficiency and prepare mentally, and financially, to live on a fixed income. Before and after retirement, your investments should also be fairly low risk to ensure you have the retirement income that works for your lifestyle. You may want to include more bonds and stable value investments in your mix to lower your market risk and create a steady income for your distributions. However, keeping some money in stocks can help keep your portfolio diversified and protect your savings from the impact of inflation. It's also important to develop a withdrawal strategy for retirement that balances your income needs with your goal of preserving principal. Consider working with a financial professional to create a comprehensive plan that includes Social Security benefits, pension income, and other sources of retire-

## PERA SmartSave

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Managing investments requires ongoing attention and adjustments may be needed at any age. By understanding these unique considerations at various stages of life, you can potentially develop a strategy that helps you achieve your financial goals and secure your future. Your local Retirement Plan representatives can help provide you with guidance on the journey to and through retirement. Connect with them to review and discuss your investing strategy.



Northern NM | Peter Rappmund | (480) 877-2104  
Peter.Rappmund@voya.com  
Central NM | Paul Llum | (505) 699-8548  
Paul.Llum@voya.com  
Southern NM | Ron Uribe | (915) 701-4304  
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\*Source: 4Q24 PERA SmartSave Newsletter



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## State Awards Job Training Funds To Support Up To 122 New Mexico Employees

*Economic Development Department approves \$2.2 M in training reimbursements for December*

**By Bruce Krasnow**

For the final month of 2024, the Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP) board approved \$2.2 million in reimbursement funds to support up to 122 trainees and interns, announced the New Mexico Economic Development (EDD) Cabinet Secretary-Designate Rob Black.

In the 2024 calendar year, JTIP approved training funds for 1,467 full-time positions and 30 interns. During this time, Step Up funding offered businesses assistance in training 177 employees, giving them opportunities for promotion from within.

"JTIP is a vital tool for businesses who seek to grow their workforce or upskill existing employees in New Mexico," Secretary-Designate Black said. "Eighty-four businesses benefited from JTIP assistance in 2024, supporting high-paying jobs in key industry sectors throughout the state."

"To date, more than 75 of our new employees have participated in training supported by the JTIP program. This initiative has not only created new, high-quality jobs but also provided an opportunity for local workers to

gain specialized life-long trade skills," Renee Heath, senior HR director at Arcosa Wind Towers said. "Arcosa's involvement in the JTIP program has not only been beneficial to Arcosa but also has had a broader positive impact on the local community by providing the economic stability supported by well-paying jobs."

The December JTIP awards went to the following companies:

- **AerSale, Inc.**, Roswell, 32 trainees at an average wage of \$24 and 5 interns at an average wage of \$20. Award: \$564,904. AerSale provides services in support of the aviation industry with a focus on the maintenance and modification of narrow-body and wide-body aircraft.
- **Arcosa Wind Towers**, Belen, 42 trainees at an average wage of \$23. Award: \$520,511. Arcosa is a provider of infrastructure-related products and solutions in construction, energy, and transportation markets.
- **BlackVe, Inc.**, Albuquerque, 15 trainees at an average wage of \$61. Award: \$525,208. BlackVe is a national security-focused space company applying cutting-edge design, manu-

facturing, and production technologies to the process of designing, manufacturing, and operating satellites.

- **Broken Arrow Glass Recycling**, Cuyamungue, 3 trainees at an average wage of \$30. Award: \$60,513. Broken Arrow Glass Recycling (BAGR) is a creative glass recycling studio providing residential curbside glass collection services in the Santa Fe and Taos areas.
- **Century Sign Builders**, Albuquerque, 1 trainee at a wage of \$49. Award: \$29,438. Century Sign Builders designs, manufactures, and installs interior and exterior signage nationwide, handling signage from design to installation and guaranteeing its work for the life of the building.
- **Gridworks, Inc.**, Albuquerque, Step Up award: \$17,715. Gridworks provides turnkey solar and energy storage solutions for developers and utility clients through engineering, procurement, construction (EPC), and operations and maintenance (O&M).
- **Kairos Power LLC**, Albuquerque, 10 trainees at an average wage of \$60. Award: \$344,378. Kairos Power is an advanced energy technology and engineering company launched



Broken Arrow Glass Recycling Company is creating a closed-loop system for glass waste in NM. Among the many uses for recycled glass is its application in commercial and residential landscaping. Photo courtesy of Broken Arrow Glass Recycling Company.

out of a broad research effort at U.S. universities and national laboratories.

- **Knight Scientific Systems, LLC**, Albuquerque, 2 trainees at an average wage of \$43 and 2 interns at an average wage of \$34. Award: \$85,677. Knight Scientific Systems is developing multi-spectral Object Detection (OD) tools to bring the power of machine learning to all imaging wavebands.
- **Mindscape Ventures, LLC**, Hobbs, 10 trainees at an average wage of \$17. Award: \$77,673. Mindscape Venture offers a diverse selection of high-quality cannabis products.

*Learn more about the Job Training Incentive Program at [edd.newmexico.gov/jtip](http://edd.newmexico.gov/jtip).*



Community Spotlight

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**Founded in 1993**, Junior Achievement of New Mexico has been empowering young people to own their economic success for over 30 years. What began as a small initiative to inspire youth to understand the value of work and money has grown into a statewide movement reaching thousands of students annually. Through partnerships with schools, volunteers, and businesses, JA of NM delivers hands-on, experiential programs that focus on financial literacy, work readiness, and entrepreneurship.

These programs are designed to prepare students for life beyond the classroom by teaching them critical skills like budgeting, career planning, and business development. With the help of community volunteers, students gain real-world insights and learn how to set and achieve personal and professional goals.

To get involved, consider volunteering, sponsoring a program, or donating. Visit [newmexicoja.org](http://newmexicoja.org) to learn more about how you can help equip New Mexico's youth with the tools they need to succeed.



**In 2023 and 2024 combined, HOLMANS USA donated over \$350,000 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](mailto:community@holmans.com).

### February is American Heart Month

By David Barre

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men, women and most racial and ethnic groups in the United States and the leading cause of death of New Mexicans in 2022.

“This February we are encouraging New Mexicans to take steps to protect their heart health,” said Dr. Miranda Durham, chief medical officer for the New Mexico Department of Health. “

High blood pressure is the leading cause of heart disease and nearly half of adults in the United States have high blood pressure. In New Mexico, 31.8% of the population had high blood pressure in 2021.

There are steps New Mexicans can take to lower their risk of high blood pressure and heart disease:

- Eat healthy: Choose healthy meal and snack options including plenty of fruits and vegetables as well as foods high in fiber and protein. Avoid too much salt and saturated fat.
- Keep yourself at a healthy weight: Being overweight increases your risk of high blood pressure.
- Be physically active: Every week adults should get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise, such as brisk walking or bicycling.
- No smoking: Smoking, even occasionally, raises your blood pressure and puts you at a higher risk for heart attack and stroke.
- Limit alcohol intake: Too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure.
- Get enough sleep: Getting a healthy amount of sleep, seven to eight hours a night, helps keep your heart and blood vessels healthy.

For more information about heart disease visit the Centers for Disease Control, [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)



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## Metro Court's Free Civil Legal Clinics Continue throughout 2025

By **Camille Baca**

The Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court will continue to host its free monthly Civil Legal Clinics throughout 2025. Volunteer torneys will be available each month by phone to provide free legal advice in the following areas: Landlord/Tenant Matters, Consumer Rights, Contract Disputes, Employee Wage Claims, and Consumer Debt.



The clinics are held telephonically on the second Friday of each month from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Consultations are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, and the clinic can serve up to 25 individuals each month. Participants should have all documents and paperwork pertaining to their case on-hand during their telephonic consultation. Spanish-language interpreters are available upon request.

“More than 13,000 civil cases were filed in the Metropolitan Court last fiscal year, with litigants in the majority of those small claims cases representing themselves. Our free monthly civil legal clinics serve individuals who may not otherwise have access to an attorney,” said Chief Judge Joshua J. Sánchez.

To sign up, or if you are an attorney interested in volunteering, please call the court's Self Help Center at 505-841-9817.

The legal clinics are sponsored by the State Bar of New Mexico. The Metropolitan Court has been hosting the clinics since 2017.

## New AgrAbility Exhibit Showcases Resilience Of Farmers And Ranchers

By **Allison Penn**

Farm and ranch work is long, difficult and dangerous, especially when the person doing it is challenged with a disability. New Mexico AgrAbility, the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum (NMFRHM) new exhibit, sheds light on how people with disabilities in rural areas gain access to technology, specialists such as occupational therapists, and other programs to maintain their livelihood and agricultural production while improving the quality of their lives.



The Action Trackstander helps Tiffany Sánchez navigate the rough terrain of her farm, 2024. El Palacio, Photo by Anna Lisa Padilla.

AgrAbility is a U.S. Department of Agriculture program to assist farmers, food growers, and farm families who are touched by a disability, chronic health problem, or just getting older, which affects their ability to take part in an agricultural lifestyle. Imagine having a leg prosthesis and trying to drive a farm tractor, or a bad back and trying to ride a horse to round up cattle. People have overcome those challenges with help from the Agr

The AgrAbility exhibit debuted to the public on Jan. 23 and will continue through December. Visitors can engage with stories about farmers and ranchers who have overcome physical and mental challenges in their pursuit of their agricultural careers. The exhibit features a tractor simulator, which is an actual cab of a tractor designed for individuals with physical barriers, fiberglass cows, and a hoop house to immerse the visitors in what AgrAbility is all about.

“With diminishing numbers of individuals pursuing or continuing careers in agriculture, these programs provide an important resource for people’s involvement in food production,” Nathan Japel, NMFRHM curator, said. “We are happy to share the resilience and tenacity of these individuals in their pursuits of food, fiber and fuel production. We hope our visitors will be able to spread the word about the resources and possibilities available to everyone.”

The New Mexico AgrAbility Project is a partnership of New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension, New Mexico Technology Assistance Program, Mandy’s Farm, and the University of New Mexico Occupational Therapy Graduate Program. For more information visit, <https://elpalacio.org/2024/12/from-disability-to-agrability/>



### Santa Fe County Assessor Isaiah F. Romero Elected Chair of New Mexico Counties Assessors' Affiliate

#### Assessors' Affiliate

By Ivan Barry

Santa Fe County Assessor Isaiah F. Romero has been elected as the new Chair of the New Mexico Counties Assessors' Affiliate (NMCAA), a prominent organization supporting county assessors nationwide. Romero succeeds Bernalillo County Assessor Damian Lara, who was appointed Vice Chair after serving as Chair. Assessor Romero, who previously served as Vice Chair of the Affiliate, was elected during the New Mexico Counties 2025 Legislative Conference held in Santa Fe on January 23, 2025.



"I am honored to be chosen as the new Chair of the Assessors' Affiliate," said Romero. "I look forward to collaborating with my colleagues to continue strengthening the assessors' role in our communities. I also want to thank Assessor Lara and all the board members for their leadership and dedication. Together, we will advance the work of county assessors across New Mexico."

The NMCAA Board also re-elected key members to continue their roles: Lucas Fresquez, Deputy Assessor of Los Alamos County, remains Treasurer, and Tim Bernal, Deputy Assessor of Valencia County, continues as Secretary.

The New Mexico County Assessors' Affiliate is committed to supporting county assessors throughout the state, providing a platform for collaboration, advocacy, and professional development.

### The NM Film Office announces FOX series "The Cleaning Lady" returns to New Mexico

By Dolores Martinez

The New Mexico Film Office announced that season four of the FOX television series "The Cleaning Lady" began principal photography in October in and around Albuquerque.



Season four of "The Cleaning Lady" will continue the emotionally driven character drama about Thony (Élodie Yung), a Cambodian-Filipino former surgeon who is currently living in Las Vegas on an expired visa with her son Luca. Although she tried making a living as a cleaning service worker alongside her sister-in-law, Fiona (Martha Millan), Thony was pressured into working for the criminal underbelly of Las Vegas after she witnessed a murder. The longer she lives this double life, the deeper entwined she becomes in the criminal world and the further she crosses the moral line. "The Cleaning Lady" continues to examine healthcare, immigration, and the struggles and triumphs of the human spirit and the American Dream.

In addition to Yung, the series will also star Martha Millan ("Succession"), Kate del Castillo ("Queen of the South"), Khalen Roman Sanchez ("The Cleaning Lady"), Faith Bryant ("The Cleaning Lady"), Sean Lew ("World of Dance"), and Santiago Cabrera ("Land of Women").

"The Cleaning Lady" is based on the original Argentine series and produced by Warner Bros. Television and FOX Entertainment. Daniel Cerone ("The Blacklist"), Tim Busfield ("The West Wing"), and Eddie Serrano ("White Collar") produce the series.

"The return of 'The Cleaning Lady' to New Mexico will continue to boost our local economy and create jobs for the industry," Steve Graham, New Mexico Film Office director, stated. "Our state's world-class crew base, qualified production facilities, competitive incentives, and diverse landscapes have proven ideal for representing various locations in previous seasons of 'The Cleaning Lady,' and we are excited for their return for season four."

The production will employ over 2,500 New Mexicans, including 256 crew members, 6 principal actors, and approximately 2,384 background talent.

For more information, contact [cleaningladyproduction@gmail.com](mailto:cleaningladyproduction@gmail.com)

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## Lt. Governor Howie Morales Elected to National Aerospace States Association (ASA) Executive Board

*Helping Advance Jobs & Key New Mexico Industry*

By James Farrell



Lieutenant Governor Howie Morales has been elected to the executive committee of the Aero-

space States Association (ASA), a national organization working to advance aerospace and aviation in member states and throughout the nation. Morales will serve as Secretary of the association, along with Lt. Governor Winsome Earle-Sears of Virginia as Chair, Lt. Governor Josh Tenorio of Guam as Vice Chair, and Mal McGhee of the Poarch Creek Tribe as Treasurer. ASA promotes New Mexico and other states, territories, and Tribe-based perspectives in federal aerospace & aviation policy development.

"I am honored to be selected to serve on the leadership team of the Aerospace States Association, a

nation-wide organization of leaders whose work positively impacts our own state. New Mexico is a trailblazer in aerospace industry, business and job development. Our broad skies and endless horizons inspired us to build the world's first purpose-built commercial spaceport, Spaceport America, a success story. The dream of opening access to space to all citizens is now a reality that was first made possible in New Mexico. Aerospace also ignites children's minds powerfully. ASA's commitment to growing STEM education in classrooms, and its push to expand access to space for everyone are major reasons I have been active in ASA since the beginning of my term as Lt. Governor. I look forward to helping to boost this exciting industry and great education outreach programs for students," said Lt. Governor Howie Morales.

The Aerospace States Associa-

tion (ASA) is a non-partisan 501c (3) organization comprised of Lieutenant Governors, Governor appointed delegates, state legislators, territorial and Tribal government representatives and associate members from aerospace organizations and academia working to advance aerospace and aviation in member states and throughout the nation. ASA is the only aerospace advocacy organization promoting State, territory, and Tribe based perspectives in federal aerospace & aviation policy development.

In addition to being significant employers and economic drivers within the state, New Mexico's aerospace businesses are proving to be committed and generous corporate citizens. They are helping fight the wildfires. Lockheed and other ASA members are deploying assets to help combat recent fires in New Mexico and in California, for instance.



"Not only estab-

lished companies are making waves in New Mexico's aerospace industry. The state's startup scene is thriving, with new companies developing innovative new technologies and business models. Our universities and research centers are also contributing to the industry's growth, conducting cutting-edge research and educating the next generation of aerospace professionals. New Mexico is fortunate to have such a significant aerospace influence in our state, and with strong support from the State, the industry is thriving today and can continue to provide high-paying jobs, long-term investment, and positive impact to our state for decades to come," Morales added.

Visit [www.aerostates.org](http://www.aerostates.org) for more information on the Aerospace States Association.

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Sauce: 14 oz (I use Bueno frozen red chile), mild, medium or hot, or a combination; 4 cups water, 1 medium onion, minced, 2 garlic cloves, minced, 1 tsp salt or to taste  
Filling and assembly: 1 lb ground beef, 1/2 white onion, finely chopped, 12 corn tortillas (I prefer Albuquerque yellow corn tortillas), oil for frying the corn tortillas, 1 lb shredded mild cheddar cheese (the amount depends on how much cheese you want...some for stuffing and some for topping), salt and pepper to season the ground beef, prepared red chile.

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

For the Red Chile: Cook your meat in a skillet with salt and pepper just until lightly browned. Place red chile (thaw out day before) into a sauce pan, add water, add ground beef, add the onion, garlic and salt, bring to a boil and let simmer for 25 minutes You want it pourable, not thick. (add additional water if needed)

For the filling and assembly: Heat a small skillet with a little oil. When sizzling, place a corn tortilla in the oil for just a second to soften and remove to a paper towel. Set the tortillas aside. shredded cheese and chop your onions. Preheat your oven to 450 degrees. Get a large baking dish or individual plates if you prefer. Line up all your ingredients. Tortilla, chile, cheese, onion (I like flat enchiladas). Place a tortilla in baking dish or plate, add your desired amount of chile, cheese and onion. Repeat Ladle some of the sauce over the enchiladas, insuring the entire enchilada is covered in a little sauce. You can cover if you really like them cheesy, but remember you have cheese in the filling. Place the enchiladas in the hot oven and cook just until your cheese has melted.

## NMDOT D1 Employees of the Month January 2025

By Ami Evans



**Employee of the Month-Jacob Garcia 41-49**



Jacob's efforts in organizing and cleaning the yards, removing accumulated junk, and improving the overall work environment has not gone unnoticed. Jacob made a lasting difference in our operations. He is truly a wealth of knowledge, always willing to help and guide others. Whether it's assisting those in need or teaching someone how to complete a task properly, Jacob has shown to be a valuable asset to the patrol team.

One specific instance that stands out is Jacob's participation in the Career Day in Deming last year. He stepped up to assist with the event and was a natural with the kids. Jacob's enthusiasm, willingness to engage with them, and ability to explain career opportunities in our patrols was exceptional. It was clear to everyone that he was not only passionate about his work but also dedicated to sharing that passion with the next generation. Jacob made a real difference that day, and it was a pleasure to work alongside him.



**Supervisor of the Month-Jason Polanco 41-80**

Jason is always willing to go above and beyond to assist any employee on any crew. Whether it's helping with paperwork, addressing administrative issues, or providing training on equipment, he consistently shows up and gives his best. What stands out is that he never turns anyone away. Whether

it's an employee, contractor, or a member of the public, Jason takes the time to answer questions to the best of his ability. And when he doesn't have an answer, he will go the extra mile to find it.

Jason's unwavering commitment to helping others, regardless of title or position, has truly set a standard for all of us. Jason shows that leadership is not just about managing tasks, but about supporting people and making a difference in their work and lives. Jason's professionalism, dignity, and respect for others has earned him the admiration of everyone who works with him.

### Crew of the Month-B & G 41-26

Building & Grounds Maintenance Team has received this recognition due to the outstanding work they do maintaining and enhancing the cleanliness, safety, and overall appearance of our facilities. Their responsiveness, attention to detail, and commitment to keeping our facilities tidy and organized—while still managing their regular maintenance duties—has been exemplary.



In addition to this team's everyday work, their collaboration with other departments has been outstanding. This team handles maintenance requests with efficiency and care, and their proactive approach to preventive maintenance has helped prevent larger issues down the line. This team's flexibility and willingness to tackle last-minute tasks without hesitation speaks volumes about their commitment to their job duties and the team.

Your dedication was also evident when you dropped everything to assist Safety with the design, building, and installation of bed organizers. Your team's teamwork and resourcefulness are truly appreciated by everyone at NMDOT.

## Housing New Mexico launches Zero Interest Homebuilder Program

By Kristie Garcia



Housing New Mexico has launched a new program to address the shortage of affordable entry-level housing available to low- and moderate-income homebuyers in the state. The Zero Interest Homebuilder Program (ZIHP) is a loan product that offers interest-free construction financing through the New Mexico Housing Trust Fund.

These loans are available to nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, governmental housing agencies, regional housing authorities, governmental entities, governmental instrumentalities, tribal governments, tribal housing agencies, builders, single-family developers, corporations, limited liability companies, partnerships, joint ventures, syndicates and other eligible associations or entities.

As home price increases outpace wage growth, the ability to achieve homeownership becomes more difficult, resulting in a huge need for affordable housing.

"With this new program, our intention is to promote the development and sale of entry-level homes priced appropriately for their respective market," said Housing New Mexico Executive Director/CEO Isidoro Hernandez. "We are optimistic that eligible for-profit and nonprofit developers and builders will take advantage of this zero-percent interest rate construction loan, and ultimately, provide more homeownership opportunities for New Mexicans."

ZIHP development and construction loans may be used to assist in financing a wide range of activities to increase affordable homeownership opportunities, including costs of on-site infrastructure necessary to support the development of affordable single-family lots and/or the construction of affordable homes.

Complete applications must be received no later than 60 days prior to a regularly scheduled Housing New Mexico Board of Directors meeting to be considered at that meeting. Meetings are typically held the third Wednesday of the month. To learn more about eligible loan applicants, loan terms, application procedures, eligible home types, eligible homebuyers, sales price limitations and other details, visit the Housing New Mexico website.

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# Big Brothers Big Sisters

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Join us for **Bowl for Kids' Sake**, Big Brothers Big Sisters' largest annual fundraising campaign, supporting mentoring matches between caring adult volunteers and vulnerable children in New Mexico!

*It takes LITTLE to make a BIG difference!*

## GET INVOLVED

Joining is easy! Form a team, fundraise with your network, and celebrate with us at the bowling event. It's a fun team-building experience, and every dollar stays in your local community!



## THE EVENTS

This spring, themed events are rolling into bowling centers across New Mexico! Your team will enjoy two hours of bowling (shoes and ball included), event t-shirts, food, drinks, prizes, and plenty of fun!

## CHANGING LIVES

Bowl for Kids' Sake makes a lasting impact in New Mexico! Funds raised directly support mentoring relationships that help kids overcome challenges and succeed. Your support isn't just for one event—it's an investment in the future of our communities.



## 2025 Bowl for Kids' Sake Event Dates and Locations:

**Albuquerque:** March 29th

**Holloman Air Force Base:** April 5th

**Taos:** April 5th

**Santa Fe:** April 9th, 12th, and 13th

**Gallup:** April 26th

**Española:** May 3rd

**Farmington:** Date TBD



[www.BBBSNM.org/EVENTS](http://www.BBBSNM.org/EVENTS)

Scan the QR to find an event near you!

## MDVR Success Story: Former Soccer Star Now Cares For Other Athletes

By **Jeff Levine**

Not too many people can say they got their dream job right out of college. Angel Flores is one of the lucky ones.

Flores is the assistant athletic trainer for women's soccer at the University of Texas–El Paso (UTEP). Practice is every day during the season, and she's at work by 6:30 a.m. and at the field by 8:00 with her medical equipment and enough water for the players. She tapes ankles and knees before practice; then back inside after practice, she provides therapeutic treatments and helps players with any pain they're experiencing.



"It was an absolute goal of mine to pursue a career in D1 women's athletics, especially soccer," Flores says. The NCAA's Division I (D1) is comprised of the intercollegiate athletics programs at the country's largest universities. Angel was a star soccer player in Alamogordo. She came to the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation after being diagnosed as a high school freshman with dyslexia and dyscalculia—sort of dyslexia with math and numbers—which led to anxiety. Although she often found relief while on the soccer field, she needed NMDVR to help arrange classroom accommodations with the school. These included extra time for homework, being allowed to take exams in an empty classroom, and a special pen that recorded while she wrote.

Then, during her junior year, she suffered a traumatic brain injury in an auto accident that ended her chance of playing D1 soccer. Through perseverance, support from her family, and encouragement from mentors at school, she graduated from high school.

"I was done playing, but I could still be involved in soccer by helping other athletes," Flores remembers. She enrolled at New Mexico State University—first at the Alamogordo campus, later transferring to the Las Cruces main campus—studying sports medicine. In doing so, she became the first person in her family to go to college.

Leaving her hometown was an eye-opener. "I was in a new city and didn't know anyone, but I fell in love with the campus. I knew I was there for a reason," Angel recalls. "The professors wanted me to succeed once they saw I wanted to be there and wanted to learn. Even though they knew about my learning disability, I wasn't treated differently."

Flores especially thrived doing the hands-on portions of the curriculum and earned her Bachelor of Science in Athletic Training in spring of 2023. NMDVR continued to assist Angel through her college years, both with financial assistance for tuition and fees and in helping to provide necessary technology to help her in her studies. Upon graduating, she was immediately hired at NMSU as athletic trainer for the cross country team. She got the soccer job at UTEP just a few months later.



"These athletes make it worth it," Flores says. "They're kind because they know I'm there to help them. When they're vulnerable, they can rely on me." She travels with the team, staying in hotels and eating meals with the players. "It's awesome to be part of that journey with them."

As for Angel's future, she is pursuing a master's degree in education and would like to take her current career to the next level, as an athletic trainer for professional women soccer players, maybe even for her favorite team. "Ideally, I would love to work for the Portland Thorns (of the National Women's Soccer League). Although my plans have changed through the years, I knew I always wanted to be in soccer and I'm doing it. That's the coolest thing ever!"

*The Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2025, the total awarded is \$24,099,900. The remaining 21.3% is funded by state appropriations and transfers from the Commission for the Blind and Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.*

Public Education Department Launches Instructional Materials Dashboard

New dashboard provides insight into the quality of instructional materials <https://nmmaterialsmatter.ped.nm.gov/>

By Janelle Garcia



The New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) announced the launch of the NM Materials Matter dashboard, a user-friendly and searchable database that offers transparency into the instructional materials purchased by school districts statewide. "Transparency about how school districts allocate funding for instructional materials and whether they meet high-quality standards is important for families and educators," said Public Education Secretary-Designate Mariana D. Padilla.

The dashboard also indicates whether those materials are classified as high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), as rated by New Mexico educators. The dashboard promotes transparency and empowers families, educators and policymakers with accessible information to support informed decisions.

The dashboard data is based on districts' annual reporting of their expenditures for core instructional materials. Users can filter dashboard content according to district, grade range, subject area and instructional material name. The dashboard emphasizes instructional material alignment with state academic standards and, by highlighting progress and successful practices, advances New Mexico's shared vision for educational excellence.

By launching this tool, the PED is introducing a new level of transparency into the current landscape of instructional material selection. The dashboard information can be used by district and school leaders, regional educational cooperatives, educator preparation programs and professional learning providers to better support their constituents.

The PED prioritizes HQIM for all New Mexico students and teachers by facilitating a rigorous, evidence-based and transparent review process completed by New Mexico educators. As a result of these reviews, the state releases an annual list of state-adopted instructional materials, which school districts are encouraged to use in their own selection process. Statutorily, the PED is required to review core instructional materials for alignment with the state content standards and criteria for determining their level of quality.

Research shows that access to HQIM dramatically improves educational outcomes. Research also shows that high-quality professional learning tied directly to the adopted HQIM further improves educational outcomes. Districts should have a plan for implementation that includes professional learning for teachers to skillfully use their HQIM to meet the needs of all students. The PED is committed to making HQIM available across the state and supporting strong implementation to ensure every student receives a great education.

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](mailto: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 February 28, 2025. Look in March's 'Round The Roundhouse for the winning announcement along with another photo contest to enter. Good luck!

Congratulations to the January's winner, Karla McWilliams, DCA. Her name was selected in the drawing of correct entries. January's photo location was Valles Caldera, specifically the cabin of Walt Longmire Bon Appetit!

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## Clarissa Sierra Certificate of Appreciation from Lt. Governor Howie Morales

By Sam Newton

New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Recognition of Silver City Veteran Service Officer Clarissa Sierra by Lieutenant Governor Howie Morales



Rudy Martinez, New Mexico Veterans Advisory Council member; Raymond Bejarano, Trustee of Gutierrez-McBride VFW Post 12212, Grant County; NMDVS VSO Clarissa Sierra; Lt. Governor Howie Morales; Jacob Madrid, Junior Vice Commander, Gutierrez-McBride VFW Post 12212, Grant County

On January 31, 2025, New Mexico Lieutenant Governor Howie Morales visited the Silver City office of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (NMDVS). During this visit, he presented Veteran Service Officer (VSO) Clarissa Sierra with a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of her exemplary efforts to assist New Mexico veterans in securing state and federal benefits. Her prior service as a military police officer in the New Mexico Army National Guard from 2012 to 2018 was also acknowledged as commendable. Clarissa represents the dedication and commitment of individuals who enhance the quality of life in our state.

Clarissa's office is based in Silver City, where she serves the counties of Grant, Hidalgo, Luna, and Catron. The NMDVS operates seventeen field offices throughout the state, staffed by highly trained and committed VSOs. Lieutenant Governor Morales emphasized the critical nature of the services provided by these officers, sharing personal experiences of how they aided his own father in obtaining veteran benefits. Clarissa has been with NMDVS for two years and expresses pride in her role in facilitating access to the benefits that veterans deserve. In her personal time, she enjoys supporting her two daughters in various sports activities.

## Supreme Court of New Mexico Day Commemorates Establishment of the State's Highest Court in 1912

By Barry Massey

New Mexico's highest court today proclaimed "Supreme Court of New Mexico Day" on Jan. 10 of each year.

The proclamation commemorates the day on which state Supreme Court justices first took their oaths of office in 1912, and the Territorial Supreme Court went out of existence. New Mexico became the 47th state on Jan. 6, 1912.



Chief Justice David K. Thomson  
Photo courtesy of NM Supreme Court

"The state Supreme Court protects the constitutional rights of all New Mexicans by serving as the final authority in interpreting and deciding matters of state law. Its counterparts in other states do the same for the rights guaranteed under their respective state constitutions" said Chief Justice David K. Thomson.

"The proclamation advances one of my goals as Chief Justice to help people understand the critical role of state supreme courts across the nation in preserving our rights and maintaining the rule of law," said Chief Justice Thomson. "Recognizing the establishment of New Mexico's highest court reminds us that our society functions within a framework of laws applying equally to each person and governmental institution."

First Three New Mexico Supreme Court Justices

When the state Supreme Court was first created, it was made up of three justices. The Court was expanded to five justices in 1929.



Frank Parker  
Chief Justice  
Supreme Court

Before statehood, New Mexico's territorial Supreme Court justices were appointed by the president and performed the duties of both trial and appellate court judges. The territory was divided into judicial districts with each having a judge who rode circuit from county to county to conduct trials and decide cases. The justices convened in Santa Fe to hear appeals as the territorial Supreme Court.



Richard H. Hanna, left, the Santa Fe New Mexican, January 13, 1912 Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, UNM and Clarence J. Roberts, right, Representative New Mexicans, 1912, page 246



New Mexico's Constitution separated trial and appellate court judges. There initially were eight judges sitting on the district courts and the three justices of the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court of New Mexico oversees other courts that make up the judicial branch of New Mexico: the Court of Appeals, district and magistrate courts, the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court, county probate courts, and municipal courts.

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New Mexico Cities Top MovieMaker Magazine's "Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker" List

By Dolores Martinez

The New Mexico Film Office announced that for the third year in a row, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Cruces each landed coveted spots on MovieMaker Magazine's prestigious 2025 list of "Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker."

Albuquerque earned the top spot among large cities for the seventh year running, while in the small cities and towns category, Santa Fe once again topped the list, and Las Cruces ranked eighth best this year. New Mexico's triple win on MovieMaker Magazine's prestigious annual list underscores the state's growing prominence as a film industry hub.

"¡Órale! From Albuquerque to Santa Fe to Las Cruces, when productions choose New Mexico, they're choosing our talented people and incredible landscapes," Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said. "MovieMaker Magazine's recognition of Albuquerque and Santa Fe as the very best cities in North America to make movies validates our wise investments in New Mexico's film industry. We're not just making movies here; we're building a thriving film industry and creating dynamic career

opportunities for those who live and work in our beautiful state."

The MovieMaker rankings consider factors such as film production activity, tax incentives, cost of living, lifestyle, and access to resources.

"When you consider the incredible supply of talent in our community, enchanting scenery, and the exceptional quality of life that filmmakers and their families have come to enjoy here, no other city comes close," Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller said.

Santa Fe, the "City Different," ranked number one on the "Small Cities and Towns" list for the second year in a row.

"Like a great motion picture, Santa Fe continues to win award after award," Santa Fe Mayor Allan Webber said. On top of the unanimous vote to move forward with the Aspect Media Village at Midtown, this recognition means we'll remain a leader in the film industry. And means good jobs and great opportunities for our residents for years to come."

Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker – Big Cities

1. **Albuquerque, New Mexico**
2. Toronto, Ontario, Canada
3. Atlanta, Georgia
4. Chicago, Illinois
5. Calgary, Alberta, Canada
6. New Orleans, Louisiana
7. Miami, Florida
8. Austin, Texas
9. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
10. Cincinnati, Ohio

Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker – Small Cities

1. **Santa Fe, New Mexico**
2. Fort Lauderdale, Florida
3. Wilmington, North Carolina
4. Providence, Rhode Island
5. Savannah, Georgia
6. St. Petersburg, Florida
7. Ashland, Oregon
8. **Las Cruces, New Mexico**
9. Knoxville, Tennessee
10. Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada and Missoula, Montana

Las Cruces, New Mexico's rising star in the film world, made the list for the third year in a row, landing the #8 spot in the "Small Cities and Towns" category.

"Las Cruces is thrilled to be once again recognized as a top film-making destination in New Mexico and America," President of Film Las Cruces and State Senator Jeff Steinborn said. "With our generous 40% film incentive and amazing locations, crew, and culture, we have a lot to offer filmmakers."

"As someone who returned to New Mexico after years of working in the California film industry, I can personally attest to the incredible opportunities and quality of life our state offers filmmakers," Steve Graham, director of the New Mexico Film Office, said. "Our diverse locations, skilled workforce, and competitive film incentives

continue to attract productions of all sizes. This recognition from MovieMaker Magazine underscores what many of us already know: New Mexico is simply the best place to live and work as a moviemaker."

New Mexico's long-term partnerships with Netflix, NBCUniversal, and 828 Productions help create a dynamic and supportive environment for productions of all sizes.

New Mexico is home to some of the most celebrated productions of 2024. "Oppenheimer," filmed in Los Alamos and Abiquiu, garnered numerous major awards, including multiple Golden Globes and Academy Awards. Other acclaimed productions filmed in New Mexico, such as "In the Summers," "Love Lies Bleeding," and "National Anthem," recently received prestigious nominations for the 40th Film Independent Spirit Awards. At the same time, "Love Lies Bleeding" was named a "Top Independent Film of 2024" by the National Board of Review.

For the information about this 2025 list visit, [MovieMaker.com](http://MovieMaker.com).



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