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Questa del Rio News

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Cerro VFW Pays Tribute to Purple Heart Recipient Roger Blanco for Surprise Birthday Party



Photo courtesy of Audriana Leon

(R) Blanco sits proudly with a fellow veteran at his 82nd birthday party

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

Roger Blanco has spent much of his life giving to others, often quietly and without expectation. On Saturday, Dec. 13, the community he has long served gave something back.

Members of the Cerro Veterans of Foreign Wars Post, along with friends and neighbors, gathered to surprise Blanco with a birthday celebration in honor of his 82nd birthday. When Blanco walked into a room filled with familiar faces, admiration and warm embraces, the emotion of the moment reflected years of gratitude for a man many describe as the heart of their community.

Blanco is a Purple Heart recipient and Vietnam War veteran whose service and selflessness extend far beyond his military record. A member of the Cerro VFW, he has become known not only for his dedication to fellow veterans, but for his compassion toward anyone in need.

In October 2023, Blanco was featured in the *Questa del Rio News* after he made an



Photo courtesy of Audriana Leon

(L) Blanco greets (R) Valerie and (C) Don Rael at his 82nd birthday. Valerie is daughter of the last Bataan Death March survivor, Valdemar DeHerrera who passed away in 2025

extraordinary gesture of generosity — giving his Purple Heart medal to his neighbor, Frank Rael. Rael's family had reported that the Purple Heart awarded to their father went missing. Longtime neighbor and friend Blanco, moved by their loss, chose to give them his own.

At the time, Blanco described the act simply as one of love.

The medal, earned through sacrifice, became a symbol of connection and

kindness — a reflection of Blanco's belief that honoring others is just as important as honoring oneself.

Those same qualities were on full display on Dec. 13, as community members shared stories, laughter and gratitude in Blanco's honor. Attendees described him as kind, hardworking, generous and deeply loving — the kind of person who shows up without being asked and gives without expecting recognition.

As the celebration continued, it became clear that the surprise party was more than a birthday gathering. It was a moment of collective appreciation, a chance for the community to return the love Blanco has spent a lifetime giving.

For one afternoon, the quiet hero stood at the center of the room, surrounded by the people whose lives he has touched, reminded that his kindness has never gone unnoticed.

And just as he once gave away a symbol of his sacrifice out of love, on Dec. 13, that love came back to him — multiplied.

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Questa del Rio News

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VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

EDITORIAL: Legislature Should Pass All 10 Health Care Worker Compacts in 2026

By KRISTINA FISHER,
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
THINK NEW MEXICO

The most immediate way New Mexico lawmakers can expand access to health care is by joining all interstate compacts for health care workers. These agreements make it easier for health care professionals licensed in other states to care for patients in New Mexico, including through telehealth.

States that join the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact experience an increase of 10% to 15% each year in the number of licensed physicians. No state that has joined a health care worker compact has ever withdrawn.

Currently, 42 states participate in the doctor compact, 41 in the psychology compact, and 39 in the physical therapist compact. New Mexico, by contrast, is one of only four states that participate in just one or no health care worker compacts. The state is a member of the nursing compact.

During the 2025 legislative session, the New Mexico House unanimously passed legislation to join seven health care worker compacts, and Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham expressed her support. The legislation stalled in the Senate Judiciary Committee, where several senators opposed the measures.

In response to growing public pressure, the Senate majority leader has pledged to consider compacts for doctors and social workers during the 2026 session. However, that would leave out eight other compacts, despite workforce shortages across those professions.

To meet national benchmarks, New Mexico needs an estimated 2,510 additional emergency medical technicians, 526 physical therapists, 281 physician assistants and 114 occupational therapists, among other health care professionals. The state's behavioral health system has been in crisis for more than a decade, with severe shortages of psychologists and counselors.

Opponents of the compacts have

raised three main objections.

First, some senators have objected to provisions that protect interstate compact commissions from lawsuits for official acts. These commissions are composed of members of participating states' licensing boards. New Mexico's medical board already receives identical legal protections under state law.

Notably, the same provisions appear in the nursing compact, which New Mexico has participated in since 2003. Opponents have not identified any problems resulting from the state's participation in that compact over the past two decades.

Second, opponents have asserted that joining the compacts could jeopardize New Mexico's legal protections for health care providers who offer reproductive and gender-affirming care. However, the compacts explicitly state that they do not alter a state's authority to regulate medical practice within its borders and include strict limitations on information sharing between states.

States such as Colorado and Illinois, which have laws similar to New Mexico's protecting reproductive and gender-affirming care, participate in multiple health care worker compacts without reported issues.

Finally, opponents have argued there is insufficient time to prepare the compacts for the 2026 legislative session.

Because compacts are agreements among states, participants must adopt identical substantive terms. States may make only minor, technical changes that do not alter those terms.

Legislators have had years to work with compact commission staff on drafting acceptable language. The emergency medical technician compact was first introduced in New Mexico in 2017, and the doctor compact has been introduced repeatedly since 2019. Other compacts have been introduced multiple times over the past five years.

Lawmakers should move forward in 2026 by approving all 10 health care worker compacts to expand access to care for New Mexicans without further delay.

Thank you to everyone who helped make our December fundraiser such a success. Your generosity and continued support of local journalism are deeply appreciated and truly needed. For those who were unable to give during the fundraiser, donations can be made at any time. A full accounting of the results as well as a full-page dedication will be shared in our upcoming February issue. Thank you again.

Mikayla Ortega
Editor, Questa del Rio News

EDITORIAL: Water Quality Control Commission Should Put Science First in Water Reuse Debate

By MEEGAN FIERRO ABELLA, CHEVRON DIRECTOR FOR NEW MEXICO OIL AND GAS OPERATION

It's a familiar pattern: Bold leadership and meaningful progress often attract criticism. Under Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's leadership, New Mexico is raising the bar on responsible energy production, early childhood education, higher education, and universal childcare – all of which are transforming lives across our state.

New Mexico's commitment to early childhood education and free pre-K has delivered remarkable results. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, 21% of 3-year-olds and 51% of 4-year-olds in our state were

enrolled in preschool programs in 2024 – far exceeding the national averages of 8% and 37%. These gains reflect bold investments in early learning.

The governor and the legislature have also expanded access to higher education through tuition-free college for New Mexico residents, preparing our youth for careers in emerging industries like artificial intelligence and quantum computing. With the enactment of universal free childcare – the first of its kind in the nation – New Mexico is leading the way in supporting working families.

These achievements reflect a broader, forward-looking approach to economic development that leverages the strength of New Mexico's oil and natural gas in-

dustry to generate the revenues making these investments possible. As we build on this progress, we must also confront one of our state's most urgent challenges: securing a sustainable water future.

New Mexico now has a promising path for addressing its water resource challenges through the treatment and beneficial reuse of produced water, which is generated from oil and gas operations. Unfortunately, some of the

same voices who question the value of energy production to the state's bottom line – including the industry revenues that help fund education and childcare programs – successfully pressured the Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) to vacate the earlier decision to hold a hearing on the reuse petition.

SCIENCE & WATER cont'd on page 8

EDITORIAL: Erased: Local Veteran Seeks Answers on Questa High School's Missing 9/11 Mural

By ADELITA C. MEAD, Veteran and Cerro VFW Lifetime Member

The new school year at Questa Jr./Sr. High School began with a troubling void where a piece of local history used to be. On the first day of school, my son—a Senior at Questa Junior Senior High School—came home and informed me that the 9/11 memorial mural in the locker room area near the cafeteria had been painted over. This mural, created by longtime Art teacher Mr. Albert Chacón, was a piece of our district's history. I was one of his students, and I graduated along with his daughter Amy in 1996.

On Sept. 11, 2025, while substituting at the school, I saw the wall myself. A once-powerful image commemorating one of the most defining events in modern

American history had been reduced to a blank white surface. The words “Never Forget”—painted carefully, behind the staircase—were gone. Ironically, these are the same stairs that still bear motivational words encouraging students to rise, persist, and remember their values.

That day, while teaching history, I spoke to each class about the importance of remembering 9/11. For me, this is not a distant historical event. I was on active duty in the U.S. Army, assigned to the Pentagon as a photographer for the Army Chief of Staff. On the morning of the attacks, I was on leave in New Mexico and had boarded a flight in Denver bound for Reagan National Airport. My plane was grounded in Albuquerque. Six days

ERASED cont'd on page 22

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Business Profile- Antonio's The Taste of Mexico

By LORA ARCINIEGA

Antonio's The Taste of Mexico is expanding its reach across northern New Mexico with the second location set to open late December 2025. The Taste of Mexico is a northern New Mexico staple that has been around for 23 years, and for eight years at its current locations, Antonio's continues to prove to be one of the best Mexican restaurants in Taos, as shown in its 4.1-star Google review with over 1,000 reviews. If you've ever been to Antonio's, you know to expect quality Mexican food as well as local staples.

A friendship that grew into a business partnership flourished right in one of the seats at Antonio's restaurant. François Bouyra began coming to Taos in 2023 around Christmas time to visit friends. "We came to ski and immediately I fell in love with Taos. There is something about the weather, gastronomy, the people, and the feeling that you get in Taos that's unlike anywhere else," Bouyra said. It wasn't long after that François and his wife purchased a home in Arroyo Seco.

Antonio and François recalled the story of their first meeting. François explained, "It was near closing time, after a long day of skiing, when I called Antonio's to see if they'd still be open when I made it back to Taos." Despite the late hour, Antonio generously said to

come right over and he would fix him a meal. Little did Antonio know that conversation would change his future. After several talks about interests, realizing that they had the same love of food—specifically Mexican food—and an overall love of Mexico, the partnership was solidified. Originally from a small village in France, François has lived in Mexico for 34 years.

Antonio had been thinking of expanding, and his new friendship and partnership with François and their immediate cohesion on a business idea meant expansion was now a reality. His second restaurant was within reach.

For François, Taos reminded him of where he grew up in France. "I grew up in a small village where there wasn't a lot going on, but you had a beautiful view and you were immersed in the land. Those wide country views of Taos reminded me of back home," Bouyra said.

The second location is located in El Prado, but close enough to Central Taos that people can easily stop by for lunch and dinner. Both François and Antonio are looking forward to serving the same high-quality Mexican food Antonio offers with some elevated dishes. They are also excited to offer Mezcal 33, which will be their featured Mezcal.

With François's background in business consulting and marketing and Antonio's expertise in hotels and restaurants, this combination of talents is sure to deliver a fresh, new dining experience. François's love of Taos and Antonio's cuisine made it easy for him to make the decision to invest. "We share the same entrepreneurial spirit," Bouyra said. "We see opportunities and we embrace them."

Antonio mentioned that his son, Marco, is interested in working at the



Photo by Lora Arciniega

François Bouyra and Antonio Matus

new location. "I'm excited for Marco to host at the new location." François mentioned his two children, Santiago and Marion with pride. "Santiago works with me in my consulting business and my daughter lives and works in Paris for a fashion magazine."

Pending the liquor license, the new space will soon offer a full bar serving great cocktails, wine, and spirits. "The space itself is very comfortable and very beautiful," both partners agreed. "It has two patios, lots of outdoor seating and

just is a great scene in Taos."

Most people know that Antonio's was featured on the popular TV show Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives. "That was such a fun time and such a rewarding experience," Antonio shared.

Arriving in Taos in 1994, Antonio has worked in restaurants throughout New Mexico. Both Antonio and François light up when discussing their current and future endeavors and cannot wait to open the doors of Antonio's The Taste of Mexico in El Prado.

A Year of Momentum: QEDF Reflects On A Transformative Year for Questa

By LYNN SKALL,
QEDF DIRECTOR

The past year has been one of growth, innovation and community impact for the Questa Economic Development Fund (QEDF). With a renewed focus on local businesses, QEDF secured a LEADS grant from the New Mexico Economic Development Department to lead a comprehensive Business Retention and Expansion (QBRE) program. QEDF conducted interviews, site tours and surveys with more than 45 local businesses to learn what obstacles and opportunities exist in the community.

The resulting report is already shaping strategic planning and earned statewide recognition, receiving the award at the Governor's Conference on Economic Development for excellence in the Business Retention and Expansion category.

To support small businesses and sole proprietors, the Questa Business Bridge (QBB) continues to connect the community to business resources, training and services. Backed this year by a \$15,000 grant from the LOR Foundation, QBB hosted weekly business workshops, classes and resource sessions, including a Networking Breakfast, which

connected local businesses directly with regional resource partners.

One of the year's highlights was the first-ever Questa Business Bridge Pitch Contest. Fourteen local entrepreneurs took part in workshops to strengthen their business strategies, fine-tune their budgets and perfect their pitches, then competed for \$22,500 in prize money from QEDF and the Questa Credit Union. Seven winners received grants for equipment, signage, technology, marketing and supplies, investments that are already boosting local economic activity and gross receipts tax revenues.

The second annual QBB Pitch Contest will kick off early in 2026.

Workforce housing continues to be a top concern for our area. QEDF partnered with the Taos Housing Partnership and other collaborators to advance preliminary initiatives: exploring zoning updates through the Village of Questa for accessory dwelling units (casitas), rehabilitating vacant homes for rental properties and laying groundwork for new affordable housing developments.

Environmental stewardship remains

MOMENTUM cont'd on page 8

Forged by Fire Food Truck Opens for Business

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

Husband and wife duo Dezirae and Armando “Mando” Ortega are officially fired up and ready for business.

The couple recently celebrated the grand opening of their new food truck, Forged by Fire Smash Burgers on Saturday, Dec. 13.

“We wanted to be prepared so we started with a soft opening first,” Dezirae said. “We played it safe as we didn’t want to sacrifice any food or product. We were so happy to see that the grand opening went off without a hitch!”

The couple’s blended family includes their children, Alex, 16, Ava, 14, Addy, 12, Genesis, 10 and Hezekiah, 8. All hands were on deck for the grand opening, helping out and pitching in with food and drink prep.

“They helped us with everything we couldn’t do and it was so beneficial,” Mando said. “It was also so great to see the community so excited. We were also very excited seeing that everything we served was forged fresh on the spot.”

Forged by Fire is parked across from



Courtesy photo

Frank’s Eats and Sweets at 28 Lower Embargo Road near Highway 522, easily visible just off the main road.

While food trucks are often associated with fast food, the Ortegas’ said their approach is different.

“When people see a food cart or trailer, they think ‘fast food,’” Mando said with a laugh. “With our operation,

everything we’re cooking and preparing is freshly made when it’s ordered so it’s important to note that we’re not fast food, but we are fresh food, specifically our Smash Burgers.”

The menu features smash burgers, chicken sandwiches, chicken strips, fries, and smash tacos, all made fresh to order. Their house smash sauce is a signature

item, made from scratch from a blend of spices, seasonings creating what the family calls, a “hidden secret.”

The truck also serves fresh-squeezed lemonades made to order. Each order starts with sliced lemons or limes squeezed into a 32-ounce jug, with flavors including cherry, mango and seven other options, along with a traditional lemonade.

“You may have to wait a minute for your food,” Mando said, “but it will be fresh..”

The business also continues to operate a kettle corn venture, which remains an important part of the family’s vision.

“Our kids love making and selling kettle corn,” Dezirae said. “The kids are young right now, the business is young, and we don’t want to lose that part of our business and God-willing, the kids will be able to take over it one day to make money of their own.”

The couple said the experience is teaching their children work ethic and

FOOD TRUCK cont’d on page 11

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Kit Carson Electric Cooperative Cuts Ribbon on Amalia II Solar and Battery Facility

By STAFF WRITERS

Kit Carson Electric Cooperative marked the completion of its Amalia II Solar & Battery Facility with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, adding 8.75 megawatts of solar generation and 8.75 megawatts of battery storage to its renewable-energy portfolio.

The project was developed through a partnership with the Rio Costilla Cooperative Livestock Association, Guzman Energy and Luminace and is located adjacent to the original Amalia I solar array.

With Amalia II now online, KCEC operates about 51 megawatts of solar generation and 25 megawatts of battery storage, placing the cooperative among the leading rural electric providers adopting renewable energy and energy storage nationwide.

The co-located solar and battery system is designed to improve grid reliability and resilience, particularly during peak demand, extreme weather and wildfire risk conditions common in northern New Mexico's mountain communities. The battery system allows KCEC to store energy generated during the day and dispatch it when demand is highest or when outages occur.

"Today's ribbon cutting marks more than the launch of a new facility; it represents the fulfillment of a shared



Courtesy KCEC

community vision years in the making," said KCEC CEO Luis A. Reyes Jr. "Amalia II enhances grid resilience, boosts local renewable energy production and demonstrates what can be achieved through strong local leadership and partnerships."

Beyond providing renewable electricity, the facility reduces reliance on long-distance transmission lines, which can be vulnerable during wildfire seasons. The battery system also supports emergency operations by helping maintain power for essential services such as fire stations, medical clinics and communications infrastructure during outages.

RCCLA President Nick Vigil said the project aligns with the organization's mission of responsible land stewardship and long-term community benefit.

"Amalia II shows that renewable energy development and responsible land management can work together to strengthen our communities and preserve the natural heritage of our region," Vigil said.

KCEC will purchase power from the facility under a 25-year power purchase agreement with Luminace. Guzman Energy, KCEC's wholesale power provider, will manage energy operations, including battery dispatch, to support reliability and cost control.

"The Amalia II project reflects the long-term partnership between Guzman Energy and KCEC," said Jeffrey M. Heit, founding managing director of Guzman Energy. "It's about working together to meet the evolving needs of the community."

Robert Rabe, chief development

officer for Luminace, said collaboration among public and private partners was key to the project's completion.

"Our focus has been on delivering a project that respects the land, benefits local communities and provides dependable, affordable clean energy," Rabe said.

Amalia II is KCEC's 21st solar project and third battery energy storage installation. The project also supports the cooperative's broader clean-energy strategy, which includes community microgrids and future hydrogen initiatives aimed at providing round-the-clock renewable power.

KCEC was formed in 1944 and serves nearly 30,000 members across Taos, Colfax and Rio Arriba counties.

Questa Elected Officials Tour Georgia Facility Tied to Green Hydrogen Plant

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

Questa councilman Jason Gonzalez along with Questa Mayor John Ortega joined officials with Kit Carson Electrical Cooperative recently as they traveled to Georgia on a trip to tour facilities producing materials that will be used in the construction of the planned green hydrogen plant in Questa.

The visit allowed officials to see firsthand how the technology operates and the safety measures in place before similar systems are installed locally.

Councilman Jason Gonzalez, who has previously been a vocal critic of the green hydrogen project, said the trip addressed many of his concerns, particularly regarding safety.



Courtesy Jason Gonzalez

Councilman Gonzalez shares photo of Plug Power's green hydrogen plant

"I was quite impressed with the degree of security they put into the monitoring of the machines to ensure if there were a leak or any danger on the

horizon, it would be immediately detected and defused," Gonzalez said.

Mayor John Ortega said he continues to strongly support the project and believes it will bring economic benefits to the area.

"This project is going to stimulate our local economy by bringing projects for contractors as we work to get it established," Ortega said. "It will also create about a dozen long-term jobs in the Questa area. I am proud to see growth happening to keep our local economy thriving."

Gonzalez said while he remains cautious, the trip helped ease some of his concerns.

"I'm still skeptical of this project,"

Gonzalez said, "however, this trip did help me feel much more at ease about the project as a whole and I am leaning toward being in favor of it." While the trip appears to have won Gonzalez over, he said he remains closely attuned to local constituents who are concerned about the amount of water the project will require to operate. "We need better accountability on how our own water supply will be affected, especially amid the ongoing drought, and I will continue to advocate for that," he said.

Village officials say the Georgia visit was part of an effort to ensure transparency and due diligence as plans for the green hydrogen facility continue to move forward.

Questa Officials Consider Affordable Housing Concept Amid Housing Shortage

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

Village leaders in Questa are in the early stages of reviewing a housing concept that supporters say could help ease the community's housing shortage, though questions about infrastructure, water use and long-term impacts remain unresolved.

During a Dec. 10 work-study session, village officials met with representatives from Earth Space Technical Ecosystem Enterprises (ESTEE) to discuss a preliminary idea for developing approximately 60 homes at the Questa Business Park. Officials stressed the meeting was informational only and did not involve approvals, funding decisions or a construction timeline.

The proposal is being advanced by ESTEE CEO Omar Fayed, an entrepreneur based in Santa Fe whose work emphasizes sustainable infrastructure and long-term cost efficiency. Early conversations have also involved the New Mexico Economic Development Department and Kit Carson Electric Cooperative (KCEC), whose renewable energy investments in Questa were cited as a key factor in attracting interest to the area.

Paige Ryan, with the state's Economic Development Department, said the project was originally explored in Santa Fe but stalled due to challenges working with the Public Service Company of New Mexico. Outreach to KCEC later opened discussions in northern Taos County, including Questa.

Mayor John Ortega said the concept aligns with the village's need for more attainable housing, particularly for working residents. Preliminary plans envision a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom homes, with three-bedroom units potentially priced around \$200,000. Ortega emphasized that the goal is affordability rather than profit.

"They're not trying to make money off these houses," Mayor Ortega said. "They're selling them at the cost of construction and infrastructure."

By comparison, average home prices across Taos County currently range from roughly \$494,000 to \$539,000, based on recent MLS data.

According to ESTEE representatives, the homes would be built using high-performance structural cellular concrete, also known as air-concrete. The material is lighter than traditional concrete and offers greater insulation, which advocates say can reduce long-term energy costs. While air-concrete carries a higher upfront price — estimated between \$360 and \$1,200 per



Photo by E. Wilde

cubic yard — supporters argue those costs can be offset over time.

Local architect Mark Goldman of Taos, a UNM-Taos lecturer who runs a construction certificate program, is participating in early discussions.

Infrastructure capacity quickly became a focal point of the meeting, newly elected Questa councilman Daryl Ortega questioned whether the village's current water and sewer systems could support a development of that scale.

"There's no capacity for the sewer," he said. "We don't have the infrastructure."

Mayor Ortega countered that upgrades are planned and expected to be in place before any construction begins. Fayed said wastewater treatment and infrastructure planning are central to his company's work and acknowledged the concerns raised by council members.

Community members offered mixed reactions. Local ranchers Juan Cisneros, a board member of the Questa Independent School District, and Max and Sabrina Mascareñas raised concerns about how new development could affect acequias. Mayor Ortega said Goldman is familiar with acequia systems and would avoid designs that interfere with them.

Councilwoman Louise Gallegos said she remains cautiously optimistic but noted that many details have yet to be worked out. Village officials reiterated that future meetings will focus on infrastructure capacity, environmental impacts and public input before any decisions move forward.

The discussion also highlighted differing perspectives among attendees. Some residents expressed skepticism about cultural impacts and resource limitations, while others — including those with ties outside the immediate area — viewed the

proposal as an opportunity to strengthen affordability and encourage residents to return home.

Fayed shared his personal background with the *Questa del Rio News*, saying that despite growing up with financial means, his professional focus has been sustainability and long-term human development.

He is the son of the late Egyptian businessman Mohamed Abdel Fayed.

In addition to leading ESTEE, Fayed is co-founder and CEO of EarthX, a data visualization and mapping company built on NASA's World Wind Project. He also serves as chairman of Synergetic Press and is a fellow at the Institute of Ecotechnics. His companies operate offices in Switzerland, Britain and Santa Fe.

Fayed said his work centers on regenerative systems for wastewater treatment, food production and air management, with applications ranging from sustainable communities on Earth to future space exploration. Long-term concepts discussed for Questa include greenhouse infrastructure to support local food production and supply Taos County businesses.

Mayor Ortega said the village has been in conversation with Fayed for about a year and that Questa's renewable energy initiatives helped set it apart.

No timeline has been established, and village officials emphasized the proposal remains conceptual as discussions continue.

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Visit our Questa Business Bridge Hub online for full class descriptions and to register for a class.





Historic Preservation Grant Targets Economic Revitalization in Northern NM



Courtesy Cornerstones Community Partnership

A volunteer assists with the traditional enjarrando (stuccoing) the mud atop of adobe bricks through one of Cornerstones Community Partnerships programs

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

A Santa Fe-based historic preservation nonprofit has been awarded a \$750,000 federal grant aimed at revitalizing historic places and strengthening rural communities across north-central New Mexico.

Cornerstones Community Partnerships, founded in 1986, is the first organization in New Mexico to receive the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant, a program administered by the National Park Service. The funding will be regranted, minus administrative costs, to smaller preservation projects in seven rural counties: Torrance, Santa Fe County outside the city, San Miguel, Mora, Colfax, Taos and Rio Arriba. Applications are expected to open in mid-2026.

The Paul Bruhn program is designed to help rural communities use historic preservation as a tool for economic development. Prime grantees such as Cornerstones distribute funds to local organizations and communities, supporting projects that might otherwise lack access to federal resources.

“New Mexico has some of the nation’s richest heritage but also some of its deepest economic challenges,” said Jake Barrow, executive director of Cornerstones. “This award allows us to invest in the historic assets of our rural communities — preserving their cultural legacy while fueling jobs, housing and economic growth.”

New Mexico ranks among the states with the highest poverty rates, even as it draws billions of dollars annually from cultural tourism. Much of that economic activity is concentrated in destinations such as Santa Fe and Taos,

while smaller rural communities often struggle with aging infrastructure, workforce shortages and limited access to affordable housing.

Through the grant program, Cornerstones plans to offer planning grants of up to \$20,000 for assessments and design work, as well as construction grants of up to \$150,000 for restoration projects. Eligible properties must be located in rural counties, be listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and demonstrate a clear community benefit through preservation, reuse or tourism.

Since its founding, Cornerstones has completed more than 400 restoration projects in New Mexico and the greater Southwest, including work on San Miguel Chapel in Santa Fe and community landmarks such as the Santo Domingo Trading Post and La Sala de San José. The organization is known for combining technical preservation expertise with local leadership and training.

“This grant builds on decades of trust, training and partnership,” said Gregg Henry, chair of the Cornerstones board. “Together, we will ensure that New Mexico’s historic places remain not only standing but thriving — anchors for rural resilience and opportunity.”

Cornerstones will partner with the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Division, New Mexico MainStreet and other organizations to carry out and expand the grant program.

While applications for this specific grant are expected to open in mid-2026, the agency is taking ongoing inquiries. To submit a project, visit <https://tinyurl.com/2w3u92wv>.

MOMENTUM cont'd from page 4

a high priority. QEDF partnered with Kit Carson Electric Cooperative and the Village of Questa on the green hydrogen project slated to break ground this year. A sponsorship of Cultivo youth internships focused on sustainable agriculture, and work with Chevron on produced water innovation is helping to protect northern New Mexico’s freshwater resources.

QEDF secured more than \$125,000 in New Mexico Trails+ grants for outdoor recreation, which supported trail mapping in Largo Canyon, identified beginner rock-climbing routes and invested in engineering and environmental work on the Questa to Red River Trail, positioning Questa within one of the state’s fastest-growing industries.

Beautification and the creative economy continued to reshape the look and feel of the village. Youth-led “dumpster art,” the installation of new activity- and attraction-themed light pole banners and a new Highway 38 welcome sign, painted by local artist Peggy Trigg, are helping tell Questa’s story to residents and visitors alike.

That story is also being told through the Questa del Rio News, which had a banner year. The paper raised more than \$140,000 in grants, donations and subscriptions, plus doubled its advertising sales projections. The paper’s digital reach for breaking local news now tops over 300,000 monthly Facebook viewers. These stories are also honored by being archived in Washington, D.C.’s Library of Congress.

Tourism and marketing efforts, through the New Mexico True Cooperative Campaign, leveraged a \$30,000 annual investment into \$90,000 in marketing value promoting Questa. QEDF continues to stand out as a Certified Economic Development Organization. For the second consecutive year, it was one of only 12 organizations statewide to receive a \$40,000 operational grant from the New Mexico Economic Development Department for meeting stringent economic development standards.

As QEDF looks ahead to 2026, our mission remains rooted in community values, supporting business opportunities, preserving our cultural heritage and building a future that reflects what makes Questa unique.

SCIENCE & WATER cont'd from page 3

That hearing would have provided a forum to examine the scientific evidence supporting the safe and beneficial reuse of treated produced water for diverse economic development opportunities, like data centers, advanced manufacturing, renewable energy projects, and non-food agriculture.

Most importantly, using treated produced water to meet our compact delivery obligations with Texas would help protect local water rights in Taos County — where Chevron recently worked to protect water rights for the village of Questa, mutual domestic water associations, and local farmers — as well as in other rural communities across New Mexico. California has safely used treated produced water for nearly two decades. Texas is now advancing its own beneficial reuse initiatives, including the use of treated produced water transported across the state line from southeast New Mexico. But this water is a resource that should remain in New Mexico, where it can help secure our future and benefit the communities that make this state strong.

We thank the governor and the



Photo by Gemini

legislature for their past support in safeguarding critical water rights in places like Questa. We now urge the WQCC to vote again to set a new hearing for the WATR Alliance petition. The WQCC should continue its work and fully consider the scientific evidence supporting the safe and beneficial reuse of treated produced water. By listening to the science, New Mexico can unlock its full potential and ensure that every resident and community can thrive in a diversified, resilient economy.

Meegan Fierro Abella, of Hobbs, is Chevron’s director for New Mexico oil and gas operations, a native New Mexican and a proud graduate of New Mexico State University.

Still Here: A Story of Self-Determination and Success

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

Julia Fernandez de Maez was raised by grandparents who believed work, culture and family mattered more than comfort.

The oldest of five siblings, Fernandez de Maez grew up primarily in Taos alongside her brother, Johnathan, while other siblings were raised in Washington state, a contrast she said shaped her strong norteño identity.

Her grandparents, Loren and Bea Maes were pillars in her life. Loren Maes, a Questeño, worked for decades at the Questa Mine, continuing a family legacy that spanned generations. The couple devoted their time to supporting Julia's passions for dance and athletics, often spending long days outdoors in Amalia fishing and camping.

"My grandparents couldn't buy opportunities," she said. "They had to make them, and that's what they taught me."

Her family's roots run deep in northern New Mexico. Her great-grandparents, Dora and Ben Sr., were also in-



Courtesy photo

Julia Fernandez de Maez stands proudly with her billboard promoting the Body Shop

fluential figures in her childhood. Dora, she recalled, was playful and spirited, taking the grandchildren for ice cream

and joking about looking for brujas around Questa and Cerro.

A bracelet gifted by her grandmother, symbolizing five generations of family, remains one of Fernandez de Maez's most meaningful possessions.

She took an unconventional path early on. Fernandez de Maez did not graduate high school and said she feels no shame in that decision.

Her entrepreneurial spirit ignited at age 10, she was earning money selling Kool-Aid and candy so she could go to the local carnivals. As a teenager, she was cashing checks worth thousands of dollars laying flagstone and concrete as she ran her own business.

"Sometimes kids don't have the option to go to college," she said. "So I dropped out and started my own business laying flagstone and concrete when I was 16."

In her 20s, Fernandez de Maez moved to South Dakota, working in commercial construction as the only woman on job sites. She later earned

a Class A CDL and worked as a heavy equipment operator.

Dance, however, remained her anchor.

She grew up immersed in flamenco and traditional dance. When she moved to the Midwest, she found no flamenco community whatsoever.

"There was no flamenco," she said. "So, I created a space for it."

She recalls practicing in garages, recording lessons on flash drives, selling them to people, and also traveling across South Dakota, North Dakota, and Texas teaching workshops.

"If there's no opportunity," she said, "you make the opportunity."

After years of building her craft away from home, Fernandez de Maez returned to northern New Mexico. Today, she owns The Body Shop and works as a full-time personal trainer, serving clients across southern Colorado, Eagle Nest, Angel Fire and Santa Fe. She is also a

STILL HERE cont'd on page 11

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Kit Carson Electrical Cooperative Donates \$13,000 to Food Assistance Groups across Northern NM

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

Kit Carson Electric Cooperative provided \$13,000 in holiday donations to food banks, pantries and community organizations across its service territory, as part of a broader commitment that has exceeded \$150,000 in community support this year.

The funds are being distributed to organizations that address hunger and food insecurity throughout Northern New Mexico, including ALM Pantry, Youth Heartline, St. Vincent de Paul Food Bank, St. James Episcopal Church, San Juan Nepomuceno Parish Food Bank, San Francisco de Asis Church Food Pantry, the Ojo Sarco Community Center food bank, and grocery voucher programs through Sangre de Cristo Valley Market and Super Save.

The cooperative's board of trustees approved the donations, citing rising living costs and uncertainty surrounding the future of many food assistance programs. Trustees emphasized the importance of reaching all parts of KCEC's service territory, including remote rural communities as well as more populated areas.

In addition to financial contributions,



Courtesy KCEC

Luis Reyes attends the Taos Feeds Taos event on Dec. 19

KCEC employees participate directly in food distribution efforts. The cooperative partners with Shared Table, a food outreach program serving Taos County and surrounding areas, delivering food boxes to homebound residents, older adults and others unable to travel to food pantries.

"Providing support to all areas of our service territory is a fundamental part of

our mission," said Bobby Ortega, president of the KCEC board. "Our communities rely on these programs, and we remain dedicated to helping them continue their critical work."

KCEC has supported food assistance efforts in the region for decades, including more than 40 years of involvement with Taos Feeds Taos. The cooperative contin-

ues to assist with food box preparation and grocery delivery during periods of increased need.

Beyond holiday giving, KCEC reported contributing more than \$150,000 in donations and sponsorships in 2025 to support scholarships, schools, local governments and nonprofit organizations across Taos, Colfax and Rio Arriba counties. Beneficiaries include youth programs, schools, fire departments, churches and community organizations, though that total does not include in-kind services or volunteer hours provided by employees.

"Providing electric, internet and propane services is only part of our responsibility," said Luis A. Reyes Jr., KCEC's chief executive officer. "We are committed to supporting the communities we serve, especially during challenging times."

Founded in 1944, Kit Carson Electric Cooperative is a member-owned electric distribution cooperative serving nearly 30,000 members in northern New Mexico. More information about its community initiatives is available at www.kitcarson.com.

LOR FOUNDATION UPDATE BY AEDAN HANNON

LOR Supports: Taking Care of Those Who Take Care of Us

Looking back, 2025 was a busy year. Questa locals championed more than 60 projects with LOR's support, contributing more than half a million dollars to the community. Each project made life a little better for those who call Questa home. But there's one trend that we were especially excited to see. Time and time again, residents stepped up to support those who take care of Questa.

Back in April, LOR's Maria Gonzalez learned of the significant challenges facing the village's emergency medical ser-

vice (EMS) team. Without significant updates in over 20 years, the team's sleeping and living quarters were rundown, with one mattress so worn that springs were poking through. For Questa's ambulance crews, who work long overnight shifts, getting the rest they needed to respond quickly and save lives was a problem. The solution: EMS and village leaders worked with Gonzalez to buy a new bed, blankets, pillows, stove, and living room furniture, improving the well-being of first responders—and the community.

Just a few months later, the Questa Fire and EMS Department's new volunteer fire chief reached out to Gonzalez with a similar concern. Questa's fire department had not had wildland firefighting gear for over 10 years, a serious issue since the department is the first line of defense against growing drought-fueled wildfires. Without the proper protective equipment, volunteers were putting their health, safety, and the futures of their families at risk. So, with support from LOR, the Questa Fire and EMS Department purchased 15 sets of helmets, flame-resistant clothing, boots, and other protective gear to fully outfit crews the

next time they respond to a wildfire.

"These are the people who show up when we need them most," Gonzalez says. "Making sure they have what they need—it's the least we can do. The projects residents led in 2025 sent a clear message: Questa looks after the people who look after us."

The investments in Questa's guardians and stewards went far beyond first responders. Community projects supported veterans, local businesses, teachers, and even public works crews. After two traffic accidents near road repair sites highlighted the urgent need for better safety equipment, one village staffer used a grant from LOR to secure solar beacons, traffic barrels, warning signs, and other essential safety supplies for road work crews.

For many residents, supporting those who serve Questa just makes sense. They know that investing in these community leaders ultimately benefits everyone in Questa. That was the case when one Questa Independent School District employee approached Gonzalez about providing high-quality professional development for teachers and staff. School leaders knew hosting workshops on instructional

strategies, technology, and community engagement would not only improve teacher morale, but better prepare them to serve students and families. In a very real way, caring for teachers was caring for the future of Questa.

"When you support a teacher, you're supporting every student in their classroom. When you protect a road crew, you're ensuring safer roads for years to come," Gonzalez says. "It's never just about one person—it's about strengthening the whole fabric of Questa."

Last year Questa's fabric got a whole lot stronger because of the hard work and dedication of residents. Thank you! We can't wait to see the ideas and solutions the community comes up with in 2026. As we hit the ground running, you can reach out to Gonzalez at maria@lorfoundation.org or 575-665-2001 to share your idea and set up a time to chat. From all of us here at LOR, we're wishing you a wonderful new year.

LOR works with rural communities in the Mountain West to enhance livability and prosperity while preserving the character that makes each community unique.

FOOD TRUCK cont'd from page 5

responsibility, with the parents supporting them along the way.

Mando Ortega retired from Kit Carson Cooperative to focus on running Forged by Fire full-time while Dezirae Ortega continues to work for the Town of Red River and contribute to the business on a part-time basis.

During the winter months, the truck will operate three days a week — Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays — from 11 a.m. until the food runs out, usually between 2:30 and 3 p.m. Summer plans include full-time weekday service and traveling to events throughout northern New Mexico and southern Colorado.

Orders are currently taken directly at the truck to ensure freshness.

The idea for Forged by Fire has been years in the making, inspired by the Ortegases' love of cooking together at home. "We connect well in the kitchen," Dezirae Ortega said. "We enjoy trying new recipes, and the kids love cooking, too, so this is a great way for us to do it as a family." The venture allows the family to work side by side while staying connected to the community through local

events, festivals and concerts, strengthening both their family bond and their ties to the community they serve.

"We're at a point where we're still young enough to work super hard, so we decided to jump all the way in to pursue our dream," Mando said.

The couple emphasized the importance of serving quality food at affordable prices to the community.

Faith has also guided the vision behind Forged by Fire.

The family chose Proverbs 16:3 — "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established" — as a reflection of their approach to the business. The Ortegases said they have committed the food truck to God, choosing patience and trust in the process while believing the outcome of the venture is in His hands.

For the Ortegases, Forged by Fire represents more than a food truck — it is a family effort rooted in faith, hard work and a desire to serve their community, one fresh-made meal at a time.

To stay updated on the business hours, times and location of operation, visit their Facebook/ Forged by Fire Smash Burger.

STILL HERE cont'd from page 9

professional belly dancer, performing at regional venues as well as larger stages, including the Santa Fe Opera. She also operates a custom fitness app, coaches clients nationwide. She recently placed second in a bodybuilding competition in Albuquerque and has her heart set on becoming an Olympia bodybuilder.

Her approach to fitness emphasizes accessibility and restoration.

"Growing up, there were opportunities I couldn't afford," she said. "So I meet people where they're at when it comes to personal training. I don't want people not to have an opportunity to take care of their health, simply because they can't afford it so I am working to reinvent the whole personal training industry through my work."

The Body Shop is a locally owned space she describes as community-driven, with much of her business built through word of mouth.

Fernandez de Maez said her work — in fitness, dance and life — is rooted in resilience.

"What it comes down to is believing your vision is within reach," she said.

Both Loren and Bea Maes died in a house fire in 2023, a loss Fernandez de Maez described as devastating.

"I didn't know if I was going to make it past that," she said. "I knew I had to keep pushing forward."

One of her final memories with her grandparents came just weeks before their deaths, when she took them on a drive to Red River, stopping at Shotgun Willie's to listen to her grandpa Loren recount stories from the mine and recall childhood outings.

"It felt like being a child again," she said.

Her grandparents used to call her "Juliana la Chapulina" — the grasshopper — because she was always moving, always full of energy.

"That energy comes from my lineage," she said. "It stays with me. Everything I do comes from them."

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Kit Carson Electric Cooperative Supports Local Food Organizations Across Its Service Territory With A \$13,000 Holiday Donation



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Kit Carson Electric Cooperative is honored to provide a donation of \$13,000 this holiday season to support families and community members in need throughout Northern New Mexico. These funds were distributed to several local food banks, pantries, and community organizations that play a vital role in addressing hunger and supporting vulnerable households.

At Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, we believe in honoring the past while investing in the future.

Red River Swears In New Council Members Amid Ongoing Election Challenge

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

A legal petition was filed in the 8th Judicial District on Wednesday (Dec. 3) challenging the results of Red River's most recent municipal election. The challenge was filed on behalf of candidate Michael Nail, Town Council candidate who lost the election by one vote.

The dispute over Red River's municipal election continued Tuesday (Dec. 23) during the town council's public comment period, as several community members voiced opposition to the swearing-in of council winner Angela Black while a petition filed on behalf of candidate Michael Nail remains pending. We reached out to Justin Brandenburg, who was not sworn in, however, says he will proceed with the swearing in after the Christmas holiday.

Town officials confirmed the swearing-in proceeded after election certification was issued, which they said legally required the council to seat the candidates.

The council meeting was contentious. Several supporters of Nail spoke during public comment, urging comment and urging the council to delay seating the new members until the courts determine the outcome of the election challenge by a judge.

Attorney Nann Winter, counsel for the Town of Red River, joined the meeting via Zoom. She addressed concerns raised by attendees. Winter repeatedly emphasized the importance of maintaining continuity of government while the legal chal-



Courtesy Town of Red River

A snapshot of the town council chambers Dec. 23

lenge proceeds.

"I want everyone to pause and consider what government does," Winter said. "Look at your agenda for today and look at what government does. Your agenda contemplates the approval of grants, the moving of projects, funding, budget considerations. That is huge, and I can't stress the importance of what government does and why it needs to continue."

Winter said that New Mexico law is explicit in election contests, stating that the individual holding a certificate of election must assume office and perform its duties until the contest is resolved.

"When that certificate is issued, the person who received it must take their seat," Winter said. "If the certificate holder does not take their seat, that would be breaking the law in New Mexico."

Nail also submitted a cease-and-desist letter to the town council requesting that the swearing-in be halted. The order had been filed with Taos County, however, the

letter was not court-ordered and had not been authorized by a judge.

During public comment, campaign supporter Matt Dietz questioned Winter about why the council could not wait to swear in the candidates until the courts adjudicate the matter. Winter responded that continuity of governance requires a fully seated council capable of carrying out municipal duties.

Winter explained that while a court will hear Nail's complaint, the legal process could take months. In the meantime, the certificate holders are legally obligated to govern.

"The person who has received a certificate must effectuate government, review budgets, move projects forward, listen to citizens, and govern on their behalf," Winter said. "Government is paramount and has to continue."

Winter added that if the court ultimately determines wrongdoing occurred, the seated council member would be

removed and replaced accordingly.

"If the court rules that there was some impropriety, then the person in the seat will be removed and the person who should have taken the seat will replace them," she said.

Dietz continued to seek clarification on the legal advice given by the town attorney. Dietz said he was ruled out of order after continuing to seek clarification. He later reached out to our publication, saying his objections centered on what he described as conflicting explanations from the town attorney regarding the administration of the Oath of Office. He says he was attempting to gain clarification on legality versus formality when he says Mayor Calhoun ruled him out of order in what he believes was an effort to quash potential on-record statements in future litigation. Following this incident, he left the meeting in frustration.

Nail did not attend the council meeting, as he was preparing for an emergency injunction and ex-parte hearing held later at 1 p.m. in Raton before Judge Steven Romero. Nail sought a temporary restraining order to prevent the swearing-in of Black and Brandenburg.

During the hearing, Judge Romero continued the matter, granting Nail additional time to amend his complaint and add defendants, including the New Mexico Secretary of State's Office, which issued the certificates of election.

The election challenge remains pending.

CAV's Corner: A New Year of Hope, Healing and Safety for Survivors

By JOELLA A. MONTTOYA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAV

As the new year begins, there is something tender about watching our community settle into January. Holiday lights come down, the winter air grows quiet, and many of us take a deep breath for the first time in months. A new year invites reflection, but it also invites possibility.

As I enter this year, I am thinking about survivors of domestic and sexual violence who carry the weight of last year's pain into the new one, hoping for something different.

The Turning of the Year Is Not the Same for Everyone

The new year is often described as a

fresh start. But for adults and children living with domestic or sexual violence, turning the page on the calendar does not suddenly bring safety. The struggles they face on Dec. 31 remain on Jan. 1.

Some begin the year wondering if this will be the year they finally leave. Some are trying to rebuild after immense trauma. Some are quietly surviving day by day, hoping someone notices their pain.

For many children, the new year means returning to school with relief after weeks spent in unsafe homes.

The Power of a New Beginning

While violence does not disappear at midnight, a new year offers something essential: hope. Hope is one of the most

powerful tools a survivor can have.

I see that hope every day at Community Against Violence (CAV). I see it when a survivor arrives at our shelter with nothing but the clothes they are wearing and determination in their eyes. I see it when a child takes their first deep, safe breath. I hear it in the phone calls we receive at 2 a.m. — the calls when someone finally says, "I need help."

Hope often shows up in small acts. It rarely arrives all at once, but it grows.

Our Community's Role

One of the things I value most about this community is the way we look out for one another. We check on neighbors. We ask questions. We show up. That

matters, especially for survivors who feel unseen or unheard.

As we move into the new year, I invite us to make a few gentle commitments:

- Listen when someone shares their story, even if it is quiet or hesitant.
- Believe survivors. Your belief can change the direction of a life.
- Pay attention to the children around you. Their behavior often speaks before their words do.
- Be patient with those who are healing. Trauma does not follow a timeline.
- Support organizations like CAV. We are here 24/7, and your support allows us to

CAV'S CORNER cont'd on 24

Chuck Kroon Remembered for His Quiet Dedication

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

Chuck Kroon, a quiet but deeply committed volunteer whose steady presence helped keep local news flowing across northern Taos County, died peacefully Dec. 15 after stepping away from his role in recent months to focus on his health. He was remembered by colleagues for his reliability, thoughtful leadership and unwavering dedication to community journalism.

Unassuming by nature, Kroon was known to speak softly — but when he opened up, friends and fellow volunteers said he offered sharp insights, creative ideas and a lifetime of lived experience. For several years, he volunteered as a newspaper distribution manager alongside his partner, Linda Betz, ensuring that local news reached merchants and residents throughout Questa, Red River, Cerro, Costilla and the greater Taos area.

Each month, without fail, Kroon arrived ready to distribute nearly 4,000 newspapers. He coordinated volunteers, carefully mapping routes that balanced efficiency with accessibility, always aiming to make the work manageable while ensuring papers reached as many people as possible.



Photo by E Wilde

Chuck (left) attending the first anniversary of the *Questa del Rio News* party at Rael's Coffee in 2019

ing to make the work manageable while ensuring papers reached as many people as possible.

“Chuck had a gift for logistics,” said Emily Wilde with the *Questa del Rio News*. “He understood the landscape, the

people and how to get the job done with the least resistance and the most care.”

Traveling with Betz was one of Kroon's great joys and the only thing that ever pulled him away from distribution days. Otherwise, colleagues said, he was present and prepared, approaching his work with enthusiasm, excitement and grit.

In recent months, Kroon stepped back from his role as newspaper distribution coordinator due to health concerns. His absence was felt immediately, and his passing has left a lasting void at the *Questa del Rio News*.

Though he is gone, those who worked alongside him said his legacy will continue through the paper's commitment to delivering meaningful, inspiring and essential news to local residents.

“Thank you, Chuck, for your dedication, honesty, integrity and dependability,” the paper said in a statement. “You will be deeply missed and forever remembered.”

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Ronnie Gallegos

By LORA ARCINIEGA

Being raised in a community where your history connects to every part of your present, it is difficult to find the courage to leave. It is similarly difficult to forge a path and stay. Questa del Rio News is committed to highlighting different members of our community, both those who have created their paths and planted their own roots in the community that raised them, and those who have pursued lives outside of the community—through our Representando series. This series is dedicated to those who are Representando communities in northern Taos County, in various facets of life.

Ronnie Gallegos, a Questa native and 1982 Questa High School graduate, attributes his successful career in the military, education, and public service to the bedrock values instilled by his parents: his mother's patience and his father's leadership.

Born in Questa in 1964, Ronnie is one of nine children born to Adonario "Horsie" and Petronila "Peggy" Gallegos. He grew up near La Cienga Elementary School, experiencing a childhood ingrained in community and faith. One of Gallegos's favorite things about Questa is how the community comes together in times of need and in times of celebration. "When someone is hurting, the whole community comes to their aid," Gallegos said, recalling several memories from his childhood and as a young adult.

Growing up, church life was central to the Gallegos family. "I was an altar server and a Peregrino (pilgrim) all through my youth. I spent a lot of time growing up in the church and we always went to midnight mass," he recalled. During Christmas, he remembers walking up Flag Mountain to find a Christmas tree and decorate it with his family. His mother's famous mountain bread was a staple, often packed into his pockets along with potted meat or Vienna sausages on days exploring the mountains.

Gallegos' father, Adonario, a World War II combat veteran, was a quiet man. "When he spoke, we knew to listen,"

Gallegos said. "My parents were awesome. Gallegos and his siblings quickly learned the value of respecting their parents. "We just had to get one look, and we knew to behave." He describes his mother's extraordinary patience. "She would get up so early to make us breakfast, and I would just sit and watch her," he said. "When I'd mess up, she would just look at me and wait for me to speak and then respond. She never put me down." Gallegos notes that his mother had to step up and help raise her siblings after her mother died young. "I don't know anyone that has the maternal instinct like my mother.

Growing up, Gallegos and his siblings were not taught Spanish, as their parents had faced punishment for speaking it in school. He learned the language later in life, recalling his desperate desire to converse with his Spanish-speaking grandparents. He was able to have a conversation with his grandmother shortly before she died, informing her that, despite her prayers, he would not be a priest. "My parents and grandparents always prayed for one of us boys to become a priest," Gallegos chuckles.

While in high school Gallegos was a four sport athlete and student body president. After high school, Gallegos briefly attended the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque but found the college scene intimidating. He returned to Questa. A wake-up call came when his partying led to crashing his mother's car and his father issued an ultimatum: "Straighten up or get out."

Gallegos joined the Marines in 1984 mostly on a gut feeling but his interest peaked after his sister secured a scholarship with the Marines. His military career spanned 28 years: eight in the Marines, 10 in the National Guard, and 10 in the Reserves, including five Combat deployments and receiving some of the Nations highest Decorations; The Bronze Star with Valor and the Purple Heart for being wounded. He was deployed on a Western Pacific Tour in 1987, and then in Desert Storm, and went on two deployments to Iraq. Gallegos was wounded in action and received the Purple Heart in 2003.

Gallegos recalled teaching on Sept. 11, 2001, when he saw the planes hit the World Trade Center. He remembers telling his students they were witnessing history and informed them he would be leaving to fight for the country, leading to a deployment in 2003. Gallegos recalled when his brother, Joey, died while serving in Iraq in 2009. "It was so sad for our family when Joey died. I was chosen to be his Military Escort from Dover Air Force Base in Delaware because I was still part



Courtesy Photo

Ronnie Gallegos at the Memorializing Veterans event in Angel Fire, 2025

of the Military." Of his surviving siblings, four currently reside in the Questa, one in the Española area and one in El Rito. His first sibling, younger brother Johnny, passed away in 1993.

Gallegos recalled that after his first deployment, the village of Questa held a parade for him, bringing him in on a fire truck from the bridge south of town. "Culture is one of those things that should never leave our little town. Our community comes together at the time of need and I've never seen that before while I have traveled the world."

With college credits from UNM and Highlands University, Gallegos earned a bachelor's degree in history and political science. He eventually fell into teaching after being a substitute teacher and realized that teaching was his calling. He taught high school and middle school until 2012, specializing in history and biology. Gallegos credits his teachers with having a profound impact on him, beginning with his very first day of school. At just three years old, he was not yet officially old enough to attend, but because his older brother, Donald, was going, Gallegos was allowed to join his aunt Loveida's class.

Gallegos has an extensive coaching career beginning in 1992, starting with girls' basketball at Española Valley High School, then football and baseball. He then coached football and baseball at McCurdy leading teams to three State Runner up placements. His final years were coaching football at Taos High School and after 30 years coaching in 2023 he retired. He credits his father, who coached him in Little League, for demonstrating when it was time to step down and let someone else lead.

"Teaching and coaching are a calling and I loved it," he said. "Every morning in my classroom, I'd have a different quote, and I'd let the students decipher it." Gallegos, who has lived in Española for 34 years and married to Mary Monney-Gallegos and has two sons Andrew and James, now focuses on public service. He is involved with the Santa Cruz Irrigation District and serves on the Española Planning and Zoning board. One thing Gallegos loves to do is a sports recap that airs on the Native Winds Radio in Taos, covering northern New Mexico sports.

Besides sports, another passion of his is helping other veterans. He holds a recurring coffee and tea date with fellow veterans at a Burger King in Española and while he attended Northern New Mexico Community College he started the Veterans Resource Office which assists Veterans with benefits, college and trade programs.

Gallegos' life mantra, inspired by his time in the Marines, is "Leave no one behind." He also lives by the saying, "To teach is to learn and to learn is to teach." He draws inspiration from his family, recalling his grandmother splitting wood until she was 90 years old. "I don't have a wood splitter. My arms are my wood splitters," he laughs, planning to follow her example.

For many locals who have left Questa and return on occasion to see family and friends there's nothing like coming down the hill and crossing the bridge into town. It allows you to relax your shoulders and take a breath. For Gallegos, Questa remains his touchstone. "When I'm coming down the hill into Questa I can finally breathe and say I'm home."

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from the Librarian's Desk...

Sharon Nicholson

Starting Sat., Jan. 10, a new six-week Conversational Northern New Mexico Spanish Course will offer adult learners a rare opportunity to immerse themselves in the living language and culture of the region. The course runs through Feb. 14, with weekly sessions held on Saturdays from 12-2 p.m.

Designed for adult non-native speakers, the program emphasizes practical, everyday Spanish enriched by the distinctive vocabulary and rhythms of Questa and surrounding communities. Participants will explore language tied to acequia traditions, community

life, foodways, and the cultural expressions that make Northern New Mexico Spanish unique.

This course is more than a language class, it's an invitation to understand the heartbeat of the community: how people speak, what they value, and how they come together. Each session will weave language learning with cultural context, creating a space for connection and shared experience.

The final week will feature an applied learning experience with local elders, culminating in a community potluck dinner showcasing Indigenous and traditional Northern New Mexico dishes—a celebration of language, heritage, and shared table.

The instructor, Pilar L. Robledo, is a longtime Questa resident and lifelong educator with over 35 years of experience teaching language, culture, and community-based learning worldwide.

Though not a native “Questeña,” Robledo is deeply committed to local traditions and serves as a *parciante* with the Cabresto Lake Ditch Association, reflecting her active role in acequia culture.

What You Might Explore Each Week

Week 1:

Ways to introduce yourself, ask simple questions, and get a feel for the rhythm of Questa Spanish.

Week 2:

Building everyday conversation skills and noticing the courtesy language common in small towns.

Week 3:

Place-based vocabulary—words connected to acequias, *parciantes*, *regada*, local directions, and seasonal life.

Week 4:

Expressions tied to community gatherings and food traditions.

Week 5:

Opportunities to practice conversation in real-life scenarios.

Week 6:

Sharing language and stories with community elders, followed by a potluck featuring Indigenous and traditional Northern New Mexico foods.

Space is limited, so those interested are encouraged to sign up soon to secure a spot.

Registration Details

Dates: Saturdays

Jan. 10 – Feb. 14

Time: 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Location:

Questa Public Library, Questa, NM

Cost: No Charge

Sign Up:

Contact the Questa Library at
(575) 586-2023

Voces de Nuestro País Announces January Events

By CLAIRE COTE,
MICHAEL RAEL, PEGGY TRIGG,
Contributing Writers

Historias de la familia, amor, aventuras, y desventuras dichas por la gente de nuestro país

Voces de Nuestro País ~ Voices of Our Place are monthly story gatherings at Questa Library. Featured guests share their stories of family, history, love, adventures, and misadventures as told by the people of our area. These stories are deeply enjoyed in-person at the library, but also by virtual listeners afterwards. Each event is carefully recorded and made available as a monthly audio and video podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon music and Youtube; just search for “Voces de Nuestro País.” By sharing these stories on multiple online platforms, we hope to widen and deepen the community connection experienced at the in-person events. Please tell your friends and family!

To kick off 2026, we are offering two events in January: the fourth “Voces de Nuestro País” event at Questa Library will take place on Sat, Jan 10, 2 - 4 p.m., featuring Chris and Rodney Arellano, nationally acclaimed and locally beloved musicians from Costilla with deep roots in their community and musical family. On Sat., Jan. 24 come join us for our first



Courtesy Photo

(Left) David Cisneros and (Right) Louise Gallegos after the Voces de Nuestro País event at Questa Library on December 13, 2025, photo by Claire Coté courtesy of Voices of the Northern Rio Grande

Story-Sharing Open Mic; stories from all community members are welcome. Come sign-up; we can't wait to hear your story!

Our third Voces de Nuestro País event took place on Dec. 13 and focused on the importance of service to one's country and community with our featured guests, Louise Gallegos and David Cisneros. Louise Gallegos shared stories about a broad range of life experiences: being the first female Councilor and twenty years of service on the Questa Village Council; how her interest in politics started with her father who always took the family along with him to vote; about the resto-



Courtesy Photo

(Left) Rodney and (Right) Chris Arellano playing at Questa Farmers Market

ration of St. Anthony's Catholic Church; and stories of growing up in Questa with lots of time outside through the seasons including sledding with socks on her hands to keep them warm.

We also heard stories from David Cisneros, an unsung hero from Cerro who has lived a life of service. David shared stories of his twenty years in the Navy starting at just seventeen years old, including volunteering to serve during Vietnam and six months with the Turkish Navy. He shared stories of life at sea, through battles and some of his posts and experiences during his extensive global travel throughout Europe and Asia as

well as Australia and New Zealand. He also shared stories of integrating into civilian life and choosing a career path in refrigeration and appliance repair, which he learned in San Diego, CA and has done for decades in Cerro and Questa and throughout Northern Taos County.

Michael Rael is MC and curator for these monthly gatherings and podcast episodes, hosted in collaboration with Questa Library and Voices of the Northern Rio Grande, a program of local nonprofit, Localogy. Audio recordings, videos, and images from “Voces de Nuestro País” events are also being added to our digital community archive, a local repository and resource established by Voices of the Northern Rio Grande and Questa Public Library with support from the Manitos Community Memory Project. Learn more about the community archive and listen to stories from community members at [QuestaStories.org](https://www.QuestaStories.org) and [QuestaLibrary.org](https://www.QuestaLibrary.org).

Don't miss our fourth and fifth “Voces de Nuestro País” events at Questa Library on Jan. 10 and 24, 2-4 p.m. Also, save the Date: Next month's story-sharing event will take place on Feb. 21. We hope you can join us!

If you have stories you'd like to share, please let Michael Real know. You can often find him at Rael's Market or email him at rael870@gmail.com.

FOR MORE NEWS, PHOTOS & EVENT INFO VISIT [QUESTANEWS.COM](https://www.Questanews.com)



2025 Was Great; What's Next?

The past year saw much success in our mission to strengthen community via the arts and culture.

Many of our artists were hosted by Red River at their Vino in the Valley event last summer, broadening an audience for our creative community.

The tenth annual Questa Art Tour drew more attention than ever from media throughout the state and more participants than ever.

Our Traditional Foods Workshop with Flavio Cisneros was a rousing success, returning our focus to local culture in the absence of History Trail celebrations that has become too hot to enjoy on our usual June date.

Speaking of the Questa History Trail, now is a great time to walk the self-guided trail and take your kids and

friends with you!

Alumbra Holiday Market filled up with vendors very quickly, and a beautiful day welcomed shoppers to the wide variety of festive crafts and holiday gifts. Shop Questa!

And, of course, the Ceramic Cafe at the Youth & Family center (Check back with us in late March for exact dates for the spring session).

Ceramic Cafe

Part of our Art for All series, the Ceramic Cafe's open studio in November was full of bustling energy. These twice-yearly sessions are one of our newer projects.

A wide variety of folks come to enjoy playing with clay, ranging from already established artists looking to experiment with a new medium, kids who enjoy creating, and first-timers who are just curious. Getting to create alongside others, share knowledge, and learn from one another's successes (and even the inevitable difficulties) is fun.

The QCC's tireless grant writing allowed this program to add even more supplies and tools this past year, including the cost of clay, so the program continues to be free and open to all (donations are always welcome). We also



Courtesy Photo

A vendor assists a customer at the Alumbra Holiday Market in Questa as shoppers enjoyed a festive day browsing festive crafts, shopping for holiday gifts and supporting local businesses

thank the village of Questa for providing space in the Youth & Family Center, next to the Questa library.

Ceramicist and cafe host Anna Fuenning says she looks forward to seeing the program evolve with the natural ebb and flow of old-timers and newcomers alike, for what we all hope is many seasons to come. "It's a really sweet hangout with a dear community!"

An important Membership drive for 2026

Because of much-reduced federal funding for the arts, we must streamline our efforts while hoping to serve our

artist participants even better. A drive is taking place right now through May, with the goal of raising \$5,000. Memberships start at just \$10 and are vitally important to us, showing community buy-in that helps us secure grants. We hope every neighbor who has enjoyed one of our events this past year will become a member to ensure a wonderful 2026!

Find all the info you need and easy online payments at our website, QuestaCreative.org. Go to QuestaCreative.org and scroll all the way down to donate or join.

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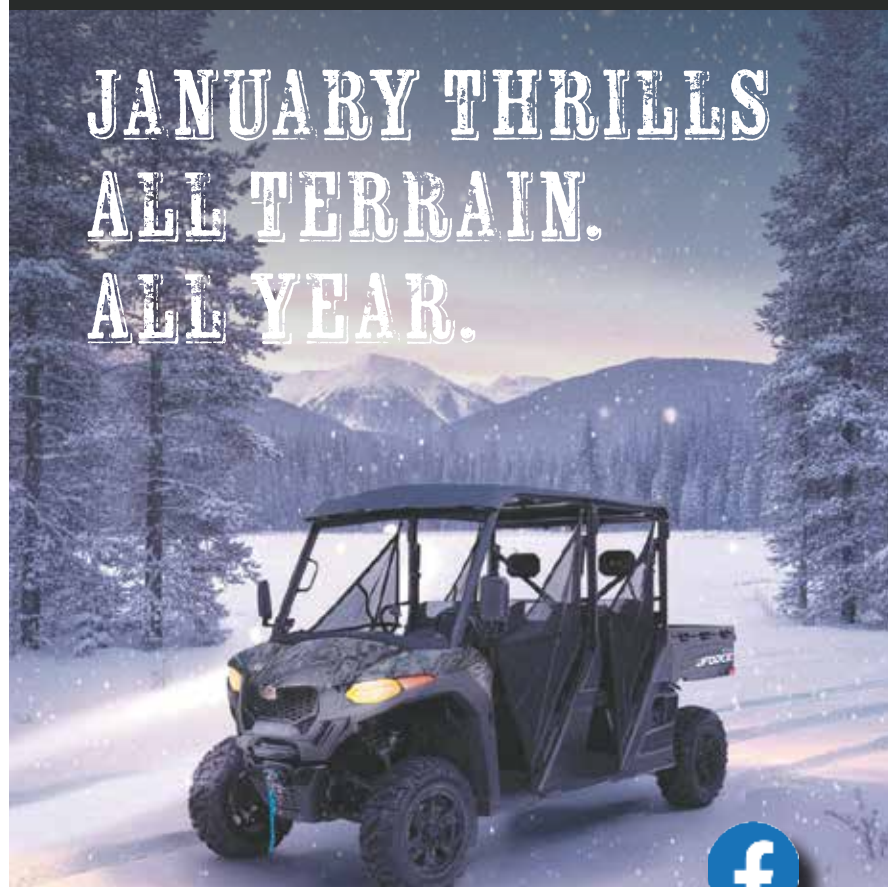
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Santas Helpers del Norte in Questa For Over 30 Years

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

For over three decades, the arrival of Santa has meant more than just a glimpse of a man in a red and white suit in Questa. It has meant generosity, community and the kind of Christmas magic that lingers long after the lights come down.

On Dec. 13, Santas Helpers del Norte once again delivered that magic, welcoming families from Questa and surrounding communities for its annual holiday gift giveaway. Cars stretched down N. Kiowa road, some waiting up to an hour, as children bundled in winter coats eagerly anticipated a moment with Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus and even a surprise visit from the Grinch.

More than 300 children waited their turn, eyes wide and smiles growing as the “big guy” and his wife arrived in festive fashion — riding in on a trike, escorted by Santa’s helpers and elves. For many families, the wait was part of the joy, filled with

laughter, waving hands and the shared excitement of the season.

Each child left with a free toy and a memory, but the event offered something deeper as well: reassurance that their community cares.

Santas Helpers del Norte is organized by a group of local families led by Defino “Joey” Ortega, who has been involved with the effort since the early 1990s. What began as a small act of kindness has grown into a tradition that generations of families now count on every December.

That joy does not happen by accident. The group fundraises throughout the year, relying on donations, volunteer time and community support to ensure Santa can return each Christmas with gifts in hand and cheer to spare.

Parents watched from car windows as their children met Santa and Mrs. Claus, posed for photos and shared holiday wishes. For a few moments, worries were set



Photo courtesy of Audriannah Leon

Santa and Mrs. Claus arrive in trike fashion to the Santas Helpers del Norte event

aside, replaced by laughter and the simple wonder of the season.

As the final cars rolled through and the last toys were handed out, Santas

Helpers del Norte once again proved that Christmas spirit is not measured by size or spectacle, but by consistency, kindness and the people willing to give year after year.

PBS Series Films in Cerro Showcasing Veterans and Community Life



Photo courtesy Rachel Kuc and Pablo Herrera

(L) Rosalie Ortega and local volunteer work to prepare plates for the community on Thanksgiving day



Photo courtesy Rachel Kuc and Pablo Herrera

Local (R) DD Mead and her mother (L) work on preparing food for locals on Thanksgiving day

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

While many Americans spent Thanksgiving gathered around family tables, a PBS production crew headed to Cerro to document a small community with deep roots in service and tradition.

Cultura, a nationally broadcast PBS television series produced at Eastern New Mexico University in Portales, filmed an episode in Cerro on Thanksgiving Day. The episode focuses in part on the local Cerro VFW Post 9516, a longtime fixture in the village and a symbol of the area’s ties to military service and community life.

The production highlights residents

and veterans whose families and histories are closely connected to the land. Interviews were filmed inside the VFW hall, which has served generations of local veterans and remains a gathering place that reflects Cerro’s sense of continuity and shared memory. Filmed on a holiday centered on gratitude, the conversations emphasized reflection and community rather than staged moments.

The episode also documents efforts to revive the Cerro VFW Hall after a period of limited use. Local veterans and community members have been working to restore the space as an active meeting place that honors past service while serv-

ing present-day needs. In the program, the hall is presented as both a historical landmark and a living institution sustained by local commitment.

Complementing the interviews are aerial shots of the surrounding landscape. Drone footage captures the rugged mountains and broad ridgelines that frame the village, underscoring the connection between the people of Cerro and the terrain that has shaped their lives for generations.

The episode is narrated by Geni Flores, whose voice guides viewers through the setting and stories, providing context to both the sweeping visuals and the personal accounts. The piece was shot and edited by

Pablo Herrera.

Cultura has gained national attention for bringing rural New Mexico stories to a wider audience while maintaining a focus on local voices. The series is known for combining cultural documentation with high production values and community-based storytelling.

“This is about showing New Mexico as it truly is,” producer and writer Herrera said. “Not as a postcard, not as a stereotype, but as lived experience.”

The Cerro episode is airing nationwide and is available to view on KENW’s YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/@kenwpbs.



Donny Santistevan Jr.

By LORA ARCINIEGA

Donny Santistevan Jr., a 17-year-old senior at Questa High School, is charting a clear path toward a career in business management and accounting. The son of Santana and Donny Santistevan Sr., he has lived in Cerro his entire life and credits his family for instilling the values that drive him.

While he describes himself as initially quiet and reserved, family and friends say Santistevan is determined and outgoing once he forms a connection.

"Once you get to know me, I can be funny and can be a great friend," he said. "I might look quiet but I'm actually a really outgoing person."

Santistevan cites both of his parents

as his biggest role models. He admires his father for being the "hardest-working man he knows," and his mother for achieving her master's degree and demonstrating the power of determination. "My mom has set the example of what success looks like and inspires me to be more like her."

"My aunt, who has a disability, comes and stays with us once a week and my mom takes care of her. I have seen her do that my whole life and she takes care of all of us," he said, highlighting his mother's nurturing and caretaking abilities.

Santistevan has an older sister, who is just one year ahead of him and graduated in May of 2025, serving as a constant role model. "She gave me a glimpse into what high school would be like and now what I can expect for college." He also shares a strong bond with his younger brother, Joel, who he drives to high school every day.

Santistevan remains tightly connected to his family, often spending time with them and his friends. He visits his paternal grandfather, Geno, at least three times a week. He recalls the passing of his paternal grandmother, Doris, as having a huge impact on him and his family.

A dedicated student, Santistevan is in the top three of his class and has been a member of the National Honor Society since the seventh grade. He currently



Courtesy Photo

Donny Santistevan Jr.

tackles four challenging dual-enrollment courses at the University of New Mexico-Taos campus, taking both in-person and online classes. He's been enrolled in college courses at UNM-Taos since he was a sophomore.

Beyond academics, he plays the trumpet for the school's mariachi group. He began playing after the group needed a trumpet player and he volunteered to step up. Santistevan is also an avid soccer player, a sport he's been playing for several years.

One of the highlights of his high school career was the group trip to Greece and Italy last summer. Santistevan noted that

visiting the ancient Colosseum was the highlight of the trip for him. Traveling is not new to Santistevan and his family. They make it a point to travel to a new location every year, something Santistevan has grown to look forward to. "We went to Hawaii this summer with my aunt and cousins and had a great time."

He also credits his Spanish teacher, Diane Léon, as having a profound impact on his life, consistently offering great advice and guidance. She tells me, "go after what you want."

Although he loves his hometown, Santistevan is ready to explore a "new world" and plans to leave Cerro after graduation to pursue his college education and business career. He has a clear idea of the path he needs to take to achieve his future goals.

When offering advice to younger students and readers, Santistevan emphasizes perseverance: "Don't let one bad day determine your future. And never lose sight of the people closest to you."

Ultimately, his appreciation for family and quiet tenacity has fueled his determination for success. For Santistevan, growing up in a supportive environment that nurtured his qualities has ensured he will use the lessons learned in Questa to build a successful future for himself.

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Questa Hosts Third Annual 'Pride of the Q' Cheer Competition



Photo courtesy Vivian Vallejos



Photo courtesy Vivian Vallejos

Teams in the Mini Pit awaiting winners to be announced

By STAFF WRITERS

Questa High School hosted the third annual 'Pride of the Q' cheer competition Saturday, Dec. 20 at the school's Mini Pit, drawing a packed crowd and teams from across northern and central New Mexico.

The NMAA-sanctioned event was coordinated and hosted by coaches Maria Media and Angel Media along with the Questa High School co-ed cheer team.

Participating teams included the

Española Valley Sundevils, Pojoaque Elks, Belen Eagles, Thoreau Hawks, Cuba Rams, Taos Extreme and the Questa Mini Wildcats.

In the competition results, Española Valley earned first place in A-4A Game Day, while the Questa Wildcats took first A-4A All Girl Game Day. Belen captured first place in A-4A Co-ed Cheer with Music, and Thoreau won A-4A All Girl Cheer with Music.

Wildcat cheer coaches and athletes

Questa Wildcat Cheer perform at the 'Pride of the Q' competition

expressed appreciation to the many parents and community members who volunteered to help make the competition a success. Volunteers included Pam and JR Rael, Jacqui Ortega, AnnMarie and Juan Arguello, ValerieAnn Vigil, Raynelle Sanchez, Michael Cordova, Marina Garcia, Feliz Ortega, Nicole Smith, Cassandra Cardenas, Kalena Trujillo, Julian Rivera and Jonathan Rivera. Dwayne Ortega served as the event's DJ.

Additional support came from Questa

FFA, which provided the awards plaques, and Vigil Photography, which donated the Grand Champion banner. The Class of 2027 operated the concession stand, James Vigil managed facilities, and the LOR Foundation provided pizzas for participants.

Organizers said the annual competition continues to grow, showcasing athleticism, school spirit and community support for cheer programs across the state.

COACHING Spotlight



ERICA PADILLA
Varsity Girls Basketball Coach

ENJOYS MOST:

I enjoy coaching because it lets you help guide the kids towards their goals, confidence and clarity as they grow and succeed. The connection and trust that forms throughout seasons is a bonus. The kids finding their potential and overcoming their challenges is just another reason for coaching.

COACHING PHILOSOPHY:

My coaching philosophy centers on teaching fundamentals, teamwork and discipline to grow skill and character both on and off the court. I emphasize clear expectations, positive communication and mutual respect while balancing athletic effort with academic success and a solid team culture.

Photo Courtesy of Vivian Vallejos

YEARS COACHED:

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VARSITY BASKETBALL; SMALL FORWARD, CENTER



DECEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS: STATS - 32 points, 13 rebounds, 4 assists, 10 steals

HERO/ROLE MODEL: "My parents because they have always shown me and taught me to work hard for what I want and to never give up or cheat my way through. Hard work will get me where I want to go and earn me my place."

WHY DO I LOVE IT: "I play the game because of the love I have for it and the love I have for it is what gives me the potential to be great. There will always be someone with more talent than you, but that's no excuse to let them work harder than you."

OTHER STUFF: volleyball, hanging out with friends and family, outdoor activities and working when I can to save for my future.

ATHLETE of the MONTH

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EZEKIEL MARTINEZ: 4TH GRADE, ALTA VISTA ELEMENTARY
4TH/5TH GRADE BASKETBALL TEAM



DECEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS: Getting picked to play with the 5th grade basketball team, working on dribbling and ball handling, and averaging 8 points per basketball game

HERO/ROLE MODEL: God

WHY DO I LOVE IT: "I love to play basketball because it's FUN. I get to play with my friends and I'm good at it!"

OTHER STUFF: eating, playing video games, watching Stranger Things.



Questa FFA Students Advance to State Competition

By MARIANA ORTEGA,
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On Nov. 21, the Questa High School FFA chapter competed in multiple Leadership Development Events, known as LDEs, which are designed to build career-ready skills such as public speaking, résumé writing, job applications and agricultural knowledge. The group traveled to Grants to participate in the contests.

Questa students competed in extemporaneous speaking, quiz, creed speaking and employment skills events.

The Greenhand Quiz team, which tests members' knowledge of FFA history, structure and opportunities based on the official FFA manual and state constitution, tied for first place but lost the tiebreaker. The team still qualified for the State FFA Convention in May. Team members Jolene Segura and Jessi Jackson placed third and fourth individually. The other team members are Giana Young and Allison Segura.

Segura also placed first in her Greenhand Creed cohort and advanced to final callbacks, finishing sixth overall. She will serve as an alternate at the state compe-



Courtesy Clara Adams

(L) to (R), Giana Young, Allison Segura, Jolene Segura, Jessica Jackson, Matthew Gallegos, Esteban Lara, Xzavier Mondragon, Jeremiah Ortega

tion. Young placed sixth in her creed speaking cohort, just outside the callback cutoff. Jackson placed fifth in her extemporaneous speaking cohort, with the top two advancing.

The Employment Skills Leadership Development Event simulates real-world job searching and interviewing, including résumé and application evaluation and interviews. Matthew Gallegos placed 15th overall and made the top 15 list in employment skills. FFA adviser Clara Adams noted his improvement from last year.

In their first competition, Mia Ramos

placed 17th and Marianna Ortega placed 24th out of 34 total employment skills participants.

The high school Greenhand Quiz team is currently the only Questa team qualified for the state competition, which will be held in Las Cruces from May 26–29, 2026. Additional state qualifiers will be determined by February 2026.

At the junior high level, the Questa FFA Quiz team earned third place at the district contest, securing a spot at the New Mexico State FFA Contest in Albuquerque from Feb. 6–8, 2026. Team members Jeremiah Ortega, Xavier Mondragon

and Esteban Lara also competed in creed speaking, placing 14th, 16th and 17th, respectively, out of 19 competitors.

Although Liam Martinez and Elijah Segura were unable to attend the district contest, both students remain eligible to join the team at the state contest, one as a competitor and one as an alternate. The chapter expressed pride in the students' dedication and teamwork as they prepare for the state level.

Mariana Ortega is a student at Questa High School. She is a member of the FFA and wrote this piece as a contributing writer.



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Applications Open: Regenerative Ranching Mentorship Program

By STAFF WRITERS

The Taos County Economic Development Corporation (TCEDC) is accepting applications for the 2026 cohort of its Regenerative Ranching Mentorship Program, a six-month initiative aimed at supporting beginning and early-career ranchers through hands-on training and business education.

The program will run from March through September 2026 and will pair participants with experienced ranchers

who practice regenerative methods. Mentees are required to complete 40 hours of on-ranch mentorship with a designated mentor and 15 hours of educational workshops facilitated by TCEDC and partner organizations.

The curriculum focuses on regenerative ranching practices, ranch business development and peer-to-peer learning within a supportive ranching community.

Participants who complete the program will receive \$20.90 per hour,

totaling a stipend of \$1,150 for 55 hours of participation. The program includes 40 hours of paid on-ranch education, 15 hours of paid workshops covering regenerative agriculture and ranch business planning, and networking opportunities within the regional ranching community.

Applicants must be at least 16 years old, have fewer than 10 years of ranching experience and reside in Taos, Mora, Colfax or Rio Arriba counties. Participants must attend 15 hours of

training and workshops, primarily held in Taos County, and complete 40 hours of on-ranch work over the course of the program.

The program is intended for individuals interested in integrating regenerative ranching practices into a beginning or future ranching operation and who demonstrate a passion for ranching culture, practice and business.

To apply, visit tcfdc.org or call Anny Warman at (575) 785-8731.

ERASED cont'd from page 3

later, I returned to the Pentagon to assist my unit and the FBI with documenting recovery efforts.

My husband Korey, then assigned to the 54th Quartermaster Company at Fort Lee, Virginia, was also deployed to the Pentagon, where his unit was tasked with searching for human remains and personal effects. I spent four years and thousands of hours working in the Pentagon's E-Ring—the very area destroyed on 9/11. Had I not traveled home to attend a wedding, I might have been among the victims. Sadly, thousands of Americans perished that day in 2001, including 184 at the Pentagon and on flight 77, and 2,753 more died in New York City, and 40 more in the field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Terrorists not included.

This is why the disappearance of that mural matters. Not symbolically—but personally, not only to me, but to Veterans and American families, especially those here in Questa, Cerro, Costilla, Amalia, El Rito, and beyond, who lived through this era and carry its weight.

Mystery of the Lost Mural

In early Sept, I approached Principal Ronnie Miller with my concerns. His response made it clear that he had no knowledge of the decision to cover the mural, nor an understanding of how deeply its loss would impact Veterans and community members.

At the Sept. 17, 2025 facilities meeting, I brought the issue to the attention of the School Board, and all members appeared genuinely surprised. When one asked how this could have happened, Superintendent John Maldonado stated that it was a “miscommunication” between custodial staff and administration during summer maintenance. The mural had simply been accidentally covered with multiple coats of

paint. Or was it intentional?

Even if accidental, the lack of communication, accountability, or public acknowledgment has been troubling. No notice was given to parents. No explanation to the school board. No apology to the community.

When I spoke again with Principal Miller and Superintendent Maldonado recently, both stated they had no immediate plans to replace the mural. Miller said he did not have any ideas as to how to “fix” it, nor had he spoken to the current art teacher yet. Maldonado also said he had no plans to correct the problem, due to pending future renovations, repairs, or new construction—including potential consolidation of Alta Vista Elementary Intermediate School with QJSHS.

While long-term planning is important, this is not a long-term issue.

This is a matter of respect, history, and community identity.

A blank white wall sends the opposite message of “Never Forget.”

Why We Need Action Now — Not “After Renovations”

Our district prides itself on honoring Veterans, engaging the community, and teaching students the importance of civic responsibility. Removing a 9/11 memorial—even accidentally—requires an immediate and meaningful response. Waiting years until construction plans finalize is simply not acceptable.

We are a community with a high population of Veterans and military families. Our students deserve to see their history reflected in the school walls—not erased.

The mural was not merely art.

It was a teaching tool.

A memorial.

A reminder of sacrifice, unity, and resilience.

Delaying its replacement risks sending a message our district does not intend:

That some history can be forgotten when it becomes inconvenient, or an embarrassing moment that nobody wants to own up to.

A Path Forward — Possible Solutions

The solution does not have to be complicated or expensive. Any of these steps would be far better than allowing the wall to remain empty indefinitely.

I propose the following immediate actions for community and board consideration:

- 1. Restore the original mural** using a photograph. If an image of the original artwork can be located, students in art classes, under supervision, could repaint it as a project. This would honor both the mural and the legacy of Mr. Chacón.
- 2. Commission an artist to recreate or reimagine the mural.** Whether it is Mr. Chacón himself or another local artist, the district could commission a piece that appropriately honors 9/11 and its significance.
- 3. Install a large printed reproduction immediately.** While planning or painting is underway, the empty wall should not remain blank. A high-quality printed mural or mounted display can be installed quickly and affordably.
- 4. Invite Veterans and community members** to collaborate. QISD policy encourages parent and public involvement in committees. This issue should be addressed transparently, with input from Veterans organizations, families, and community leaders.
- 5. Publicly acknowledge the mistake.** If it indeed was a mistake, the leadership of the schools should offer a simple, yet sincere apology to the QISD School District, and to Mr. Albert Chacón for the failure in communication and judgment. 9/11 was not a conspiracy; it was a national tragedy, and we have to honor the victims and the Veterans who were subsequently sent to fight the war on

terror for decades in Afghanistan and Iraq. Veterans like my husband and myself. Those who wear the uniform today, and for future veterans that continue to emerge from our very own Questa High School and chiefly, those who died in service to our Nation.

- 6. Rebuild trust in Leadership** Keep the public informed about the progress on the restoration, and proudly reveal the project once completed. I believe strongly in holding our leaders accountable and in the importance of bringing concerns forward in a transparent and constructive manner. Do so in good faith, without instilling the fear of retaliation in staff or students. Encourage respect, responsibility, gratitude, and integrity.

Fly the flags proudly, replace them when they get weathered and worn. When you have a moment of silence, specifically state what it is for. Don't assume students don't notice- they do. Celebrate the history of our Country, don't erase it.

“Never Forget” Is More Than a Phrase

I love our students and the staff at Questa Junior Senior High School. Returning to substitute this year has reminded me how special this community is. The students are bright, respectful, and curious. They deserve to walk hallways that reflect the values we teach them.

A plain white wall cannot be the final word on the mural that once stood there.

Our students—and our community—deserve better.

They deserve to be reminded of America's promise to “Never Forget.”

Update: At the December 17 Questa School Board meeting, the Superintendent briefed the board on his plans to repaint the mural, on plywood, so it can be moved if needed. He said they ordered supplies and the Art teacher is going to start working on it before she retires at the end of the school year.



By Toner Mitchell

Go Fish Yourself

Last year was quite a ride, wasn't it? Aside from all the good stuff — I hope we all found lots to be thankful for throughout 2025 — we saw plenty of ugliness that we hopefully won't see again. Without going into details, I will simply opine that our nation may be as angry now as it has ever been. I would go so far as to say that many people seemed to consider it their job to make us angrier, and boy, do they deserve a bonus.

I tried to stay above it all, or at least to the side. To the extent that I didn't entirely succeed, I attribute my failure to the fact that I didn't fish as often as I usually do. As many miles as I drive around northern New Mexico, I normally keep a rigged fly rod in my car for the frequent occasions when I'm cruising along a stream and find some precious few mo-



Courtesy Photo

Rio Chama below Heron Dam

ments to wet a line. In 2025, for reasons I can't fathom, I left the rod at home. I drove to meetings in rural villages, turned around and drove home, where phones and computers lurked with their venom and their spite.

Honestly, I think I just forgot to fish, which was definitely a first. For as long as I can remember, fishing has been like a clock regulating my psychic rhythms for good and for bad. Various loved

ones, but mainly my wife, have regularly banished me to the river for attitude adjustments, essentially saying, "I don't want to see your [expletive deleted][expletive deleted] back here until you catch a damn fish!"

These people taught me what I already knew, to heed the signals my brain was sending through an irritable temper and raised voice, or nights upon nights of insomnia. They taught me that fishing

was my emotional hygiene. Like brushing my teeth, fishing wasn't a practice I could skip without suffering significant reductions in the quality and quantity of life. At the very least, interrupting such a healthy habit would ensure that no one would want to come near me or my filthy mouth.

It's a well-worn cliché that fishing is like religion, and like all clichés, there's some truth to it. During my Catholic boyhood, I remember lying in bed and sending anxious words into my pitch-black room in the hope that answers would soon return; praying, in other words. The transition from that to fishing was natural. If not certain knowledge of what lay in the depths, drifting a fly through a river current required a serious and yet optimistic faith in a being that, although invisible, had the power to make my next moment better than this one, or at least not too much worse. As such, my search was its own reward.

I hope I'll remember that in 2026. Instead of getting washed away by the media-induced dopamine floods, I hope I'll run for higher ground. Or better yet, over the next hill where a clear and cold stream with lots of hungry trout will be waiting for me.



BIRD IS THE WORD

By Bryce Flannagan

The American Crow: Genius in Black Feathers

In the cottonwood groves along the Rio Grande and the piñon forests of New Mexico's high country, a misunderstood genius conducts its daily business. The American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) has been maligned as a harbinger of death and dismissed as a scavenger, yet here it remains, 31 million strong across North America, outsmarting humans at every turn.

These glossy black birds, measuring 16 to 21 inches long, possess brains proportionally larger than those of humans. Recent neuroscience reveals why. When a crow encounters one of its dead, the bird's

nidopallium caudolaterale — the avian equivalent of the human prefrontal cortex — activates intensely, functioning as a command center for decision-making.

The Funerals That Teach

Kaeli Swift, an avian behavioral ecologist at the University of Washington, has witnessed hundreds of crow funerals. When a crow discovers a dead companion, it summons others with an urgent alarm call. They gather on branches, fall silent, then erupt into raucous calling for 15 to 20 minutes before dispersing.

Swift's research shows that crows are not grieving in the human sense; they are learning. The sight of a dead crow activates decision-making centers, turning tragedy into a teachable moment about danger. In experiments, crows remembered human faces associated with dead crows for up to six weeks, dive-bombing those individuals whenever they reappeared. They were conducting forensic analysis, gathering intelligence to survive.

The Gift Economy

The internet delights in stories of crows bringing gifts to humans who feed them — shiny bottle caps or bits of metal. What appears to be gratitude may be more pragmatic. Conservation ecologist John Mar-



Photo by Gemini

from European superstition. Pueblo peoples include crow clans, and unlike Western mythology, these birds are considered harbingers of good fortune.

In Cherokee tradition, the crow is known as Koga Nvwati, or crow medicine — the ability to make decisions and embrace change. Unlike European tales of cursed birds, many Indigenous stories celebrate the crow's cleverness. These are birds that brought fire to freezing people and taught lessons about respecting animals.

Thriving in Our World

From a conservation standpoint, the American crow represents a rare success story. The species has not only survived human persecution but thrived alongside it. The secret lies in adaptability. Crows exploit nearly every habitat humans create, from farmland and city parks to suburban backyards.

Walk through Old Town Albuquerque at dusk and crows may be seen streaming toward communal roosts against the pink glow of the Sandia Mountains. These birds are neither omens nor pests. They are neighbors, sharing the landscape with a sophistication humans are only beginning to understand.

zluff refers to this as "gifting," though the underlying mechanism remains debated.

One explanation is that operant conditioning works both ways. A crow drops an object near a feeding station, and the delighted human puts out extra food. The crow learns that a shiny object results in a larger meal, recognizing and exploiting patterns. This capacity was demonstrated by Josh Klein's "crow vending machine," which proved crows can learn multistep processes and recognize currency.

Sacred Keepers of Wisdom

In the pueblos of New Mexico, crows occupy an honored place far removed

**BODY
MIND
SPIRIT**

By **BARBARA TRACY**



**The Beautiful
Human Spirit**

When I was in high school many moons ago, I was active in sports and attending our school games. One winter night after a basketball game, I quietly came into the house and tiptoed upstairs to my unheated bedroom. When I entered, I was surprised to see a hot cup of cocoa sitting by my bed. “Now how did she do that?” My grandmother, who was usually in bed asleep, had somehow prepared this lovely hot drink, taken it up the steep stairs to my room and gone back to bed just at the right time for my arrival home! The amount of caring, love and understand-

ing were very clearly part of her human spirit. I have been blessed as have we all by the beauty of the human spirit, from people passing through or permanently a part of our lives.

The simplest acts of kindness, compassion, caring, generosity and loving can bring respite from our moment to moment lives. We have the capacity to bring light into the darkness with a smile or a friendly gesture to someone passing by. We don’t need to know who they are except that each of us is a precious expression from the source that animates our life. Regardless of any perceived conflicts or differences, everyone has an intrinsic worth and an inherent beauty. Look beyond any negative perception and recognize how beautiful the individual expression of life itself is happening through the human experience.

“You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.” Mahatma Gandhi

Humanity comes in all shapes, sizes, colors, experiences and perceptions. So of course, none of us is a duplicate

of another. We are individualized spirit living out lives that have been designed and modified by the very experience of being human. And when we really think about where it all comes from; that is a great mystery.

Looking toward the new year once again, and with faith in ourselves and others, we have the potential to build and rebuild bridges in relationships. Perhaps take the time to extend a hand to someone to lighten their day. We all share fundamental human experiences, emotions and vulnerabilities and when we accept that, we open the doors to compassion and understanding for ourselves and others.

“The beauty of humanity lies in our diverse, flawed, yet resilient spirit, seen in shared laughter and tears, dreams pursued, and compassion offered, creating a vibrant, imperfect tapestry of resilience, love and connection that shines brightest in kindness, understanding and unity despite our differences.” Author unknown.

Here is to a bright shining year ahead with abundance of love, laughter and harmony. Happy New Year to All.

CAV'S CORNER cont'd from page 12

remain a lifeline.

No one can end domestic violence alone. Together, however, we can create safety, connection and a community where violence has fewer places to hide.

A Year of Healing Begins With Compassion

Every survivor’s journey is different. Healing is not linear and cannot be rushed, but it can be supported through kindness, understanding and a community that refuses to look away.

My hope for the new year is simple:

- That everyone living in fear finds their way to safety.
- That every child who has witnessed violence finds peace.
- That every survivor feels believed, supported and worthy of healing.
- And that our community continues to lead with compassion.

If You Need Us, We Are Here

Every hour. Every day. Every season of the year.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
All Meals Served With 8oz. 2% Milk as available			1 CLOSED	2 Herbed Tilapia, Spinach Brown Rice Pilaf, Winter Blend Veggies Tossed Salad, Angel Food Cake w/Berries
5 Chicken Fried Steak, Mashed Potatoes w/Country Gravy Roasted Brussels Sprouts Wheat Roll Fruit Cocktail	6 Chicken Tetrazzini, Capri Vegetables Tossed Salad w/Italian Dressing Baked Cinnamon Apples	7 Soft Beef Taco Salsa Pinto Beans California Blend Veggies, Strawberry Shortcake	8 Green Chile Chicken Enchiladas Lemon Sauteed Spinach Spanish Style Cauliflower Rice Fruit Salad	9 Chicken Caesar Salad Caesar Dressing/Croutons Wheat Roll Jello-O w/Pineapple
12 Chicken Tenders, Country Gravy Roasted Potatoes Carrots Honey Cornbread Fruit Salad	13 Pepperoni & Green Chile Pizza Garden Salad w/Garbanzo Beans & Boiled Egg Strawberries	14 Vegetable Beef Stew Red Steamed Cabbage w/Apples Tossed Salad Wheat Roll Fruit Compote	15 Pulled Pork on a Bun Chateau Blend Veggies Grapes Vanilla Yogurt	16 Hamburger w/Lettuce, Tomato & Onion Baked French Fries Broccoli Salad Mixed Fruit
19 CLOSED	20 Chile Rellenos w/Green Sauce Pinto Beans Vegetable Medley Spanish Rice Honeydew	21 Chicken Fajitas w/Onion & Peppers Tortilla Salsa Capri Vegetable Peaches	22 Baked Cajun Fish Scalloped Potatoes, Green Beans Wheat Roll Chocolate Pudding Banana	23 Frito Pie Tossed Salad Tropical Fruit Salad
26 Salisbury Steak w/Brown Gravy & Mushrooms Roasted Red Potatoes Broccoli Wheat Roll Oranges w/Cinnamon	27 Baked Ham, Dressing Sweet Potatoes Asparagus Cranberry Sauce Wheat Roll Applesauce	28 Stuffed Bell Peppers Tossed Salad w/Ranch Wheat Roll Strawberries	29 Chicken & Dumplings Mustard Greens Carrots Wheat Roll Spiced Pears	30 Chile Beans w/Beef Tossed Salad w/Ranch Mexican Cornbread Apricots

**SENIOR
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JANUARY
2026**

This Senior Lunch Menu applies to all Senior Centers in Taos County. Meals are cooked fresh at each location.

Lunch donations recommendations are \$1.50 and up. Lunches for people under 60 years old are \$7.50 a person.

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Currently, exercise classes are not available.

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PLEASE NOTE THAT THE MENU IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE



**LIVE
LOVE
LAUGH**

by Ellen Wood
a.k.a. Maruška

**Should you
buy organic or
non-organic?**

Here's my rule of thumb: buy the best food you can afford. If that's all local organic, great! If you're on more of a bud-

get, go organic with the most important foods and conventional with others. If you are used to buying non-organic foods, consider adjusting your budget to allocate a higher percentage of your resources to food, if you can.

The Questa Farmers Market is a great place to buy healthy food and meet old friends and make new ones. Gaea McGee is Program Director for the farmer's market as well as for CULTIVO, a program of Localogy, the non-profit organization run by Daniel Hutchison. In the spring, check out CULTIVO's CSA (community supported agriculture) where you buy a share of the farms' crops for a weekly basket of veggies all summer. Split a share with neighbors if a

whole share is too much for you. A CSA is affordable, local and fresh, and our farmers use organic practices so you can expect it to be fresh and healthy. Spring and fall shares are usually available too.

CULTIVO stands for Community, Unity, Land, Tradition, Innovation, Vocation & Opportunity.

So why spend the extra money on organic food? Organic foods not only lower the amounts of toxic pesticides in your body, they also have higher vitamin and mineral content because they are grown in better soil. In addition, a food that is labeled organic cannot be a genetically modified (GM) food, which you want to avoid.

If you continue to buy conventional

foods, and can budget for some organic food, there's a hierarchy of importance. Certain foods are more important to buy organic because they have the heaviest concentration of pesticides. Others are relatively free of insecticides. Here's a list of each, courtesy of Robin Edmondson's website, www.robin.hubpages.com.

Ellen Wood of Questa, known artistically as Maruska, is an award-winning author celebrated for her transformative book series, The Secret Method for Growing Younger. Her latest release, Five Tibetan Rites – The Right Way, continues her mission to inspire youthfulness. All titles are available at www.howtogrowyounger.com. To contact Ellen, email her at ellen@howtogrowyounger.com.



Buy These Foods Organic:

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| Apples | Raspberries |
| Cherries | Strawberries |
| Grapes | Bell Peppers |
| Nectarines | Celery |
| Peaches | Potatoes |
| Pears | Spinach |



These are safer to buy non-organic:

- | | |
|-----------|-------------|
| Bananas | Avocado |
| Kiwi | Broccoli |
| Mangoes | Cauliflower |
| Papaya | Onions |
| Pineapple | Peas |
| Asparagus | |

JR (Malaquias) says:

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Living Word Ministries

By MIKAYLA ORTEGA

New Mexico rolled out its new universal child-care funding beginning Nov. 2025. Since this announcement, leaders in the Questa area are moving quickly to expand services for families, including the launch of what will be the only faith-based early learning center in Taos County.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced earlier this fall that the state would remove income limits and other barriers to child-care subsidies beginning Nov. 1. Under the changes, grandparents can qualify for support, citizenship is no longer a requirement, and the application process has been simplified.

Pastor Gayle Martinez of Living Word Ministries said the policy shift opened a door the church had long hoped for.

“When we learned the governor intended to fund universal child care, we saw an opportunity to lay new build-

Questa Church, Inspire Partner to Expand Childcare as New Mexico Launches Universal Access

ing blocks in our community,” Pastor Martinez said. “We wanted a faith-based program to support families. Strong families make strong churches and strong communities.”

Martinez said the new funding expands the resources available to providers. Jessica Trujillo, who attends Living Word Ministries and works with Inspire — a regional child-care and youth-program provider with sites in Taos, Arroyo Seco and Red River — helped bridge the connection. The partnership between Inspire and Living Word formed naturally and quickly grew into a formal collaboration.

Trujillo will serve as a site director of the new center at Living Word Ministries. She says the collaboration aligns with Inspire’s long-standing goal of expanding services to as many families as possible. Inspire currently offers early childhood programs and after-school care for elementary students, which she said helps bridge critical gaps for working parents.

“Over the last couple of years, our goal

has been to support and expand access wherever we can,” Trujillo said. “This is something different and something exciting for our northern Taos County communities.”

Living Word Ministries plans to convert its Sunday school classrooms into an early learning center, which Pastor Martinez says will function as a shared space that benefits both the church and the wider community.

“There is a big need for childcare in northern New Mexico and now, with the resources of universal childcare for all children under 5, more families will have access to it.”

Interest in the new center has already begun to surface. Trujillo said one mother was brought to tears in relief after learning childcare would finally be accessible to her family.

Organizers hope to open with 12 slots, though they have capacity to grow as staffing and resources expand. Hiring for the center is underway.

Pastor Martinez emphasized the long-term vision: creating programs with generational impact, grounded in faith, family support and community outreach.

Inspire previously hosted an early learning program at Freedom Church but the operation shut down as the center moved to Red River. Pastor Martinez reiterated that the new partnership with Inspire offers renewed structure and stability rooted in shared goals and commitments from both Inspire and Living Word Ministries.

“We want families to know we’re here, and we’re committed to giving this a good go,” she said. “This is a great partnership, and we’re excited about what it means for Questa.”

Trujillo echoed that optimism, calling the moment “full of joy and excitement.”

“This partnership will allow us to meet a need that has existed for a long time,” Trujillo said. “We expect to expand and grow as the community grows with support and stability.”

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By LORA ARCINIEGA

Mountain Home Health, which has provided quality home health care to northern New Mexico since 1975, is embracing a new chapter focused on education—both for patients and the next generation of caregivers.

“We want to help our community understand the differences and benefits of private duty, home health, palliative and hospice care — and feel confident advocating for the support they deserve,” said Victoria Cordova, the director of marketing.

Mountain Home Health Expands Focus on Education

The agency offers a spectrum of care designed to support patients at home, helping families understand which level of support is appropriate for their needs.

Private Duty services provide non-medical, in-home support such as bathing, dressing, meal preparation, and transportation. These services are designed to help individuals remain safe and independent and are paid for privately or through VA benefits.

Home Health is a Medicare-covered clinical service for patients who need skilled care at home, such as nursing or physical therapy. This service is ideal for those recovering from surgery or needing help with medication management and fall prevention.

Palliative Care supports patients living with serious illnesses who are still pursuing curative treatment, focusing on symptom relief and quality of life.

Hospice Care serves patients with a terminal prognosis who wish to remain home, prioritizing comfort, dignity, and emotional support for the entire family.

All of these clinical services are 100% covered by Medicare for patients who are considered “homebound,” meaning leaving the home requires a taxing effort. “No matter what level of care a patient is at, Mountain Home Health offers something for anyone who needs support at home,” Cordova said.

In addition to patient education, the agency is working to bridge the caregiver gap by informing younger community members about career opportunities, volunteering, and shadowing staff. “One of our goals is to spread education about home health care careers and pathways students might take,” Cordova said.

In early January 2026, Mountain

Home Health launched this initiative with a presentation at Questa High School. The agency currently offers career paths in physical therapy, massage therapy, and nursing. For some of these roles, students can even start classes while in high school. “We are trying to rebuild our community from the ground up starting with our younger generations,” Cordova said. “We want to educate the younger generation and empower them to know what resources and careers are available.”

Questa High School is the first rural school to hear the presentation, with plans to reach more students throughout Taos and the surrounding areas. Mountain Home Health also notifies the community that volunteer opportunities are available. To learn more, [visit mtnhomehealth.com](http://mtnhomehealth.com).

Sponsored by 



Smart Training Essentials

Every day we hear about exercise and fitness routines that will build muscle, lose body fat, and gain good body weight in a short amount of time. Of course if you're not familiar with fitness routines, or lack the experience of exercise, someone will believe what they read or saw on video. I'm not saying that books or videos are bad for you, just be cautious and do research before choosing these routines. Reason being, that some routines are developed for individuals using enhancement drugs that enable them to recover faster than the average person. Many factors come into play when dealing with exercise such as age, experience, diets, routines, and enhancement drugs, etc..

I'm a strong believer that the number one rule to get the best results from exercise is diet and nutrition. When I speak to individuals about training and nutrition, I use this example. Treat your body like a vehicle, if you put in the wrong fuel into your car, the car will run poorly and eventually break down. This is true with your body. If you feed the body a poor diet with lots of junk food, drinks, etc then your body won't perform at its highest potential. This can be the reason you don't see results or even worse get injured. Many people, especially when they are young or just started exercising, feel that they need to exercise the same body parts daily and do crazy amounts of sets in order to get stronger and grow muscle. It's the complete opposite, you workout different body parts on different days. Cut the sets down each day and then let the body recover and rest. This in return is when you'll start getting stronger and building more muscle. The following weight training program can be effective for anyone that believes that less is more effective.

**AS ALWAYS, STAY ACTIVE
AND BE IN CONTROL OF
YOUR MIND, BODY & SOUL**

MONDAY (CHEST, SHOULDERS, TRICEPS)

Flat bench dumbbell flies
1x12 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x10 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x8 reps

Inc. or Flat bench press
1x10 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x10 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x8 reps

Standing DB side laterals
1x15 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x12 reps, 20
sec. Rest perform 1x10 reps

Seated Db or Barbell shoulder press
1x12 reps, 20 second rest perform
1x10 reps, 20 sec. Rest perform 1x8 reps

Db kickbacks or cable pressdown
1x15 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x12
reps, 20 sec. Rest perform 1x10 reps

Close grip bench press
1x10 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x8 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x8 reps

TUESDAY (REST DAY)

WEDNESDAY (QUADS, HAMSTRINGS, CALVES)

Seated Leg extension
1x15 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x12 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x10 reps

Barbell Squat
1x12 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x10 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x8 reps

Barb. or Db Stiff Leg Deadlift -
1x15 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x12
reps, 20 sec. Rest perform 1x10 reps

Laying Down Leg Curl
1x12 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x10 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x8 reps

Standing 1 Leg Calf Raise
1x15 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x12 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x10 reps

Seated Leg Press Calf Raise
1x12 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x10 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x8 reps

THURSDAY (REST DAY)

FRIDAY (BACK, BICEPS, ABS)

Seated Cable Row
1x12 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x10 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x8 reps

Seated Wide Grip Pulldown
1x10 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x10 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x8 reps

Db Concentration Curl
1x15 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x12 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x10 reps

Standing Barb. Curl
1x10 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x10 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x8 reps

Hanging Straight Leg Raises
1x20 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x15 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x12 reps

Seated Cable Crunch
1x15 reps, 20 second rest perform 1x12 reps,
20 sec. Rest perform 1x10 reps

Paul Passino has a Bachelors of Science degree in human performance and sport with a health, education, and coaching minor, as well as 45 hours of sports administration and over 23 years of teaching P.E., weight training, and coaching.



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BY J. ORTEGA

One Battle After Another

Starring: Leonardo DiCaprio, Sean Penn, Teyana Taylor, Benecio Del Toro, and Chase Ininiti

Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson
Rated R

Streaming on HBOMAX

First Impression: Director Paul Thomas Anderson has come out swinging with a career best in *One Battle After Another*. It's a unique subversive take on revolutionaries, how they spark and how powerful government forces and secret societies linked to them aim to take them down. Sean Penn gives a near career best performance here as Colonel Lockjaw. This is a villain role that will live in infamy for decades to come. We also get stellar performances from Leonardo DiCaprio and Benecio Del Toro who in limited screen time also puts in a career best performance as well. And I also have to mention the performance of newcomer Chase Ininiti who does more than just hold her own with Hollywood heavyweights like DiCaprio, Penn and Del Toro. She shines bright when given the opportunity and I'm excited to watch her in future projects to come.

When you think about it when we discuss past revolutions and revolutionary characters we always tend to romanticize them whether it be Che Guevara in the Cuban revolution to Vladimir Lenin and Leo Trotsky in the Russian Revolution to Emilio Zapata and Pancho Villa in the Mexican revolution we see these characters as almost folk heroes who are more myth than man we see them as fighting the good fight to help the poorest and most vulnerable. But that's usually where the discussion

ends. We never talk about the blowback and the after effects of the exciting and thrilling part of the story. Because as we have seen from countless examples, revolutionary history isn't always a happy ending and the people who were once idolized and adored can turn into people unrecognizable and detested.

And that is exactly what Paul Thomas Anderson who's most well-known for his previous films *There will be Blood* and *Boogie nights* gives us with *One Battle After Another*. We see the rise and fall of a fictional revolutionary movement called *The French 75* headed by DiCaprio's character Bob Ferguson and his just as wreck less but exciting girlfriend Teyana Taylor's character *Perfidia Beverly Hills* we see them causing mischief and chaos for the overarching villain Colonel Lockjaw (Penn) and how Lockjaw falls in love with *Perfidia* and the complicated results of that fatal attraction. Anderson shows us the fall of *The French 75* with the arrest of *Perfidia Beverly Hills* and Colonel Lockjaw giving her a lifeline to avoid prison if she "names names" of her fellow revolutionaries. All this happens in the first 20 minutes of the movie. The real movie starts 15 years later with Bob and his Daughter *Willa (Ininiti)* hiding out and living off the grid after *Peridia* betrayed the movement. But old nemesis don't go away so easily as Colonel Lockjaw has been invited to a secret society and in order to join he needs to take care of some past transgressions like eliminating Bob and *Willa* all together.

That's as much of the plot as I want to give away for now. *One Battle After Another* was very hyped when it was announced and I'm here to say that it lived up to the hype and then some. I was pleasantly surprised and will be waiting to see how many Oscar nominations it will receive.

Final Verdict 5 out of 5 Stars



Screen Capture: *One Battle After Another*



Bring in the new year with a classic seafood stew! It's cold outside and this seafood stew is rich, briny, and perfect for a special dinner. Serve with toasted garlic bread. Make sure to buy good quality fish and seafood.

Cioppino San Francisco Seafood Stew (chuh-pee-no)

Yield: 4–6 servings

Time: ~45 minutes

Ingredients

Vegetables and spices

3 Tbsp olive oil

1 large onion, diced

1 fennel bulb, diced

(optional but traditional)

4 cloves garlic, minced

1 tsp crushed red pepper flakes (to taste)

2 Tbsp tomato paste

Liquids

1 cup dry white wine

1 (28-oz) can crushed tomatoes (preferably San Marzano)

3 cups seafood or fish stock

1 bay leaf

Seafood (mix & match)

1 lb firm white fish (halibut, cod, rockfish), large chunks

1 lb mussels, scrubbed and debearded

1 lb clams (Manila or littleneck), scrubbed

3/4 lb large shrimp, shell-on if possible

1/2 lb scallops

1/2 lb crab meat

Finish

Salt & freshly cracked black pepper

2 Tbsp chopped fresh parsley

2 Tbsp chopped fresh basil

Zest of 1 lemon using a microplane

(optional)



Courtesy Photo

PROCEDURE

Build the base

- Heat olive oil in a large, wide pot over medium heat.
- Add onion and fennel; cook until soft and translucent (6–8 min).
- Stir in garlic and cook for 1–2 minutes. Add red pepper flakes; cook for 30 seconds.
- Add tomato paste and cook for 1–2 minutes to caramelize.

Deglaze & simmer

- Pour in white wine, scraping the pot. Reduce by half.
- Add crushed tomatoes, seafood stock, and bay leaf.
- Simmer gently for 20 minutes. Season lightly with salt and pepper.

Cook seafood in stages

- Add firm white fish and simmer 2–3 minutes
- Add clams and mussels, cover, cook 3–4 minutes until opening
- Add shrimp, scallops, and crab; simmer just until shrimp are pink (2–3 minutes)
- Discard any shellfish that do not open.

Finish

- Remove bay leaf. Adjust seasoning with salt.
- Stir in parsley, basil, and lemon zest if using.

Serve

- Ladle into warm bowls with plenty of broth.
- Serve with toasted sourdough for dipping!
- Dry white wine matters—avoid anything sweet.
- Shell-on shrimp deepen flavor.
- Cioppino should be brothy, not thick.
- Make the broth ahead—seafood is best added just before serving

Brendalee (Vialpando) Reiplinger is a Questa native who has worked her way up the culinary ladder and is currently executive chef at The Lodge at Bodega Bay, located off the Sonoma Coast in CA. Brendalee credits her hospitality and joy of preparing food from her upbringing in Questa.

OBITUARIES



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Ida Felecia Cisneros
d. Dec. 15, 2025

Ida Felecia Cisneros, a longtime educator and devoted matriarch, died Dec. 15, 2025. She was 99.

Cisneros was born Oct. 14, 1926, in Amalia, New Mexico. She spent her life dedicated to family, faith and education, leaving a lasting impact on her community and all who knew her.

She worked as a second-grade teacher at Questa Independent Schools, where she was known for her gentle humor, nurturing spirit and commitment to her students. She earned a bachelor's degree in education from Adams State. Colleagues and students alike remember her for creating a warm and supportive learning environment.

In 1961, she married Jose E. Cisneros. The couple shared many years together until his death, building a home rooted in love, respect and family.

Cisneros was one of nine children and was deeply proud of her family heritage. In later years, she cherished her roles as a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

She is survived by her son, James Cisneros and his wife, Sandra; grandchildren Mariah Cisneros, Jassmann Cisneros, Kimberly Trujillo, Michael Trujillo, Mateo Vigil, Alexia Cisneros and James Ryan Cisneros; and great-grandchildren Klea Trujillo, Adrian Trujillo and Kaylee Trujillo. She is also survived by her brother, Elias Salazar and his wife, Avelinda.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Jose E. Cisneros; her grandson, Joseph Isiah Cisneros; her

parents, Emetelio Salazar and Ramoncita Vallejo; and siblings Jesusita Martinez (Delfino), Cipriano Salazar (Rufinita), Emillia Ortiz (Jose), Antonia Rivera (Lilio), Ermilinda Garcia (Mike), Clara Arellano and Cecilia Arellano (John).

Outside of her professional life, Cisneros enjoyed gardening, crocheting, dancing and picking pinon. A devout Catholic, her faith guided her life and strengthened her sense of community and service. Services are pending.



Vicki Diane Devers
d. December 8, 2025

Vicki Diane Devers passed away December 8, 2025. She was born in Joplin, Missouri on July 16, 1951. She spent her younger days in Missouri with her family and then moved to Texas where she met the love of her life. She found herself back in Missouri until 2019 and then back to the state which she loved, New Mexico. Having a deep love for the Questa/Cerro area and the mountains where they had once lived, Vicki and her soul mate Larry moved to their forever dream home in 2019 in Cerro. Larry passed away in 2021. Vicki continued to live out their dream at "The Ranch" in Cerro, spending her time volunteering at the local food pantry and serving her community. She was loved by many. She is now spending eternity with the love of her life Larry and our Heavenly Father.

Vicki will be missed by her brother Brad Lamb, sister-in-law Nancy Lamb, her children Scott Richter, Tori Curry (Levi), Somare Matson (Jim) seven grand-

children; Kash Richter, Lilli Richter, Christian Curry and Kaysha Curry, Kate Matson, McKean Matson, Cole Matson, nieces and many friends. In every place she lived, many will miss her along with the wonderful friends of Questa, Cerro, and Red River. There will be a celebration of life later in the spring. In lieu of flowers, hug your moms!



Charles "Chuck" Kroon
d. Dec. 15, 2025

Charles "Chuck" Kroon, father, husband, partner, grandfather, and friend passed away peacefully on December 15, 2025.

Chuck was born to William James and Wilma Augusta (Noerenburg) Kroon in Seward, NE on March 4, 1946. He studied electrical engineering at University of Nebraska. After college he moved to Rochester, NY, worked at Kodak, and married Cathrine "Cathi" Wyler on June 24, 1972. Together they built a life in Wallingford, CT where they raised their two children, Jimmy and Cory. They moved to New Mexico in 2010, fulfilling a retirement dream they'd been planning for over 15 years.

Chuck worked as an electrical engineer at Dictaphone (Pitney Bowes) and later Canberra Industries. Beyond his career, he had a giving heart and a lifelong commitment to volunteer work. He worked with the American Field Service in CT, hosting many foreign exchange students, and continued this journey in the southwest with his wife, Cathi, and later with his partner, Linda, in Questa, NM. He

volunteered for many local Questa organizations with both Cathi and Linda. He started volunteering for the Latir Fire Department, Habitat for Humanity, and Cerro Vista Farms, where he met Linda, and expanded his volunteer work at the local food pantry and delivering the Questa newspaper.

Chuck loved animals, particularly cats. He loved all things travel, travelling frequently with his family while in CT and continuing in NM. He visited dozens of countries in his lifetime and especially in the last five years with Linda. He loved camping, which was a family past-time in CT. He also loved home renovation and woodworking and was often found in his CT and NM workshops. He was an avid college football fan and loved watching the Nebraska Cornhuskers as it reminded him of his rugby days in Rochester.

Chuck is predeceased by his wife, Cathi Kroon and his older brother Keith Kroon of Rochester, NY. He is survived by his son Jimmy Kroon (Lori Brown), his daughter, Cory Walka (Jason Walka), his partner Linda Betz and younger brother David Kroon (Sharon Watson-Kroon). He loved his grandson Theodore "Teddy" Walka who loved sitting in his grandpa's lap and reading bedtime stories during visits.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in Chuck's honor to the following organizations:

Latir Volunteer Fire

Department of Questa, NM

<https://www.taoscounty.org/Directory.aspx?did=41>

Stray Hearts Animal Shelter of Taos, NM

<https://www.strayhearts.org/>

Habitat for Humanity of Taos, NM

<https://www.taoshabitat.org/>

The University of Nebraska Foundation

<https://nufoundation.org/ways-to-give/>

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR • JANUARY 2026

HAPPY NEW YEAR! HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO EVERYONE BORN IN JANUARY!

JAN 8: SAT NOON - 1 PM
Bridging the Digital Gap. FREE Class from the Questa Business Bridge. Located at the Questa Public Library, 1/2 Municipal Park Road. Contact gbb-coordinator@qedf.com for more info and to register. See Ad on Page 7

JAN 10: SAT 2 PM - 4 PM
Voces de Nuestro País: Featuring Chris and Rodney Arellano Questa Public Library, 1/2 Municipal Park Road (575) 586-2023 See Article on Page 16

JAN 14: WED 8:30 AM - 9:30 PM
QBEN Round Table w/ Lynn Skall. Located at Rael's Coffee Shop, Questa. Contact Lynn@QuestaEDF.com for more info. See Ad on Page 7

JAN 15: THUR BY APPT
1:1 Confidential Business Consulting w/ Anwar Kaelin. By APPT ONLY. Located at the Questa Public Library, 1/2 Municipal Park Road. Contact gbb-coordinator@qedf.com for more info and to register. See Ad on Page 7

JAN 24: SAT 2 PM - 4 PM
Story-Sharing Open Mic (Voces de Nuestro País) Questa Public Library, 1/2 Municipal Park Road (575) 586-2023 See Article on Page 16

Weekly Events

SUNDAY

Area Church Directory is on page 30, please call to confirm service times

3 - 6 PM
Open Mic at Noisy Water Winery, 518 E. Main St, Red River. A night of music, poetry, and laughter at Noisy Water Winery's Open Mic Night! Join us. Info: visit redriver.org/events/open-mic, or call (575) 754-9957

MONDAY

10 AM
Free/By Donation Community Seated Yoga Practice with Gaea, in person only, 2331 State Hwy 522 Questa, NM. More info visit yogasalaquesta.org

5 PM
Free/By Donation Community Yoga, gentle practice with Rae, in person only, 2331 State Hwy 522 Questa, NM. For more info visit yogasalaquesta.org

6 - 8 PM
FREE Mariachi Lessons, with Rachel Leon. For ages 10 and up. In person only. Located at eth Cerro VFW. Contact (575) 779-0565 or email vozdeoro2017@gmail.com for more info. See Ad on Page 5.

7 PM
Kickboxing, with Reto in person only, sliding scale \$5-15 **All classes free for teens.** 2331 State Hwy 522, Questa, NM. More info visit yogasalaquesta.org

TUESDAY

8:30 AM
Introductory Contemporary Dance with Monica, in person only, \$10-\$15. 2331 State Hwy 522, Questa, NM. More info visit yogasalaquesta.org

WEDNESDAY

9 AM
Gentle Morning Yoga w/ Gaea, in person only, \$10. 2331 State Hwy 522 Questa, NM. For more info visit yogasalaquesta.org

3:15 - 4 PM
Tiny Groovers w/ Monica. Ages 0-5 Movement & Music Class for toddlers & their parents/guardians in person only, FREE/BY DONATION 2331 State Hwy 522, Questa, NM. More info visit yogasalaquesta.org

4:30 PM
Kids' Dance Adventure - with Monica, in person only, FREE/BY DONATION 2331 State Hwy 522, Questa, NM. More info visit yogasalaquesta.org

5:30 - 7 PM
Chess Club, Practice Puzzles, Occasional lectures & casual play. All ages and levels. Starting Sept 3, Questa Public Library, 1/2 Municipal Park Road (575) 586-2023

6 - 8 PM
FREE Mariachi Lessons, with Rachel Leon. For ages 10 and up. In person only. Located at eth Cerro VFW. Contact (575) 779-0565 or email vozdeoro2017@gmail.com for more info. See Ad on Page 5.

7 PM
Kickboxing, with Reto in person only, sliding scale \$5-15 All classes FREE for teens. 2331 State Hwy 522, Questa, NM. More info visit yogasalaquesta.org

THURSDAY

6 PM
Thursday Night Jam Session at Rael's Market & Coffee House, 2430 NM-522, Questa. Bring your instrument to jam or just bring yourself and enjoy. Free! Info: call (575) 779-9249

FRIDAY

9 AM
Kundalini Yoga with Julian, in person only, \$10-15. 2331 State Hwy 522 Questa, NM. For more info visit yogasalaquesta.org

SATURDAY

10 AM
Free Community Tai Chi, with Reto, in person only, 2331 State Hwy 522 Questa, NM. For more info visit yogasalaquesta.org

NOON - 2 PM
FREE Conversational Northern New Mexico Spanish. 4 Week Course. Held through the month of January. Questa Public Library, 1/2 Municipal Park Road (575) 586-2023 See Ad on Page 9 and article on Page 16 for details



DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING FOR OUR CALENDAR? List your event online for free on the online calendar at questanews.com/questa-events, email events@questanews.com

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www.lwmsite.org (575) 586-1587

RIVER COMMUNITY CHURCH

Pastor Jesse Hardy, 65 S Kiowa Rd, Questa, NM 87556 List of events and services at rccquesta.org/community

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DINING GUIDE

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2026

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