

# East Mountain LIVING



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**Painter Mike Meyer digs deep to reveal more than meets the eye**

**The East Mountain Historical Society preserves the stories of our region**

**Fall/Winter  
Edition 2020**



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### East Mountain Chamber of Commerce Meetings Los Vecinos Community Center • Tijeras

General meetings held the first Thursday of every month, alternating between lunch and evening meetings. Due to COVID, meetings are held via Zoom until further notice. For more information: [edgewoodchambernm.com/events/](http://edgewoodchambernm.com/events/)

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### On the Cover



A pair of sandhill cranes dance in the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in southern New Mexico



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EAST MOUNTAIN LIVING MAGAZINE

*Wishes You a Happy Holiday Season*

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## Letter from the Editor

Rena Distasio

**A**s a biannual publication, *East Mountain Living* goes to press in May and November of each year, but we start working on the issue months beforehand. Earlier this year I had just assigned the last of the stories for our spring/summer issue when word of the virus started to spread. Like many business owners, our publisher had to rethink operations after our governor shut down the state. For the first time in our 13-year history we cut the number of pages in the magazine as a cost-saving measure.

We're happy to report that with this issue we're back to our full size of 48 pages. Even if things have not yet returned to "normal," many of our advertisers seem to be feeling optimistic about the future. If these times have taught us anything, it's that people are resilient, creative, and determined. Life always finds a way, even in the face of uncertainty and tragedy.

And if 2020 was a year of a myriad tragedies, so too was it a year of important milestones, including the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which gave women in this country the right to vote. On page 24 Maggie Grimason gives us a great overview of the legacy of the amendment in New Mexico.

So, too, has 2020 been a year for questioning the status quo on many levels—the way we do business, the way we work, even the way we educate our children. As of this writing, New Mexico's students are still not back in the classroom fulltime, a situation that has led many parents to decide to forgo the APS hybrid and on-line learning models in favor of homeschooling. In her article on page 36, Jeanne Drennan, who homeschooled all three of her children and is currently homeschooling her eldest grandson, outlines a number of methods and resources to get started.

One of the pleasures of editing this magazine is learning about the people who currently

make their lives and livings out here in the East Mountains—people like artist Michael Meyer (page 20) and intrepid business owners Daniel and Sarah Wright (page 10)—as well as about those whose history is rooted in our near and distant past. It's easy to take for granted or even overlook the remnants of the past, but writers like Mike Smith (page 8) and Craig Springer, as well as organizations like the East Mountain Historical Society (profiled by Springer on page 32), remind us that the history of this region never fully dies. As we build our banks and schools and libraries and restaurants and neighborhoods, we should be aware that we do so alongside that history. It always has something to teach us.

Speaking of never fully dying, if you love a good ghost story, check out the story on page 28, reprinted from one of the many books written by foremost paranormal expert and award-winning author Antonio Garcez, whom we profiled in our Fall/Winter 2019–20 issue.

As we approach the close of another year, we once again give thanks to our advertisers, without whom we wouldn't be able to publish the stories of the people, places, and history that make the East Mountains such a great place to visit and call home.

A big thanks as well to our readers—you're the reason why we tell our stories, and we appreciate that so many of you take the time to contact us with your thoughts. If you have a story that you feel should be shared in these pages, please don't hesitate to get in touch. We're always looking for ideas—and writers to bring them to life.

Until next issue, Happy Holidays—and here's to a happy, healthy, and productive 2021.

*Rena Distasio*



# East Mountain LIVING

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If you have an idea for a story or would like to write for us, please contact Rena Distasio at 505-281-4864.

The information provided in *East Mountain Living* is intended to inform the reader about activities and events in the East Mountain communities. While every effort is made to verify the facts published, NDP does not hold itself, any advertiser, or any contributor responsible for any error or any possible consequences thereof.

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## ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS:

### Jeanne Drennan

Jeanne has lived in the East Mountains with her family since 2004. She is an occupational therapist, women's health counselor, freelance writer, and author of the book, *Live Well. Be Well, 14 Healing Habits to Extraordinary Wellness*. She loves blogging about health and wellness and making organic herbal remedies whenever she can.

### Maggie Grimson

Maggie is a writer living in Albuquerque. She contributes to many independent publications covering arts, science, and travel. When she's not writing, she's watching the birds.

### E. H. Hackney

E. H. is a retired engineer, freelance writer, and sometimes jazz guitarist. He writes, hikes, bikes, and plays at the edge of the forest on the east slopes of the Sandias, where he lives with his wife and two opinionated cats.

### Megan Kamerick

A journalist for 23 years, Megan has worked at business weeklies in San Antonio, New Orleans, and Albuquerque, and has produced and hosted shows and stories for New Mexico PBS, KUNM-FM in Albuquerque, National Public Radio, and Latino USA. She is the former president of the Journalism & Women Symposium and her TED talk on women and media has more than 272,000 views.

### Chris Mayo

Chris relocated to the East Mountains from Prescott, Arizona, in 2006. He started as a freelance writer with Navy publications when he was in the service and has continued writing for a variety of trade magazines since leaving the Navy in 2002. He and his wife are the parents of two young boys.

### Mike Smith

Mike is the author of *Towns of the Sandia Mountains*, a writer for the *Weekly Alibi*, and is at work on a genre-expanding memoir, *Shadows of Clouds on the Mountains*. His essays have appeared in *Tin House*, *Booth*, *Eunoia Review*, *The Florida Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, and elsewhere.

### Tom Smylie

Tom and his wife, Cherie, have lived in Edgewood since his retirement in 1994 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as Assistant Regional Director. A graduate of the University of New Mexico, he has worked in wildlife education and research for most of his life. As an avid falconer, he conducts educational programs with live raptors at various organizations, including Wildlife West in Edgewood, and continues his 50-year affiliation with the Peregrine Fund in Boise, Idaho.

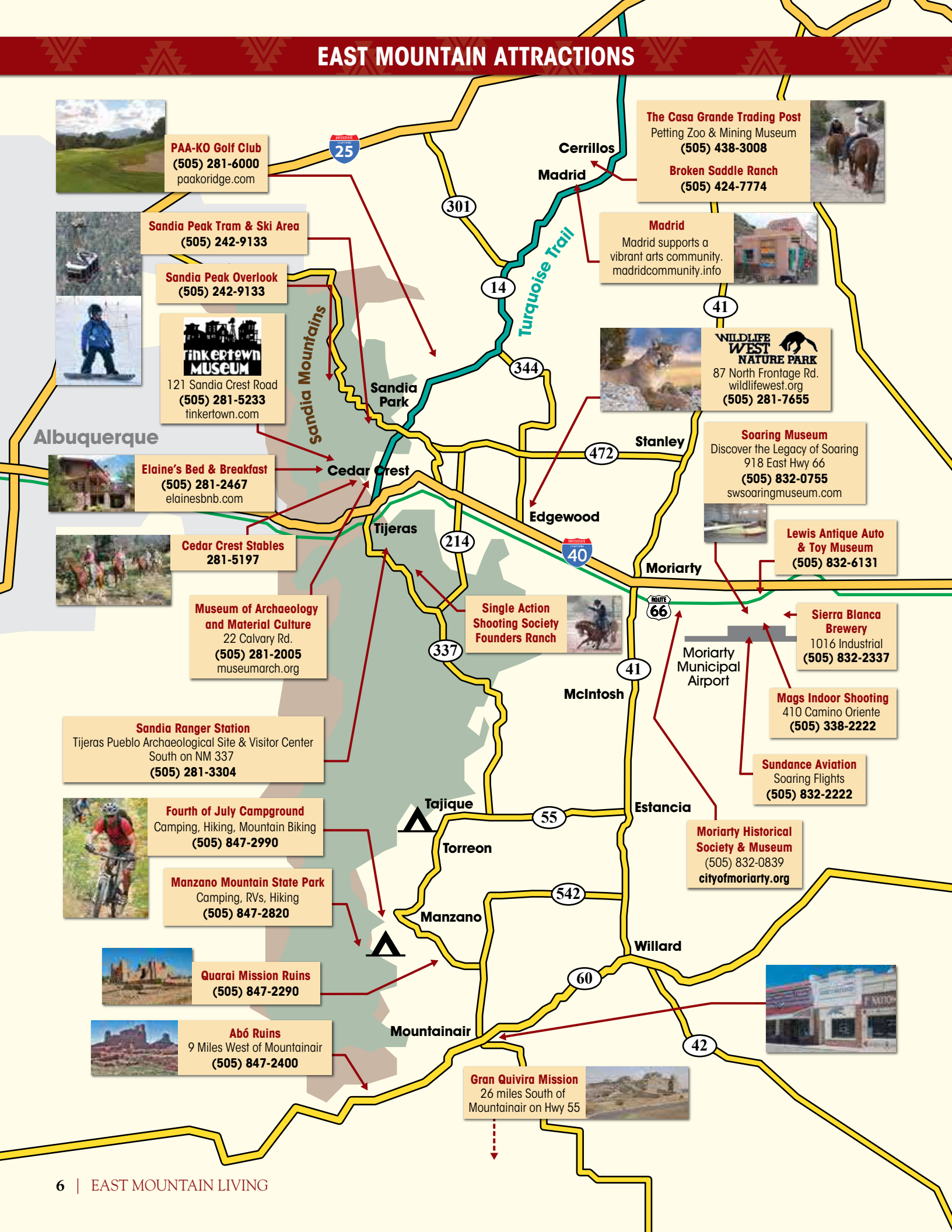
### Craig Springer

Craig descends from the founders of Cerrillos, New Mexico, children of the Santa Fe Trail, and really does live on the road from Barton to Venus. Visit him at [CraigSpringer.com](http://CraigSpringer.com)

### Cathy Weber

Cathy has worked in Albuquerque for 19 years in communications and management and is a freelance writer. She hikes, raises great kids, and loves to cook and eat. She has an MBA from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern, and recently published a children's book titled *Do be do be You* about how staying present in the here and now can help with making positive choices. You can email her at [dobedobook@gmail.com](mailto:dobedobook@gmail.com)

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# The Lost Novella of La Madera

A tale of rural life both  
foreign and familiar

BY MICHAEL FARRELL SMITH

About 15 years ago, while researching a photo-history book about the Sandias, I was lucky enough to make the acquaintance of a wonderful couple who happened to own the old Cedar Crest Resort. We have sadly since lost contact—maybe this article will help fix that—but I still own a rare book they kindly gave me, a book I probably never would have discovered without them, a unique account of rural life in and around the Sandia Mountains in the mid-twentieth century. The book, *Fiddlers 'N' Fishermen*, a 91-page 1946 novella, is set primarily in the mountain community of La Madera, not far from where East Mountain High School is today.

The book is a strange artifact. My copy is jacket-less, almost-paperback-sized, with a dark mustard-yellow hardcover, pungent yellowed pages, a two-page non-fiction preface, and a title page saying it was published in New York, by Crown Publications, a company now owned by Random House. The book can be read in a single sitting by a fast-enough reader, but readers should be warned: this book is a pure dose of something from another time, another world, another way of feeling alive in one's surroundings. It's familiar, in part because of its settings, but it is also alien, full of increasingly unrelatable attitudes and terms, and may leave you feeling unsettled. Every age has a secret, as novelist Sheila Heti has observed, and that secret is how that age felt—and this book is full of such secrets, and such feelings.

The author of *Fiddlers 'N' Fishermen*, B.F. "Sandia Bill" Clark, a.k.a. Benjamin Frederick Clark, was born in Kansas in May of 1873 and died in New Mexico in June of 1947, only about one year after this book's publication. Clark's obituary in the June 1, 1947 *Albuquerque Journal* says that he died at age 74 in "his home in



*The crumbling remnants of a stone dance hall mentioned in B.F. Clark's book *Fiddlers 'N' Fishermen* sit long-abandoned in San Antonio. Photo by Michael Meyer.*

Sandia Park Thursday. Mr. Clark had lived there for the past 18 years and is survived by his daughter Hazel Clark, who is here. Committal services will be at Fairview Park Crematory."

His best-known book, another article that same day states, was not *Fiddlers 'N'*

---

Clark evidently loved the mountains, though perhaps only in the industrialized, "progress"-minded way of colonists going back via the conquest of 1066 to at least the Vikings. *Fiddlers 'N' Fishermen*, for all its charm—the little book is a love song to an allegedly simpler sort of life in a rural setting—is actually full of then-modern industrial sensibilities, these sentiments loaded with self-assured disapproval and condescension...

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*Fishermen*, which is never mentioned, but *Melodious Poems from the Hills*, in which he requested in a poem that he be cremated. "When I am dead, don't cry for me. / Just wrap me in a shroud / and burn me that the vapors may / help form some lovely cloud."

A search for his full name also finds that Clark was a songwriter, with at least one copyrighted song, the 1936 "We're Happy by the River, in our Rustic Mountain Home."

A subsequent *Journal* article on June 2 says he was known as a nature and music lover, and when he died, an informal memorial service was arranged at his mountain cabin, with a violinist.

Clark evidently loved the mountains, though perhaps only in the industrialized, "progress"-minded way of colonists going back via the conquest of 1066 to at least the Vikings. *Fiddlers 'N' Fishermen*, for all its charm—the little book is a love song to an allegedly simpler sort of life in a rural setting—is actually full of then-modern industrial sensibilities, these sentiments loaded with self-assured disapproval and condescension as they all implicitly say, "The way things were done was wrong: because our way is better." Inconvenient animals—kittens under a porch—are just killed, and by a character reported to have a heart of gold—as if to say, "If they can't make you money, what good are they?" A creek is just something to fish, or dam, or sift for gold, or build a water-wheel on. Characters do seem to care about art—in the form of music—but even that is mostly just a way to make money, playing in-



struments at dances. And they don't play the fiddle songs documented by musicologist J.D. Robb and still danced to by Matachines dancers on annual saints' days, they play songs with English titles that sound like they belong on a mix with "Turkey in the Straw." And they do care a little about nature, but mostly only in the form of commodities, or, at best, as a mythic backdrop for their roguish narratives of goodhearted lives in the mountains, stories somehow completely ethically divested from any larger history, from any awareness of waves of colonization, or "campaigns" against indigenous people.

The work could be more self-aware, is all I'm saying.

This book, this lost novella of La Madera, a village that is itself somewhat lost, in obscurity, most of its mail sent to "Sandia Park," is as good and as bad as its time, and so sometimes aspects of it are very bad, but something very good about it are its portraits of the Sandia Mountain villages in a now-bygone time, when many of these areas were notably different than they are today. The book describes La Madera, that village area now home to East Mountain High School, with its farms and canyons and arroyos and an "old haunted cave" I hope is based on a real cave and would like to visit, and it describes a dance in San Antonio, in the old stone dance hall, with a fiddle player and a guitarist:

The moon was shining bright on the treeless mesa [?] when they reached the old village of San Antonio [on horseback], and the few old adobe houses, with their gray stuccoed walls glittering in the moonlight, resembled sails on ships. ...[T]hey rode along the wagon road [now North Highway 14] past the little eighty-year-old adobe church, with its leaning tower and its little cemetery in the front yard, with the graves all marked with wooden crosses...

This book does seem to love its setting, and its characters, and reading it now, if you can track down a copy, is a powerful reminder not only of how another time felt, in places you perhaps already know and love, but a reminder that we can't always clearly see ourselves. 🐿

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# Pizza with Purpose

## Buttercrust in Moriarty delivers great pies and a commitment to the community

BY CHRIS MAYO

Daniel and Sarah Wright initially never pictured themselves as business owners. Like many parents, they were working to provide as good a life as they could for their children. When a couple of jobs didn't pan out for them, they found themselves working for Pizza 9 in Moriarty, Daniel as a delivery driver and Sarah as a cashier.

"It was kind of a last-resort job," Daniel recalls, "but it kept food on the table." Little did they know that what they thought would be temporary work would put them on the path to their destiny.

Both stayed with Pizza 9 for four years until the owners decided to close the operation. The Wrights didn't want to buy into a franchise, but the idea of owning their own pizza restaurant appealed to them. After some soul searching and more than a few family discussions, they decided to rent the restaurant space (located on Route 66, just West of the TA truck stop on the north side of the street) and start their own operation.

At first, they ran into some issues with the Pizza 9 franchise, which strongly pushed for them to renew the original contract—but the Wrights were adamant

about establishing an independent mom and pop. Eventually, they came to an agreement. Pizza 9 would bow out but insisted the Wrights develop their own dough and sauce recipes, which couldn't in anyway resemble the ones the franchise provides to owners. So the couple went to work.

"It took a lot of experimentation," Sarah says. "I can't even guess how many different combinations we tried. I think our employees and our kids got sick of being the guinea pigs. I know they got tired of eating pizza, even though it was free."

Daniel says the biggest challenge was establishing consistency in the recipes. They considered that of paramount importance. With no baking experience, they finally came up with a dough recipe that is both consistent and a source of pride. In fact, they consider it proprietary and guard the recipe carefully. An unanticipated side benefit came from that experimentation: the restaurant's name, Buttercrust, so named because their the dough has a more buttery taste than most pizza doughs.

Developing a unique sauce presented similar challenges. "Some sauces are too acidic," Daniel says. "Others are too

sweet. We didn't want our sauce to be too thick or too watery, either. Eventually, we developed one we like, and we guard those secrets closely too."

Next, they had to decide what kind of business they wanted to be. They decided they wanted Buttercrust to be a viable and valuable part of the East Mountain community. To that end they expanded their delivery area to include Estancia and Edgewood all the way out to the Sedillo Hill exit on I-40.

That was just the first step. Both agreed they wanted to be good employers and support the community in other ways. They hold regular fundraising evenings for families in need, for instance. They've raised money for a family that lost two children, a family that lost their home to



*Buttercrust Pizza's bright and inviting interior. Photo courtesy of Buttercrust Pizza.*





a fire, and they hold an annual Christmas fundraiser as well. That's only naming a few of their efforts.

Not even the COVID-19 restrictions stopped them from walking their talk. Daniel and his teenage children did the grunt work of upgrading the property to include an outdoor dining area, shoveling and hauling gravel, and building a six-foot-high stone wall at the rear of the area while Sarah kept the pizza operation running smoothly. The area will remain an attractive outdoor dining option long after the virus is a bad memory. They also pushed hard to expand their delivery business, transitioning some of their wait staff to delivery drivers.

"What I'm proudest of is that we didn't lay off a single person," Daniel says. "We didn't want to make a tough situation tougher for anyone."

Inside, the dining area is bright and inviting. With the COVID-19 restrictions, the capacity is about 15. When things go back to normal, Daniel says they'll be able to seat about 50. Diners can choose from a variety of pizzas and calzones, and already locals have their favorites, including the Pinto Pizza, which includes sausage, pepperoni, and New Mexico green chile.

After a long year of building their business, one might assume that Sarah and Daniel would take a breather and rest on their laurels for a while. One would be wrong. Daniel is working to start a donut shop in a space that's available next door, and he's agreed to manage the Lava Rock Brewery on the other side of the pizzeria. Sarah has taken on virtually all the management responsibilities for the restaurant. As if that isn't enough, they're working on creating a dough that can be hand-tossed. Daniel says the current dough isn't conducive to the stretching required for that method.

"We never expected to be in the food business," he continues, "but now we can't imagine doing anything else."

It shows. It's obvious that Daniel and Sarah consider themselves fortunate to own their own business. It's also obvious that they have no intention of slowing down.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is called "finding one's niche."

Visit *Buttercrust Pizza* at 2015 U.S. Route 66 in Moriarty, 505-832-6900. 🐦



*Freshly-cooked pies from Buttercrust Pizza can be augmented with a green chile-stuffed crust to give them a signature New Mexico-style twist. Customers craving even more spice can opt for the Buffalo Chicken pizza or The Inferno, which includes jalapeños, hot giardiniera, and even more green chiles, in addition to pepperoni. Photo courtesy of Buttercrust Pizza.*

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## Flying High

The annual return of the sandhill cranes to the Estancia Valley

BY TOM SMYLIE

You will know it's fall in the Estancia Valley when from high above comes the distinctive trumpeting of sandhill cranes announcing their arrival in our region. The Estancia Valley, which is bounded roughly by the Sandia and Manzano Mountains to the west, Moriarty to the east, Stanley to the north, and Highway 55 to the south, has long been on the flight path of this elegant and charismatic bird.

The chortle call of the sandhill crane, which is unlike that of any other bird, is often heard before they are seen. Once you spot them, though, you'll remember them, their silhouette against the sky resembling a flying cross, wings bisecting the elongated shape made by their head, neck, and fully extended legs. It's a silhouette unlike any other species—for instance, herons, which fly with their neck and head tucked into an "s" shape, or geese, which only show an extended neck and head. Although, on extremely cold days, sandhill cranes will tuck their legs and feet under their bodies while flying, most likely to prevent them from freezing.

While in migration they'll often fly in a "V" formation at heights of 5,000 feet or more (the highest they've been recorded is at over 12,000 feet) while coming down from their nesting grounds, which stretch



*Wings extended, a pair of sandhill cranes fly through the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in southern New Mexico. Photo: Getty Images.*

from Idaho and Wyoming to Canada, Alaska, and even Siberia. They've been known to travel more than 500 miles in a single day while moving south, riding on uplifting thermals of air, then breaking away and gliding to the next column of rising air, repeating the process over and over. This energy-saving pattern allows them to easily soar to great heights and cover great dis-

tances. On their journey to the southern United States and Mexico, they'll stop to feed and rest at wetlands and rivers. When looking for food or coming and going to their nighttime shallow-water roosting areas, they'll fly lower and in formation.

New Mexico is host to two of the six species of sandhill cranes found in the United States, the lesser or brown and



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Clouds turned pink by sunset drift overhead as a flock of sandhill cranes takes flight. Photo: Getty Images.

the greater sandhill cranes. Ash gray and brown-feathered, the lesser sandhill is the smaller of the two, weighing between six and seven pounds, with a wingspan of over five feet, and an average height of four feet. The lesser is mostly found in the southeastern parts of New Mexico. They migrate the farthest, traveling from treeless Arctic nesting grounds far up north. They are more numerous than any other crane species, numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

The wintering greater sandhill crane is found in Mexico and in the southern regions of the central Rio Grande Valley from Albuquerque to the Estancia Valley. They are the state's largest bird, standing at over four feet tall, weighing 10 to 14 pounds, and boasting a seven-foot wingspan. The adults are an all-over ash gray color with a bright crimson skull cape, whitish throat and chin, and dark flight feathers (first year juvenal birds are a marbled cinnamon brown color). They

live over 20 years, mate for life, and begin mating in three to seven years of age. They nest in shallow wetlands and bogs, where they'll construct a large mound of marsh plants and lay two eggs. The eggs hatch in about 38 days, and the young birds are aggressively protected by the parents until they begin flying at about 90 days of age. As omnivores, their diet includes grains, frogs, reptiles, insects, and even small rodents.

*Continued on next page*



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*Continued from previous page*

They can be seen almost anywhere in New Mexico from October to March, and flocks have been seen flying in formation over the Sandia and Manzano Mountains. Wherever they're found, they attract attention. People travel from all over the world to see these magnificent birds at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge south of Socorro, New Mexico, and the Estancia Valley is also blessed with a wintering population of several thousand greater sandhill cranes. Historically, the cranes migrated through or wintered in the valley for thousands of years, following the seasonal filling and drying up of the ancient Lake Estancia, the remnants of which can be found at the salt lakes, "Las Salinas," near Willard. These shallow playa lakes provide the cranes with much needed water and a safe place for nighttime roosting. The shallow water offers protection from predators, provides

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Beginning in early spring, before they head north again, you might just catch these majestic birds engaged in their courtship dances. The spectacular display starts with a pair of cranes standing face to face, followed by loud trumpeting and sudden leaping 10 to 12 feet into the air as though the ground is scalding hot.

---

drinking water, and serves as a place for courtship and socializing. Prior to the establishment of irrigated farming in the valley in the 1940s, the cranes would have only stopped to rest in the playas on their way further south in search of food. Now, with grain fields extending from Willard north to Stanley, a great food source of waste grain has them staying in the valley for much longer.

Beginning in early spring, before they head north again, you might just catch these majestic birds engaged in their courtship dances. The spectacular display starts with a pair of cranes standing face to face, followed by loud trumpeting and sudden leaping 10 to 12 feet into the air as though the ground is scalding hot. They'll





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extend their seven-foot wings above their back, calling out in unison while bowing and tossing their necks and heads over their backs in an amazing display of grace and beauty.

Fossil remains of sandhills indicate the birds have existed in North America for 20 million years. Today, their ancestors, along with millions of other birds, cover our skies with their yearly migrations. Keep an eye—and an ear—out this spring, and you just might catch them as they follow their ancient migratory path to their summer homes. 



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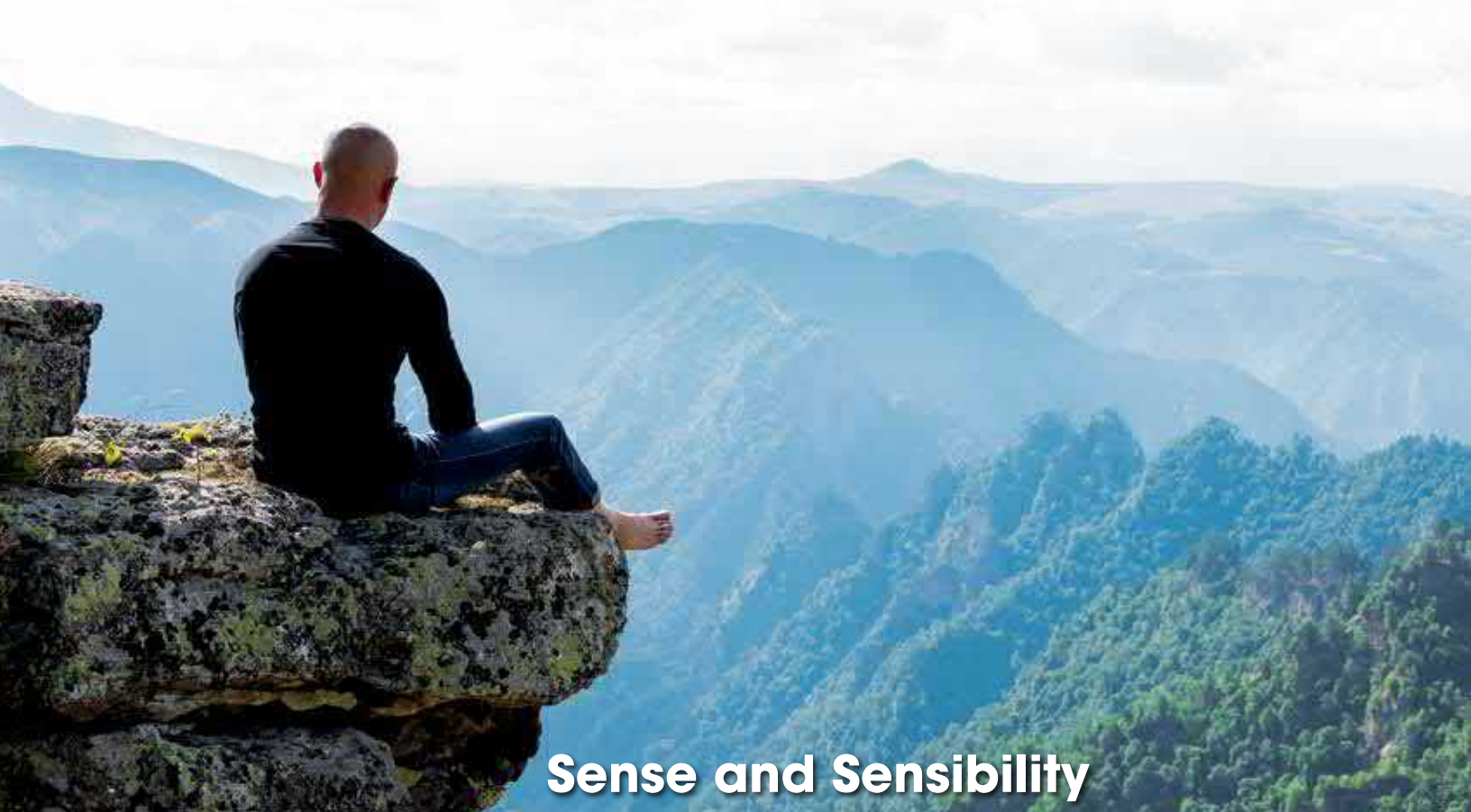


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## Sense and Sensibility

### The art of mindful hiking

BY CATHY WEBER

It was as if the trail said, “follow me,” as it led upward through the heavy air to a cooler, crisper climate. I knew by the time I got to the top I would leave behind not only the hot city but also a ton of worries, thanks to my practice of mindful hiking.

Sometimes a hike is just a hike. You want to get some exercise, or bird watch, or otherwise enjoy the natural world. But if you find it hard to stop thinking all the time, like I do, a hike can also be a way to

de-stress by turning off the constant chatter in your brain.

Mindfulness is one way to do that, a way to intentionally direct your thoughts rather than letting your thoughts direct you. It is a way of holding a place, like an open space, between the thoughts that normally seem endlessly connected. A thought stays in your head until another one comes along, mindlessly, and pushes it away. This happens over and over all day without you really noticing it.

You may also find that those random thoughts are either about the past or the

future. The new thought-free space you are creating is in the present moment. By intentionally focusing on something, like your senses, you will slow down those nagging thoughts to open up space or “thought-free time” in your head. Creating more space between your thoughts can have real benefits, especially when those thoughts are negative or disruptive.

One way to make a hike more mindful is to practice what is known as the Five Senses Focus. Pick one of the five senses to start with and then focus on each for a few minutes, one at a time, while you move. You don’t have to do them in any particular order, but try to make sure you do all five—and feel free to stop and close your eyes every now and then to really focus on each sense. Here is an exercise to get you started:

**Sight**—Take a minute or two and concentrate just on what you see. Try not to hear, feel, taste, or smell anything. Notice the colors, how many shades of green and brown there are, from the darkest to the lightest. Watch the movement of the leaves and spaces of light in between them. If a random thought pops up, just say “hi” to

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it, move it aside, and return to focusing on the color, light, and shapes around you.

**Taste**—Focus on the taste of your water, that last salty bite of trail mix that is still hanging out on your tongue, the sweat on your lips, or the dust you've kicked up while walking on the trail. Again, if you find your mind wandering, move those thoughts aside and refocus on your sense.

**Hearing**—Tune in to the sounds around you. Maybe you'll hear your dog's paws or that unmistakable sound of your hiking shoes as they crunch along the trail. You might also focus on the wind as it rushes through the trees, or even an airplane as it flies overhead.

**Smell**—Next, give your nose a workout. Can you identify the different trees by their smell? Can you distinguish juniper from piñon from spruce? How about the moisture from the previous evening's monsoon? Are there any flowers around that you can investigate? Does the air smell differently than it did at the beginning of your hike?

**Feel**—Finally, concentrate on those things that come in contact with your skin. It could be the wind or the rain, your hiking shorts rubbing your legs, the scrub brushing against your hands, the rocks felt through the soles of your shoes, your pack bumping against your back. If the heat is uncomfortable, then don't focus on that for too long unless it helps clear other thoughts from your mind.

You might lose your focus at first. That's to be expected. When that happens, just pause and count each breath for 30 seconds and then try again. If you can only do a few minutes at a time, that's fine. Eventually you'll be able to work your

*Continued on next page*



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*Continued from previous page*

way up to spending most of your hike in a mindful manner.

In addition to focusing on your five senses, there are other ways to be mindful. One simple way is to count your breathes as you sit quietly. You could also try eating slowly and thinking mindfully about each bite. As an added bonus, this actually makes you eat a little less! Additional expertly guided meditations on mindfulness are available as apps on your phone.

We are lucky to have access to such wonderful hiking in the Sandias and the surrounding National Forest, so get out there and start exploring. Take your backpack, water, and snacks—and all that junk that's been going on in your mind that you haven't been able to unload. Practice mindfulness and leave your worried thoughts up on the trail instead of in your head. Whether you are taking a familiar route or exploring a brand-new trail, practicing the Five Senses Focus or any other mindful exercise will enhance your experience, giving your body and heart a workout while stopping the unproductive chatter in your brain. 🐦



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# The Romance of Realism

Whether painting a portrait or a landscape, Mike Meyer digs deep to reveal more than what meets the eye

BY MEGAN KAMERICK

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MICHAEL MEYER

It all started with a bird. At least that's how Michael Meyer remembers it.

"When I was in second grade, we were supposed to go home and draw something," he says.

When he came home and told his mother about the assignment, she suggested he draw a bird. Frustration morphed into amazement when the picture turned out well and his mother praised his work.

Meyer was hooked. "When people say you're good at something, it drives you to do more."

His parents reinforced his burgeoning interest with a Jon Gnagy drawing set at Christmas (Gnagy was a popular television art instructor in the 1950s) and he found himself drawn to the challenge of drawing faces, an interest that would characterize his art going forward.



ABOVE: *Rendezvous.*

RIGHT: *Beautiful Birds.*

BOTTOM LEFT: *Equipment in place, Meyer works on a landscape painting outdoors.*

Meyer continued to receive praise for his work, earning awards throughout high school and graduating with the Senior Art Award. He received his bachelor's degree in Art Education at Southeast Missouri State University, a few hours south of where he grew up in St. Louis, but says he is primarily self-taught.

His subject matter includes both landscapes and portraits, with an emphasis on the people and places of the American West. Many of his portraits are of Native Americans or the mountain men and cowboys he's encountered over the years at various gatherings and re-enactments, an interest that was born from the television shows he watched as a boy. "I think they never left my brain," he says. "I just like Western art. It's a nostalgic fantasy."

Rendered in intricate detail and bold colors, his work is highly expressive and humming with energy—even a simple smile or gesture speaks volumes. "He has a way of extracting the reality of that person," says Antonio Weiss, who owned Weiss Fine Art in Santa Fe and represented Meyer. "It's not just posing. It's that person in his or her environment. Some of them are actually very haunting."


Weiss says that's particularly true of *Rhapsody*, a portrait of a street musician absorbed in playing a fiddle. Meyer uses



shadows and light to great effect here, highlighting the fiddler's pursed lips and furrowed brow, his reddish hair that sticks out from his head, his bright white suit and azure scarf. By contrast, the man's thin fingers are rendered in shadow, carefully balancing and commanding the instrument.

"Light makes or breaks any subject," says Meyer, who often paints from photos he takes. "I usually put more in than what's in the photo because I know what can be there."

The paintings are almost photographic in their detail and realism, but he also has a unique ability to organize and prioritize those details, says Richard Halstead, the



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renowned portrait artist and instructor with whom Meyer studied in Chicago.

"I recognized right away he was an exceptional talent," Halstead says. "He has an exceptional eye. He takes enormous quantities of detail and organizes them so that they have a beautiful effect" It's a technique he likens to Renaissance painters like Hans Holbein. "But it's not detail for detail's sake," he points out. "It's something that makes you feel you've opened your eyes for the first time and that you are able to see everything in a maximum sort of clarity, but with a kind of prioritization so that it forms itself into a complete and beautiful design."

Rendered in intricate detail and bold colors, his work is highly expressive and humming with energy—even a simple smile or gesture speaks volumes. "He has a way of extracting the reality of that person," says Antonio Weiss, who owned Weiss Fine Art in Santa Fe and represented Meyer. "It's not just posing. It's that person in his or her environment. Some of them are actually very haunting."

While Meyer calls his style representational, his friend Jeff Warren, who also showed Meyer's work in his former gallery, Warren Fine Art and Collectibles in Albuquerque's Old Town, calls it "romantic realism."

"They're larger than life, and paintings should be," Warren says. "They're not just a copy of reality but an interpretation of it." He uses as an example two paintings, one of a portrait Meyer did of him, where Warren is looking up with a mischievous glint in his eye as a jester on his shoulder whispers in his year. Warren says it cap-

*Continued on next page*





ABOVE: Bloody Dave Stout.

LEFT: As a member of the New Mexico Plein Air Painters, Meyer frequently paints out in natural settings.



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tures his personality perfectly. “He’s really established himself with a certain point of view,” he continues, “a certain kind of technical approach, but most of all his imagination is really remarkable.”

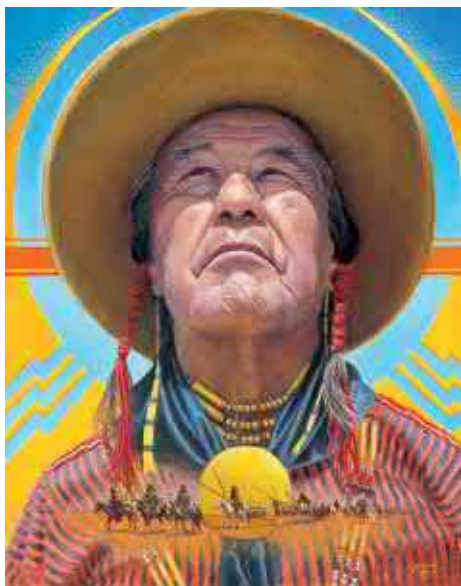
That ability to blend reality and fantasy is also evident in *Ancestral Visions*, in which a native American man wearing a broad-brimmed hat looks upward at a stylized turquoise and gold “sky.” Along the bottom, rendered in meticulous detail, is a tableau of Native men riding horseback against a setting sun. “Come on!” Warren says and then asks what other artist thinks of things like that. “He’s just remarkable.”

Also remarkable is that Meyer developed his talent, occasionally showing in galleries, while working jobs mostly unrelated to the art world. Over the past four decades he’s held positions as a commercial artist and art director for various publications, eventually moving into a senior management position with a large publishing house that moved him to Chicago.

“I never really wanted to be a manager, but I kept getting promoted and I guess I was sort of good at it,” he says. “I kept thinking ‘When can I just do painting?’ I knew if I could do this full time, I could get a lot better, quicker.”

In 2010 he and his wife, Beth, moved





Ancestral Visions.

from Chicago to Tijeras, New Mexico, and purchased the East Mountain Directory and East Mountain Living, the culmination of a longtime dream to own his own business. Since both publications are bi-annuals, his duties as publisher and art director allowed him more time to paint and meet fellow artists. Since selling the business in 2019, he has even more time to devote to his art.

Talking about his work, Meyer says it comes from a place both creative and analytical.

"I have a technical brain and that's why my paintings are so tight," he says. "I'm able to look at a face and break it down into small pieces and compare shapes and get the right proportions."

As a member of the New Mexico Plein Air Painters group, Meyer applies those techniques to landscapes as well, but admits that painting outside is the hardest thing he has ever done. "I've got a shelf full of bad paintings."

Weiss says you can feel the story behind Meyer's subjects, and shares an anecdote about *Barnet*, a painting of a modern-day cowboy. When that man died unexpectedly in Costa Rica, a woman showed up asking Meyer if she could get a print of the portrait because "Barnet" was her boyfriend. "And then after a while, another girlfriend showed up and she wanted a copy too," Weiss recalls, pointing out that Meyer obviously captured something



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ineffable about his subject. "You get the feeling the guy was handsome, and you could think about being his girlfriend and how maybe you thought you could change his ways. It's not easy to capture people's expressions—their real expressions."

So what's next for Meyer, now that he can finally paint full time? Taking more risks, for one, he says, and expanding his repertoire. Where that will take him, and us, is worth keeping an eye on.

To learn more, pay a visit to Meyer's website, [meyersart.com](http://meyersart.com).



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## Nineteen's the Charm

The 100-year anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is a good time to reflect on the role of New Mexican women in our political process

BY MAGGIE GRIMASON

New Mexico has always felt like a state apart. It is largely distinct in its history, culture, and norms from the other Four Corners states and neighbors like Texas—and certainly a different world from parts of the nation farther afield like the Northwest or New England. Stepping into statehood in January of 1912, it was also one of the last states to join the union, with only Arizona, Hawaii, and Alaska at its heels.

It makes sense, then, that it is also a state of firsts. Apart from the ugly history of developing the first atomic bomb in the summer of 1945, it is also home to, for example, the nation's first Native American woman elected to Congress, Deborah Haaland, representing New Mexico's First District, a vast swatch that encompasses Albuquerque. Prior to Haaland's election in 2015, former Governor Susanna Martinez had the honor of being the country's first Hispanic female governor elected to the office in 2010 (more on that below).

Yet, our area's history of situating women into positions of power began long before that. From Chiricahua Apache warrior-prophet and leader Lozen, who had roots at Black Mountain on the Gila River, to Soledad Chávez Chacón, New Mexico's first female secretary of state, who stepped into the role of governor when Governor James F. Hinkle left the state for a period in 1924, our state has long embraced the power of its women.

This year, marking the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which guaran-



*Adelina Otero-Warren, a woman's suffragist as well as one of New Mexico's first female government officials and the first Latina to run for Congress, appears in a photo dated 1900. Photo: Library of Congress*

teed women in the United States the right to vote, it seems a particularly poignant time to reflect on the role of women in shaping New Mexico and the East Mountains into the place we know today. Our values and shared dreams are brought with us into the voting booth as each election and new legislative session offers up opportunity for more firsts, greater innovation, and progress.

"My district is definitely not a suburb," 2020 House District 22 candidate Jessi-

ca Velasquez has asserted about the area that encompasses the East Mountains. In this election cycle, the issues that Velasquez and her opponent, Jessica Lord, are addressing are ever-relevant and not without long historical precedent—education, water, economics, healthcare. The stuff that makes for quality of life. "The issues we face here," Velasquez says, "are not so much 'politic' issues as they are real-life issues."

"The biggest issue we face is water availability, which segues into development," says Kathy McCoy, former District 22 House Representative. It's a wise issue to put front and center, since the majority of homes in the area depend on wells for water, and steady development has put that vital access to the underground water table at risk. In fact, the East Mountains is one of the fastest growing areas in New Mexico, so development—and the proposed drilling of new, bigger, and deeper wells—is much more than a philosophical point of contention. Maintaining the balance of a rural lifestyle in close proximity to "the city," is a tricky one, making the issues at play in the East Mountains of broad concern, but with all the particularities of a specific place and its values.

As ever, and to Velasquez's point about the East Mountains being very much apart from Albuquerque sprawl, the region has its own character, "We're lucky to live in the East Mountains," Velasquez says. "It's certainly a place where our struggles and our successes are connect-

*Continued on next page*

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*Continued from previous page*

ed,” a fact that has the power to galvanize the community.

“The vast majority of East Mountain residents live here for the distinct reason that it is not the city,” McCoy says. “That’s why we jealously try to guard the quasi-rural character of the area.”

Yet just as in the city and throughout all of New Mexico, education looms large. Dropout rates remain high, graduation rates low, and expenditures on public schools dip well below that of neighboring states. Women in the political arena in New Mexico have worked hard to further this state of affairs, long sidelined as a feminine concern (compared to say, the economy, environment, or gas and oil development). As New Mexico’s first female governor (though not first elected female governor), Chacón spent her two-week term working closely with New Mexico Industrial School’s board and superintendent. Maria “Concha” Concepcion Ortiz y Pino de Kleven, New Mexico’s first female Democratic whip (1941), spent years advocating for cultural education, which included the state’s first bill on the issue of bilingual education. And the second woman to be elected to the seat of governor, Michelle Lujan Grisham, signed into effect unprecedented budget appropriations for teacher salaries.

It is that long line of women—famous and otherwise—who lived out their political convictions that laid the groundwork for the freedoms that New Mexican women are building on today. Suffragette Adelina (Nina) Otero-Warren, born in 1881 in nearby Los Lunas, was one of the most important figures in early suffrage efforts in the West. From a prominent Hispano family, Otero-Warren’s activism extended across communities, and she was able to rally both Hispano and Anglo support for the 19th Amendment in her position as the state leader of the Congressional Union (a more radical arm of the movement started by feminist Alice Stokes Paul in 1913).

Through her work and that of others, New Mexico arrived at the ratification of the 19th Amendment on February 21, 1920, becoming the 32nd state to do so—inching the amendment ever closer to becoming law. By August of the same

year, the required minimum of 36 states had ratified the amendment. In 1920, just one hundred years ago and a full 72 years since the Seneca Falls Convention (the first women’s rights convention held in the United States), women finally gained the right to vote.

Yet, with the 19th Amendment, not every woman was given the vote. The suffrage movement during this period very intentionally separated itself from, for example, African American women campaigning for the same rights, and Native American women weren’t granted the right to vote until a full four years later, with the passing of the Snyder Act in 1924. By many

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It is that long line of women—famous and otherwise—who lived out their political convictions that laid the groundwork for the freedoms that New Mexican women are building on today. Suffragette Adelina (Nina) Otero-Warren, born in 1881 in nearby Los Lunas, was one of the most prominent figures in early suffrage efforts in the West.

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accounts people of color weren’t able to fully exercise their civic right to participate in the election process until 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act. This act reinforced the promise of the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed the right to vote regardless of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude,” though discriminatory practices like poll taxes, secret ballots, and literacy tests were long the norm, and intentionally kept women (and men) of color out of the voting booth.

“You have to have a thick skin,” McCoy recommends to women eyeing the political stage. “Politics can be a blood sport and you have to be ready for battle.” But most importantly? She suggests looking to the future, and the next generation of women. “Be a role model for younger girls. ... You never know what a difference you might make.”

Or the difference that the women you hold the door open for will make. Here’s to another 100 years of progress. 🐾

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## Haunted Madrid

*Stories of the supernatural abound at the Mine Shaft Tavern in Madrid. Photo courtesy of Antonio Garcez.*

### A ghost of a time in this Northern New Mexico town

BY ANTONIO GARCEZ

*Antonio Garcez is one of the country's foremost experts in the paranormal, and he has written extensively about peoples' otherworldly experiences in a series of award-winning books. Here, he shares one of those stories, a "spirited" exchange between a Madrid waitress and an unseen presence that greets her each day at work.*



Located just south of Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the mineral-rich Ortiz Mountains, Madrid is in the oldest coal-mining region in New Mexico. There is evidence of primitive mining in the Madrid area as early as the mid-1850s. Today it is a bustling village with a lively arts community.

The following story was told to me by Danette Garcia, who works at the

Mine Shaft Tavern, a popular Madrid bar and eatery:

"I'm originally from Arizona, but have lived in Santa Fe County since the year 1972. I've worked at the tavern for over three years and prior to beginning my employment, I was never told about it being haunted.

"My first experience with the ghost caught me by surprise. It took place three years ago. As I was seated in my office doing paperwork, I felt the sensation of two male hands being laid on my shoulders. Before [I could react] to what was happening, the hands quickly rose up to my neck area then moved back down over my shoulders. I had a 24-year-old dog in the office with me, and do you know that dog beat me to the door!

"Since that experience, I'm convinced that the spirit is a male spirit, because every morning when I come to work, as soon as I enter the bar and walk under the arch that separates the register area from the bar, he'll touch then brush my right cheek in a caressing way. I get the impression the male spirit is a positive one.

"What also took place just a couple of weeks ago happened while I was speaking

with a fellow worker, a chef named Marcus. I hadn't walked through the wall arch yet, and we were talking at the entrance to the kitchen. I was standing just a few feet away from the archway.

"Suddenly, I felt a gentle push in the direction of this arch. Disregarding this and continuing with the conversation, I again felt another push. I took this last push as an indication that I needed to be under the arch. The spirit wanted me under the arch so 'he' was physically pushing me to make his point. I verbally stated, 'I'll be there in just a minute. I first need to finish talking with Marcus.'

"A minute or so after saying this, I walked under the arch and I felt the now familiar caressing of my right cheek. Inside the dining room there is one table, table #15, where a chair will be pulled away by unseen hands. I'll return the chair to where it originally stood, and it will move away again on its own. This happens regularly in the dining room, but other weird things also take place.

"Unusual incidents of a spiritual nature were taking place so often in the bar and with such intensity that we located a

*Continued on next page*

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*Continued from previous page*

woman named Peggy, who is from a tribe in North Dakota. We asked Peggy to do a Native American cleansing ceremony in the bar. At one point during this ceremony, Peggy placed her hands on my shoulder and stated, 'You have a spirit attached to you.'

"As much as she tried, she was having a very tough time ridding me of this male spirit. I don't have any idea who this spirit is, but I am aware of a past waitress, named Subie, who also had a similar experience with a spirit in the bar who would touch her. To this day, the spirit that touches me follows me throughout the bar, and as I mentioned earlier, without fail, touches me each and every day as I begin my work.

"... The bar regularly features live music, and the musicians have reported the strange sound of a piano attempting to join in on the songs... One local musician, named Joe-Joe, has reported that the piano music resembles what was played in Old West bars many years gone by—music from the 1800s. Whoever is responsible for this no one knows, but these spirits have never hurt anyone.

"At other times I've also experienced empty drinking glasses being moved without anyone touching them. I'll set glasses on a table, then turn my back, [and] when I turn back around the glasses would all be moved about a foot or so to the very end of the table.

"Two summers ago, a guy was in the bar taking photographs and stated to me, 'Boy there sure are a lot of orbs in this place. You've got a big one following you!' I responded, 'Yep, I'm not surprised. There are a lot of ghosts in this place.'

"Some of the past bartenders, who still live in town, have mentioned to me [that they've seen] the reflection of spirits behind the bar within the mirrors... seated in the dining room or standing in the bar's front porch. I don't think I'd get scared if I actually had a ghost manifest itself to me in a full bodily form. I know there has never been anyone physically harmed by them, so I feel confident that I'd be okay, but you never know—right?"

*This story was originally published in New Mexico Ghost Stories, Vol. II, which can be ordered at [www.ghostbooks.biz](http://www.ghostbooks.biz)*



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- Put out garbage only on morning of pickup.
- Store garbage, birdseed, pet food in a sturdy shed or closed garage. If a bear is trying to access your garage or shed, hang a sock with mothballs on door handle. Mothballs are poisonous, read package safety directions.
- If you see a bear in a nearby tree, etc...take your dog and yourself inside to give the bear time to leave.
- Hang seed feeders and hummingbird feeders from wires 10' off the ground, 10' from supporting posts.
- Keep barbecue grills clean or stored inside.
- Keep kitchen windows and doors closed on summer nights.
- For small livestock and chickens, provide a sturdy shed and or a 5-strand electric fence using an approved fence charger with alternating current. Be sure to check with the county inspector for guidelines and limitations.
- Put a 5-strand electric fence around beehives. Remove fruit from under fruit trees if you don't want to share.
- Don't add melon rinds or fruit to compost pile except in winter.
- Don't leave food containers/wrappers, groceries, pet food or birdseed in your car overnight
- Feeding other wildlife could also attract bears. It is against NM law to feed bears on purpose.
- If a bear is drinking from your pool or hot tub, put water out far from your home and neighbors.
- Keep all poisons inside your house; many bears die from unprotected poisons or ingesting garbage bags.



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# Bringing the Past to Life

The East Mountain Historical Society preserves the documents, photos, and stories that tell our region's tales

BY CRAIG SPRINGER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE EAST MOUNTAIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

I'm sitting at my kitchen table in Edgewood near the crossroads of Horton and Dinkle. Through my window I can see the Sandias, South Mountain, and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the distance. South Mountain in particular is a piece of moving art as its shadows play out over the course of the day.

My home is perched on the north slope of a long-ranging ridge on the edge of the piñon-juniper woods. I live on the road between the ghost towns of Venus and Barton. I mean that literally. My house sits on top of what was once a road that connected Barton to Venus and points beyond.

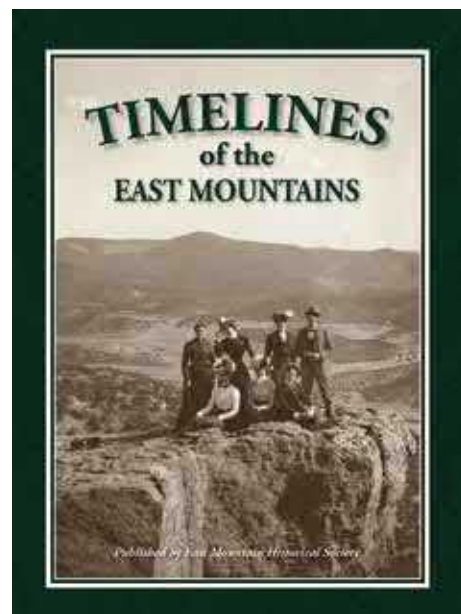


A map of the historical and vanishing places in the East Mountains, on display at EMHS offices.

I know this because next to me lies a copy of *Timelines of the East Mountains*, recently published by the East Mountain Historical Society and winner of the 2020 New Mexico-Arizona Book Awards for New Mexico History. It's not a book so much as a tome—as thick as the Chicago phone book—708 pages adorned with 350 photos and maps that bring to life the history of our region, from Golden to Moriarty to Manzano and all the places in between.

The society was founded in 1992 with a mission to preserve and promote the history of the communities of the East Mountains. Bev Neville currently leads EMHS, which is housed in the little church next to the library in Tijeras. She's been president nearly four years but says that only three of those years really count. The pandemic and the restrictions from on high have stymied programs and meetings of the all-volunteer organization for much of 2020.

But, she says, they look forward to one day soon being able to resume their programming and events, which include local talks on a variety of subjects and one to two open houses a year at the church. Their website remains a font of information as well, with photos and articles that cover a wide range of subjects. Current-



This 700-plus-page book is one of the most comprehensive East Mountain histories ever published.

ly, there are articles on the early days of Golden, local religious celebrations, and the day a submarine cruised through Tijeras Canyon.

Not only does EMHS preserve and promote the history of the area they also serve as a great resource for community members doing their own investigations. "We get calls from area residents and businesses for advice on our history," Neville says, "and we have helped others do research."

For instance, two years ago a researcher seeking information on Chilili called the organization. "We jumped into action," Neville says, "brought our equipment—a photocopier and a scanner—and spent a Sunday at the community center." They had encouraged community members to bring in photos and family stories, and spent the day getting to know folks of all ages—some whose families have been there for generations. "People came in all day long," Neville continues. "It was wonderful." The eventual outcome might be a book, but in the meantime the community has preserved important photos and shared important stories.

And stories speak to the heart of what local history means to Neville. She was born and raised on the East Coast but has been an East Mountain resident for more than two decades, having moved here from a longer stint in Colorado. She lived for a time in Sandia Park, but



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recently down-sized and moved a couple of miles eastward down Frost Road. She's been particularly impressed by the stories that live on in the families that date back generations—descendants of early settlers who are still among us.

"Families were so important to survival in a harsh land," Neville says. "I'm enthralled by the fact that homesteaders' descendants still live here. I just fell in love with that. I have become friends with people with a long history in the area—they talk most reverently about their ancestry."

But just knowing that history is not enough, she says. "It has to be shared and promoted. We have to interview the elderly and get their stories down. We have to preserve photos and artifacts."

To that end EMHS has produced an area map of historic and vanishing places all along the east face of the Sandia and Manzano mountains, fanning out eastward to where the woods transition to the drier shortgrass prairie. In addition, their book, which sold out its first printing in mid-2020 and is now available in its sec-

*Continued on next page*

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*Continued from previous page*

ond edition, is a vital source of local history that will prove an enlightening read to residents and history buffs alike.

It certainly brought the past alive for me. While reading, I could almost hear the clomp of horse hooves and the creak of buckboards carrying pinto bean farmers as they traveled the road from Barton to Venus. Just before arriving in Venus, the buckboards would have passed a sod dugout—a home carved into the prairie—set on the grounds of today's Valley View Church on NM 344. It's on the EMHS map.

The road is still visible, and it first appeared on a 1901 township sub-divisional survey by the General Land Office. The East Mountains had to be surveyed into square-mile sections before the federal government could parcel them off to homesteaders who arrived en masse to our area from Texas and Oklahoma in the early 20th century.

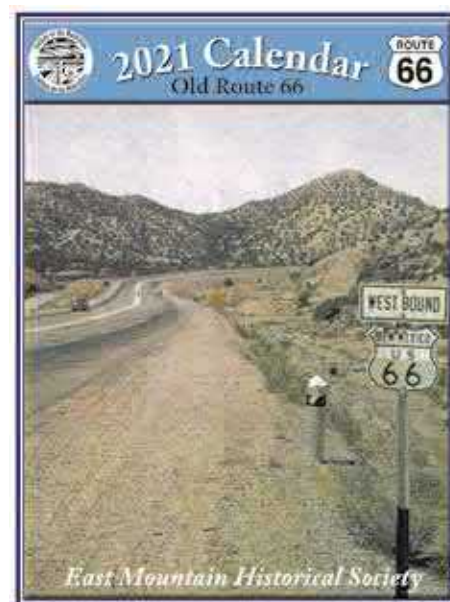
Venus, so named for the daughter of the postmaster, rested at the crest of the hill east of where Edgewood Middle School stands today, on Venus Road. Venus existed to service the coming railroad, and the grade is readily seen today from Sandia Park

to Moriarty. However, financiers William "Bull" Andrews, Matthew Quay, and Willard Hopewell apparently ran out of money for the rail, and it was never finished.

The book also talks about the earthen berms that follow the contours of the land, most visible in fallow or grazed fields and even in some neighborhoods. Think Dust Bowl. To combat soil erosion and to put young men to work, the Civilian Conservation Corps—the Tree Army as they were called—shaped many of those berms in the mid-1930s with labor from camps in Manzano and Moriarty.

Then, too, there is the grimmer side of our history. The Navajo people, vanquished by the U.S. Army, were forcefully evicted from their homes in northwest New Mexico and marched across hundreds of miles to Ft. Sumner, New Mexico. Groups of Navajos made 53 forced marches from 1864 to 1866 through several routes, the shortest via Tijeras Canyon and over Sedillo Hill. Not all of the people endured the Long Walk—many died along the way.

Place names are our autobiography and the stories that attend the places are wonderful precincts of our past. No matter where you live in the East Mountains,



The EMHS 2021 calendar, which can be purchased online, includes 26 full-color pages of historic Route 66 photos.

no matter your vantage point, the history shared by the East Mountain Historical Society will inform and educate you about the very land on which you tread.

Order your copy of Timelines of the East Mountains by visiting [eastmountain-history.org](http://eastmountain-history.org) 🐦

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Photos: Getty Images

## The Accidental Homeschooler

Once thought an outlier method of instruction, homeschooling has suddenly become the only choice for many parents today

BY JEANNE C. DRENNAN, OT/L

In today's tumultuous climate, parents have had to reframe nearly every aspect of their daily lives, including the education of their children. I can't remember a time when educational options have been so widely and eagerly explored. Everything is on the table and public or private are no longer the only considerations. Our state's hybrid model, online remote learning, and homeschooling are just a few of the options available to families.

Parents are understandably conflicted and overwhelmed trying to navigate this new educational landscape. This was the experience of one Edgewood mom/special education teacher I spoke with. "These two models," meaning 100 percent on-

line and hybrid, she said, "are extremely difficult for working parents." Concerned about her children falling behind, she decided to enroll them in private school so they could benefit from five days of in-person instruction, instead of only two days under the hybrid model.

No doubt there are many downfalls to the online/hybrid model, including internet issues, lack of educational support at home, and some behavior escalations. As such, a number of parents have switched to homeschooling for the 2020 school year.

Homeschooling had already been on the radar for Sarah Bryce and her husband, who live in Edgewood, prior to schools shutting down in response to Covid-19,

so they jumped at the opportunity to test the waters. "It was extremely important for us to provide our oldest daughter with a stable, safe, and secure environment," she says, "and homeschooling was the only way for us to do that."

When our family began homeschooling our children in 1999, it was, like many others, a conscious decision rooted in our faith—a calling, some might say. But while so many of us chose to educate our children at home, countless parents today are essentially being forced to make this decision, with little to no preparation or direction, all while adjusting to ever-changing pandemic life.

As referenced on the homeschooling website [time4learning.com](http://time4learning.com), these accidental homeschoolers are entering a world they never intended to. According to a KRQE news story that aired this past July, the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) stated that as of that airing, they had received 1,248 brand new applications for establishing a home-school in New Mexico, which accounted for 36 percent of the applications so far.



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As a statement on the NMPED website reads, "There has been an overwhelming number of phone and email inquiries into homeschooling options this year due to the health crisis." They go on to assure parents that they are working non-stop to respond to questions and provide registration support.

Educating children at home is not easy but, as many will attest, it is worth the time and effort, and homeschooling styles are as different and unique as the people involved in it. Some parents aim to re-create the traditional classroom in their homes, with schedules that coincide with their school district and adherence to said districts' scope and sequence. Others are more flexible with start/end times, integrating school into their daily lives.

Veteran homeschooler Kelly Jungling, a former Edgewood resident, takes the latter approach while homeschooling her seven children. She considers their home-school a lifestyle, not just an 8-to-3 event, often taking "sunshine days" instead of snow days, where she and the kids pack

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up their books and head up to the Sandias for school in the fresh air.

“Unschooling” is yet another model, one that is led by the child’s curiosity and interests, with help and resources from supportive parents. Sadly, current health restrictions and closings have limited the opportunity for outings and field trips we veteran homeschoolers enjoyed as a regular part of our school schedule, so parents may need to be a bit more creative in that regard.

Some homeschool families choose to use an exclusively online curriculum, a book-based curriculum, or a combination of both. Bryce chose an all-inclusive curriculum for her seven-year-old that allows her four-year-old and even her one-year-old to participate. However you decide

Home educators are a creative and resourceful bunch, and there is ample supply of cooperatives that offer classes, outings, and support groups for parents. The organization Parent Led Academic Network Team ([parentlednetwork.org](http://parentlednetwork.org)) is one such organization.

to structure your homeschool, there are state regulations that need to be considered. The Christian Association of Parent Educators, [cape-nm.org](http://cape-nm.org), and NMPED ([webnew.ped.state.nm.us](http://webnew.ped.state.nm.us)) outline all the particulars for homeschooling in our state.

While the pandemic has brought homeschooling into the mainstream, consequently removing the stigma and making it a household name, it’s vital to know that in the not-too-distant past (circa early 2020), homeschooling was often under attack and scrutinized by government authorities. The Homeschool Legal Defense Association, the “nation’s largest and most trusted homeschool advocacy organization,” has been tirelessly working for more than 35 years to equip parents and students to successfully homeschool, while protecting our freedom to educate our children at home. The organization’s website ([hsllda.org](http://hsllda.org)) is a must-visit for all things homeschool, and includes the HSLDA Online

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With so many curriculum choices available, choosing one can be simultaneously exciting and overwhelming. If you're having difficulty establishing an educational plan, or it's just not your forte, New Mexico does offer an online tuition-free option through [connectionsacademy.com](http://connectionsacademy.com). All textbooks and instructional materials are included and provided to all students at no additional cost. Additionally, [k12.com](http://k12.com) offers tuition-free and tuition-based online public school at home. For a comprehensive list of reviewed curriculums across the age span, visit [cathyduffyreviews.com](http://cathyduffyreviews.com).

Time in school varies, but on average, pre-k and kindergarten can be completed in one-and-a-half to two hours per day. Elementary-level instruction may take a couple more hours than that, and mid-to-high school can take considerably more time, although older kids are typically more independent in their studies, which lightens the load on parents. Age and number of children in home school, parental work considerations, access to the internet, and a child's special needs are just some of the factors that may influence time spent homeschooling.

While getting started and establishing a workable rhythm can be challenging, the benefits of homeschooling will be quickly realized. Taking advantage of the flexibility that homeschooling gave her family allowed former public-school teacher, retired home educator, and, along with her husband, CAPE-NM board member Cathy Heckendorn, of Moriarty, to arrange their schedule in a way that encouraged her four kids to dive deep into subject areas that interested them. If a child struggled with a concept or subject, homeschooling afforded her the time to provide one-on-one instruction until it was fully

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understood and they could move forward with confidence.

Home educators are a creative and resourceful bunch, and there is ample supply of cooperatives that offer classes, outings, and support groups for parents. The organization Parent Led Academic Network Team ([parentlednetwork.org](http://parentlednetwork.org)) is one such organization. Here you'll find an array of opportunities, groups, and classes, including sports, gifted programs, clubs, tutors, links to Facebook groups, and educational options statewide, including here in the East Mountains.

While some accidental homeschoolers may re-enter the public-school system

when restrictions are lifted, some, like Bryce and her husband, plan to continue educating their children at home. Her affirmation is one that is likely shared by most who teach their kids at home: "The quality of life homeschooling has afforded us during this time has been so very worth it, and we look forward to continuing our adventures in homeschooling."

*Additional homeschooling resources are available online at the following sites:*

[abeka.com](http://abeka.com)  
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## Life by the Batch

Preplanning in the kitchen saves time, money, and brings people together

BY JEANNE C. DRENNAN, OT/L

What if there was a way to save you hours in the kitchen and considerable money on your grocery budget? What if you could have more time for your family and the things that you love to do? What if you could enjoy greater good health? Well, those things are exactly what the simple art of meal planning and batch cooking can help you achieve.

The two go hand in hand. According to Mickey Trescott and Angie Alt, co-authors of *The Autoimmune Wellness Handbook*, meal planning is the practice of mapping out your meals for the week and letting that guide your shopping list and cooking days. This pre-planning allows for batch cooking, or preparing meals in large enough quantities to be frozen or otherwise stored for enjoyment at a later date. This “magical combination,” as the authors call it, takes the guesswork out of the perpetual dilemma of what to cook for dinner, frees up your time, and eliminates the need for you to be a short-order cook every evening.

Batch cooking can be customized to accommodate any palate or health concern, and with some experts claiming that Americans spend upwards of 40 percent of their food budgets on eating out, this technique can actually keep money in your pocket, not to mention excess fat off your waistline. It's no secret that fast foods,



Photos: Getty Images

processed foods, and packaged foods are detriments to our health and nearly devoid of all nutrients, making us susceptible to degenerative conditions that are, for the most part, completely avoidable. Meal planning and batch cooking help put the control back into our hands—control of our health, our money, and how we spend our time.

When I was a busy mom of young children, I got into the practice of once-a-month-cooking to save time and stretch our hard-earned dollars. It took one day of exhaustive activity in the kitchen, but the satisfaction of seeing a month's worth of meals in the freezer was worth every second of preparation. It eliminated the 11th hour “what on earth am I going to cook for dinner?” scramble and saved us a noticeable amount of money at the grocery store.

Today, with an empty nest on the horizon, meal prep in my household looks a bit different. Now I batch cook to help manage a chronic health condition, but instead of preparing actual complete meals like I did with the once-a-month cooking, now I tend to prepare ingredients to be combined in various meals throughout the week—soups being the exception, because they are fantastic reheated and can be frozen easily.

Regardless of whether you batch cook or batch prepare, the key to sustaining this healthy habit is to keep it simple until you get the hang of it. Once you're comfortable, you can easily integrate more involved recipes into your routine and try new ingredients. Simplicity is especially important if you are starting this practice to manage a health condition: focus on nutrient density and a variety of vegetables to regain and maintain your health.



Here is an example of the kinds of foods you might want to have on hand or prepare for a batch-cook day:

- 2 pounds cooked ground beef
- 1 whole roasted chicken or 2 pre-cooked rotisserie chickens
- 1 pound cooked bacon
- 1 pound ground turkey
- High-protein muffins
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Pork or beef roast
- Canned tuna and salmon
- Chopped lettuce
- Chopped veggies
- Sliced fruit
- Nuts
- Dried fruit

Ground beef can be used in nachos, taco salad, and burritos, or combined with veggies for a quick skillet meal. Whole roasted chickens can be served as part of a meal along with roasted veggies or chopped up to make chicken salad. I also immediately transfer the chicken carcasses to an Instapot electric pressure cooker (I love my Instapot!) to make bone broth, or I freeze them for later use. Bone broth,

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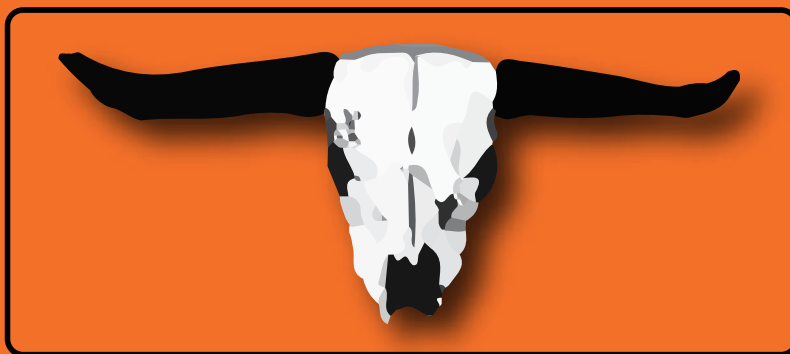
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an especially nutrient-dense food, can be used in soups or taken alone for gut healing and overall health.

Bacon can be eaten alone, crumbled on a salad, or added along with chopped veggies to scrambled eggs, omelets, or bakes. I use a pound of ground turkey to make breakfast sausage patties, which I freeze and then fry up as needed. These can be served at breakfast with high-protein muffins, which you can buy in bulk at your

local bakery or supermarket. They freeze well and can be unthawed overnight.

Washed and chopped lettuce will keep in the refrigerator for about a week, and can be paired with pre-chopped veggies, hard-boiled eggs, leftover roast chicken, etc. for a variety of salads. Pork or beef roasts can be prepared in a crockpot or electric pressure cooker and served as part of a meal paired with roast potatoes or veggies. Leftovers can be made into chimichangas or barbecue beef for sandwiches.

Canned tuna or salmon can be made into salad for sandwiches or fried into cakes. Sliced fruit and nuts make quick and healthful snacks. Sauces, breads, homemade jerky, and granola can all be batch cooked or pre-prepared.

And buying quality food doesn't have to break the bank. If you have a green thumb,

growing fruits and vegetables is an economical way to get your fill. You can freeze and/or can just about anything to ensure a year-round supply. Farmers' markets and growers co-ops are fantastic options in-season, but Costco and Sam's club are also stocking more and more organic products every day. Since they sell in larger quantities, having a membership to one of these stores is an ideal option not just for large families but also for batch cooks.

Warehouse stores also offer proteins in bulk, so you can save quite a bit of money buying large portions of fish and ground meats or multi-packs of steaks. One of my favorite tricks is to bag individual slices of pork, salmon, and chicken with a marinade, label, and freeze for future use. You can do this with individual steaks as well.

As an occupational therapist who spe-



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cializes in lifestyle medicine, I love it when an activity serves more than one purpose, promotes a healthy lifestyle, and encourages social interaction. Batch cooking can be an opportunity to get the entire family involved in prep work and cooking. For example, older kids can chop veggies and younger ones can bag up snacks, label baggies, and store meals in the freezer. Everyone can get together and brainstorm a week's worth of meals. Bento box lunches are a hit with kids and adults alike, and the kids can even fill them up themselves, giving them a sense of ownership in their health.

Batch cooking is also a great way for people outside the family to socialize. You and your friends can take turns hosting batch-cooking parties, in which everyone is assigned a series of items to contribute to the meals. These items can be pre-prepared, or, if the host home has a large enough prep area, everything can be prepared in one place and added to various recipes. With four or five people all contributing, everyone can go home with several meals for the week and, of course, it's time well spent with friends.

Ultimately, preplanning and batch cooking can lead to healthier eating habits. You'll be less likely to make unhealthy choices in those weaker moments when you're tired, short on time, over-worked, or not feeling well. It won't take long before you begin to feel better, realize that you're spending more time with your family, and even see that your grocery and eating out expenditures are decreasing. Meal planning and batch cooking require a bit of a learning curve on the front end, but the benefits are well worth the investment of your time over the long term. 🐼



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## Burn, Baby, Burn

Ensure the clean, safe operation of your wood stove

BY E. H. HACKNEY

Winter is here and it's time to get your wood stove ready for the heating season. According to current statistics compiled off city-data.com for Cedar Crest, Cedar Grove, Chilili, Edgewood, Moriarty, Tajiique, Tijeras, and Torreon, nearly 20 percent of East Mountain homes are warmed by wood, and it can be a safe, reliable, and cost-effective heating source if handled with respect.

Two primary causes of home fires from wood stoves are the improper handling of ashes and chimney fires caused by excessive creosote deposits that form from burning wood. If the fire in your stove gets too hot, it can ignite the creosote, resulting in a chimney fire. The best way to avoid this is to clean your chimney once or twice a year. You can purchase the brushes and do it yourself, or hire one of several chimney sweeps in the East Mountains.

It used to be that one of the major causes of creosote build-up was closing down the air inlet to old spin-draft stoves, says John Smaniotto, who has nearly 40 years of experience in wood stove maintenance and cleaning through his business, the Canyon Chimney Sweep. "But stoves today now feature small holes drilled in the sides, which allows you to burn wood more slowly, cleanly, and safely," he says. "Plus, new emissions requirements in 2020 mean that we won't be able to purchase any of the old junk stoves in the U.S. Only clean stoves will be available."

These new stoves are better insulated, collect less creosote, and, because they must burn cleaner than 2.5 grams of particulate an hour, are less polluting. While the East Mountains are exempt from the regulations that govern air quality in Albuquerque, Smaniotto says that if you're in the market for a new stove, it makes sense to buy a stove that meets the new regulations.

What if you have an old stove? "I would advise burning less wood at a time and let-

*Continued on next page*





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*Continued from previous page*

ting it burn freely, rather than filling the stove with wood and throttling it down," Smaniotto says.

But don't burn just any wood, he cautions. "Try to avoid ponderosa pine. It burns like paper and only puts out heat for about 10 to 15 minutes." And if you try to burn it slowly, it builds up to dangerous levels of creosote.

Mixes of piñon, juniper, and cedar are popular because they are less expensive, but they make more ash and creosote and


put out less heat per cord. Instead, try to burn oak if you can afford it. It might be more expensive up front, but it burns hot and creates little ash and creosote. Best of all, you can burn it slowly and get more burn for your buck. Whichever wood you use, it should be well seasoned.

In addition, do not burn trash, cardboard, holiday wrappings, or your dried-out Christmas tree in your woodstove. They burn too hot and increase the risk of a chimney fire—plus, some papers contain unhealthy dies and chemicals. Likewise, don't burn painted or treated wood, and never use liquid fuels, like gasoline or kerosene, in your stove.

The ashes in your stove may appear cold but can still contain hot embers capable of starting a fire. Use a covered metal container to hold ashes while they cool. Smaniotto advises using a double-bottom ashcan. These are relatively expensive but are safer and more durable than a single-bottom container. Not all trash removal services accept cold ashes, so check with your carrier before you bag your ashes and put them in the trashcan. And remember that the transfer station does not accept ashes—hot or cold. If your removal service does not accept them, you can either bury or pile cold ashes on your property or sprinkle them over garden and compost beds.

If you are considering getting a wood stove or replacing your old one, have it installed properly. It is not recommended as a do-it-yourself project. There are a number of codes for stove installations, which vary with the type of stove and chimney being used. Newer stoves and chimneys can, in general, be located closer to walls and combustibles than older ones.

You can take additional safety precautions by removing tree limbs from above your chimney and keeping your roof and gutters free of pine needles, which could ignite. Maintain a perimeter of at least 18 inches in front of your stove that is free of combustibles like wood or carpet. Three feet is ideal. Remember to have a fire extinguisher available and to check the batteries in your smoke alarm yearly.

Wood is still a good way to warm your home, and by following a few simple rules it can be done safely. Plus, there is nothing like a wood stove for the simple pleasure of sitting and watching the flames dance. 



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