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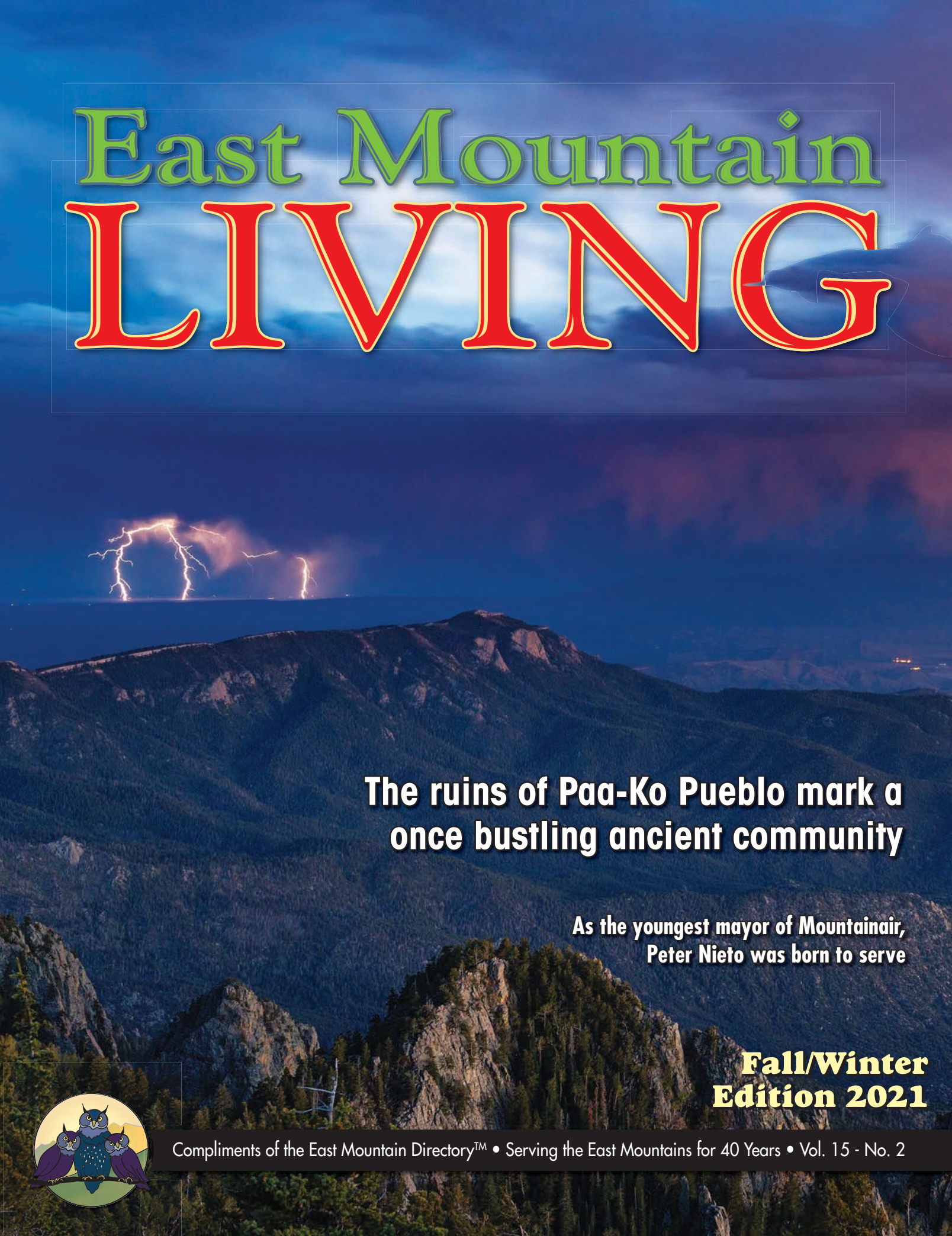

The ruins of Paa-Ko Pueblo mark a once bustling ancient community

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Community Events • Fall/Winter 2021

Amigos de Cerrillos Hills State Park

Currently, the park has suspended its programming due to COVID-19, but it is open daily to New Mexico residents only from sunrise to sunset for hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and picnicking. Check the website for more information and park alerts: cerrilloshills.org

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Cedar Crest Tire accepts contributions year round to benefit the East Mountain Pantry, but individuals and families in need can feel the crunch especially hard during the holidays. Drop your non-perishable food items off at their office at 1212 N Hwy 14 and they will transport to the Pantry. For more info call 505-281-9100.

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Sponsors a variety of programs and events year-round, including the popular Sunflower Festival, date TBA. Check manzanomountainartcouncil.org for more info.

Vista Grande Community Center

Sandia Park

While many classes are still canceled or have moved online due to COVID-19, the fitness center is now open by appointment weekdays from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. (505) 468-7500

On the Cover

An evening view from Sandia Crest shows lightning crackling in the distance as a thunderstorm descends on a lit-up Albuquerque to the right of the frame.

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Letter from the Editor

Rena Distasio

When independent publisher Igor Broes and his daughter Eliska Broes purchased the East Mountain Directory phone book in 2006, they also started *East Mountain Living*, a companion publication focusing on life in the mountain communities east of Albuquerque. They asked me to serve as editor, and together we published the first issue of the magazine in the spring of 2007.

For the past 14 years I've worked with a talented team of publishers and writers to tell the stories that make the communities on the green side of the Sandias such a wonderful place to live, work, and recreate. I'm proud of the work we have done together and the contribution the magazine has made to the community.

Unfortunately, all good things eventually end, and this will be my last issue as editor of *East Mountain Living*. My husband and I have moved even farther east along I-40, trading the mountains and woods of Tijeras for the short grass prairie of central Oklahoma.

I was born and raised in New Mexico and lived in Tijeras for 26 years. It's where I met my husband, where I made lasting friendships, where I started writing and editing, and where I enjoyed countless hours in the great outdoors, hiking, snowshoeing, running, and walking our dogs. Leaving has been one of the most difficult things I've ever done, not just logistically (note to self: no, you don't need all this stuff!) but also emotionally. The East Mountains are a special place, and we will miss it terribly.

I'll especially miss working on *East Mountain Living*. It has always been close to my heart because it was so close to home, so I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped make this magazine such a success over the past 14 years:

Igor and Eliska Broes for starting the magazine and trusting me with its editorial; Mike and Beth Meyer, who took over from the Broeses and grew the support of both readers and advertisers; current owner and publisher Mike Wier and his team for their support, enthusiasm, and expertise; our contributors, many of whom have been with the magazine since the beginning, for their talent and unwavering ability to meet their deadlines; our advertisers, without whom we could not publish; and of course our readers, who are so consistently generous with their praise and suggestions.

I'm not sure at this point who will take over for me, but I do know that it will be someone just as passionate about the East Mountains—its people, its history, its culture—as I have been since I first made my way east through Tijeras canyon with a truckload of furniture and a heart full of excitement. I'm excited as well for those who, like me all those years ago, are just beginning to discover what a great place this is to call home. *East Mountain Living* will continue to be its champion.

Rena Distasio

Editor-in-chief

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If you have an idea for a story or would like to write for us, please contact Mike Wier at 406-781-7343.

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:

Dixie Boyle

Dixie, a retired history teacher, now works as a freelance writer and fire lookout on the Cibola National Forest. She has written numerous articles and books on New Mexico's history. Her latest book, *A History of the Shaffer Hotel*, was published in 2019.

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.

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.

Antonio Garcez

Antonio 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. You can visit him at *www.ghostbooks.biz*

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 340,000 views.

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.

Denise Tessier

Denise is an award-winning New Mexico journalist who has written previously for *East Mountain Living* about the late Sheriff's Deputy Tomás "Tom" Herrera and notorious 1880s outlaw Marino Leyba. She is past president of the East Mountain Historical Society and has been on its board of directors more than 25 years, currently serving as historian and long-time newsletter editor.

Faerl Marie Torres

Faerl has an MFA in Creative Writing and a passion for white t-shirts, turquoise jewelry, and enjoying the outdoors near her home in the mountains east of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her fiction has appeared in reviews, journals, and anthologies and has won numerous awards. Torres works as a freelance writer and stay-at-home mom.

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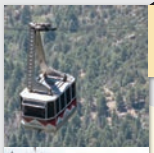

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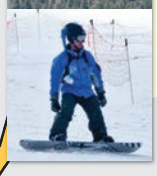

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Manzano
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25
344
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214
40
337
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55
542
60
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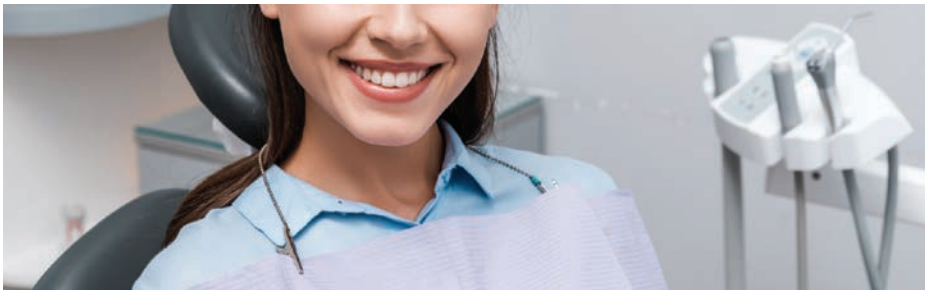

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The Pueblo Off the Highway

Blink and you'll miss the remains of a once bustling ancient community

BY MICHAEL FARRELL SMITH

Just north of San Antonito and east of North 14 sprawls a flat, level, now-fenced spot. A low brown sign identifies this unassuming site as Paa-Ko Pueblo, a name now used by a nearby upscale housing development and golf course. This site, grass-fringed and rock-studded, looks not much unlike the surrounding high desert, there where the Sandia Mountains slope down to desert valley—and probably most people who pass it by barely see it.

Just east of Paa-Ko Pueblo flows San Pedro Creek, if it is flowing and not dry, which it often is lately, a creek that flows into broad Tonque Arroyo, if that's flowing, which further downstream flows into the Rio Grande. Just centuries ago, the embankments of these quiet waterways were used much like a network of roads, roads with ready water and no doubt food for those who knew how to find it, connecting Paa-Ko Pueblo to Tonque Pueblo and other pueblos to San Felipe Pueblo and beyond.

With trees and clay, game animals and a spring, as well as the area's sweeping views of other mountains like the Ortiz and San Pedro, it's easy to see what drew the indigenous Tano and other peoples here.

Taking its name from what was likely a Tiwa word meaning "root of the cottonwood," according to Robert Julyan's *Place Names of New Mexico* (imposing bent-armed cottonwoods still grow nearby, leaves now flashing yellow), this pueblo was likely first built sometime in the 1200s, when the pueblos of what's now the Albuquerque area of the Middle Rio Grande Valley were also first established. The creek, and that spring, now called San Pedro Spring, would have been major factors in choosing the site (just imagine that discovery, 800 years ago—it must have happened—*Look!*—*Water!*), and other factors must have included the availability of plentiful trees like tall

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ponderosas, which would have then been more plentiful than junipers and piñons, before the ponderosas were significantly cleared over centuries by the pueblo's residents, likely mostly for the firewood necessary for cooking and for warmth.

Says Lincoln Bramwell's 2014 book *Wilderburbs: Communities on Nature's Edge*:

> Through centuries of habitation, the Tanoan people significantly modified the forest surrounding their pueblo, abandoning and reoccupying the site several times between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. Albuquerque landscape architect and historian Baker Morrow has estimated that Paa-Ko and surrounding pueblos supported a human population that peaked at more than a thousand occupants.

That number may have been much higher, as the boundaries between this and other area pueblos could be indistinct and porous. And according to archeologist Franklin Barnett's 1969 book-length survey of a nearby site with an overlapping history, *Tonque Pueblo: A Report of Partial Excavation of an Ancient Pueblo IV Indian Ruin in New Mexico*, available ar-

Continued on next page

This map from the University of New Mexico shows the layout of the Paa-Ko Pueblo site, which the university manages and owns. Image from the Galisteo Basin Archaeological Sites Protection Act.

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Continued from previous page

able, tillable, and easily irrigated soil, rare in this arid land, would almost certainly have been another big reason for the selection of the site.

Still: this was desert land, though wooded high desert, and survival here must have sometimes been challenging. Marjorie Lambert (a.k.a. Marjorie Ferguson Tichy), an archeologist who excavated about 200 rooms of the two major two-story "roomblocks" of Paa-Ko Pueblo in the 1930s and author of *El Palacio*'s 1937 article "The Excavation of Paa-Ko Ruin: a Preliminary Report," wrote that the pueblo's temporary abandonment in the 1400s likely happened because of "warfare and Athapaskan [Navajo and/or Apache] attacks"; and archeologist Spencer L. Rogers, in Part VI of a now-obscure multipart 1954 monograph, *Paa-Ko, Archeological Chronicle of an Indian Village in North Central New Mexico*, noted that bones excavated at the site indicated an unusually high rate of osteoporosis, suggesting residents' difficulties in obtaining necessary vitamins.

Between Paa-Ko Pueblo's two major roomblocks, many hundred rooms have been documented—none of them now visible above ground—as well as both round and square *kivas* for religious ceremonies, the earliest walls made of "coursed masonry," in levels like bricks.

Being not far south of Galisteo Creek, and a part of the pottery-prolific Galisteo Basin, much pottery was made and left in fragments there too, in vibrant black-on-white and white-on-black styles. These beautiful pots and sherds have been key to dating the site, a place with centuries of Indigenous history and then decades involving an early Spanish presence, leading to the site's ultimate abandonment.

Taking its name from what was likely a Tiwa word meaning "root of the cottonwood," according to Robert Julyan's *Place Names of New Mexico* (imposing bent-armed cottonwoods still grow nearby, leaves now flashing yellow), this pueblo was likely first built sometime in the 1200s, when the pueblos of what's now the Albuquerque area of the Middle Rio Grande Valley were also first established.

This brief post-contact era left the remains of a wooden corral, 1600s-era masonry, and abundant evidence of metallurgy, including bits of lead ore, fragments of flattened copper, and iron (in the pueblo's central plaza), as well as smelters. Historian Todd Brown, of the Cerrillos Turquoise Mining Museum, also on North 14, once showed me, c. 2006, one such smelter, and I would never have recognized it as such had I stumbled upon it on my own. It just looked like a big chunk of half-buried old rust, sitting mere feet away from the nearby developments' expensive modern homes.

Robert Julyan has also noted that, "The Franciscan mission San Pedro de Cuchillo, 'St. Peter of the Ridge,' was founded here in 1661 but abandoned before 1670." This means Paa-Ko Pueblo was not around for the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, when the Spanish newcomers

were all driven away en masse. However, Paa-Ko Pueblo is reportedly considered significant in the history of the migrations of the people of Santa Ana Pueblo, in Sandoval County, to the northwest, and descendants of the people of Paa-Ko Pueblo may be among the people of that pueblo today.

Almost a century before, Paa-Ko Pueblo may have also been a stop for the religiously minded 1581 Chamuscado–Rodriguez expedition—likely its first European contact. But although the Very Reverend James H. Defouri's 1893 work *The Martyrs of New Mexico* and David Roberts' 2004 *The Pueblo Revolt* suggest that expedition priest Juan de Santa Maria was crushed to death at Paa-Ko, after too-confidently abandoning his military escorts at Tonque, other writings suggest he made it to near what's now Chílílí, in the Manzanos.

Famed archaeologist Adolph Bandelier surveyed Paa-Ko Pueblo in 1892, its walls then still rising, though crumbling. Now UNM owns and manages the site. It doesn't look like much, but it was, it is.

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Stick to Your Ribs

Cedar Crest restaurant feeds those hungry for great barbecue and close-knit community

BY FAERL MARIE TORRES

The signage at Ribs stands over their location in a small shopping plaza in Cedar Crest, where the barbecue restaurant has served ribs, brisket, and other smoked meats to hungry patrons for over 23 years.

If you've lived in the East Mountains for any length of time or talked with someone who has, you've likely heard of Ribs BBQ. Located in a small shopping plaza on the Turquoise Trail in Cedar Crest, this culinary institution is both underrated and worthy of the local hype. Initially opened in Albuquerque 30 years ago by the Decktors, Cedar Crest has been home to the restaurant for more than 23 years.

Even before becoming an owner, Asa Bortz-Johnson worked at Ribs in the kitchen and at the front of the house, learning the ropes between graduating college and taking a job at Sandia National Labs. In 2016, Asa and his wife, Austin Bortz-Johnson, and Brad Gunter, Chad Gunter, and Veronica Gunter saw the opportunity for expansion and greater community involvement and made the joint decision to purchase Ribs. It's a true family-owned-and-operated establishment, where they discuss everything and always manage to arrive at a mutually agreed upon resolution. It's been five years of harmony, mostly due to their shared commitment to delivering quality products, taking care of their staff, and enriching the community.

Together, the Bortz-Johnsons and Gunters have 35 years of combined restaurant and barbecue experience. Back in 2016, their first task was to look at every part of the business, from meat processing to staff roles, deciding what to keep, what to change, and what to strip down to the bones. "We didn't come in with the idea we knew better," Asa says about their determination to make Ribs the best it can be. Having worked for the original owners, Asa knew some processes had evolved unnecessarily and were best in their original state, when the restaurant was first established. Their goal was to streamline their food production processes to ensure consistent quality and flavor, while also creating an exciting work environment for their staff, offering not just a job to punch in and out of, but the opportunity to work together as a team. "We're holistically inward focused to ensure the staff has development and growth opportunities," Asa says. "We worked hard to change the culture." To ensure the growth of the restaurant, Asa, Brad, and Chad have maintained full-time day jobs so all of the restaurant's profits can be poured back into the business, its employees, and the quality of the food.

Using only USDA Choice and Prime beef, their meat is processed in house, spending anywhere from 48 to 72 hours being brined, smoked, and grilled before being deemed ready for the plate. "Big Bertha," the enormous stainless-steel smoker in the corner of the restaurant, holds dozens of pork rib racks, slabs of brisket, and trays of turkey breast, hot links, and whole birds, all bathed in fragrant oak wood smoke and steam. The steam ensures the meat—especially the poultry—remains moist while the flavor

Continued on next page

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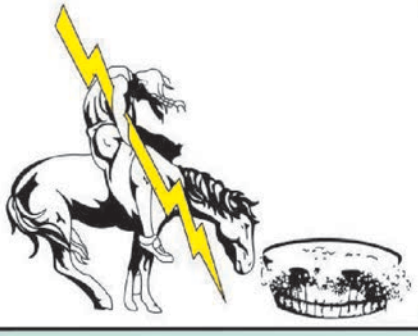

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Continued from previous page

concentrates, the meat tenderizes, and the bark can candy and darken without burning or drying out.

By the time the meat is plated, sauce is an embellishment—unnecessary, but nice for a little bite-to-bite variety. The house sauce is smoky, spicy, and marries several American barbecue traditions. Their "sweet heat" sauce has a sweet start and a spicy finish, and pairs as perfectly with ribs and brisket as with fried okra and baked potatoes.

The rustic, log cabin-esque interior is decked with neon beer signs and patriotic banners, but the real message hits you in the parking lot: wood smoke, spice, and sweetly charred meat. Ribs is about more than indulging your primal instincts; from the hand-mixed margaritas to the fresh salads and house-made desserts, it's a great place to meet friends for a drink or rendezvous for a full meal after a day of recreation in the Sandias. Karissa, a 14-year veteran of the Ribs team, made me feel at home with a bright smile and extensive knowledge of the menu and offerings.

My Ribs and Chicken Dinner arrived simply plated and steaming hot. With a candied, glistening bark and beautifully pink smoke ring, the rib meat fell from the bone. The Big Bertha roasted and smoked chicken was deliciously seasoned but also perfectly augmented when dipped in the sweet-heat sauce. While the house sauce is classic, with a tangy smoke flavor that compliments everything coming off the grill, the sweet heat is my personal favorite. Brown sugar and apple juice sweeten the sauce, while apple cider vinegar balances it out with a clean finish. I used it with abandon. From the time I opened the door to the last bite, my only disappointment was not being able to finish all the food on my plate.

Asa's brother, Eli Bortz-Johnson, is the kitchen manager, and he prides himself on helping to create just this kind of experience. A brawny guy, he looks fit to handle the slabs of beef he carefully processes and prepares. Prior to working at Ribs, Eli's barbecue experience didn't extend beyond the backyard. With a little tutelage from Dovie Decktor, and a few mistakes along the way, Eli mastered the pit. "You can't hurry barbecue," Eli says. "It's a low and slow game . . . if you deviate you won't have as high a quality of product."

Eli insists it's not about specific times or exact amounts. Barbecue is about feeling. The nuances of smoking time, seasoning, and grilling have to be earned through experience. Everything from meat density to heat and wood make a difference in the cook time. Eli's mastery was hard won, with lots of costly and time-consuming mistakes, like whole briskets forgotten in the smoker and racks of ribs smoked without ever being seasoned. Fortunately, his intuition is now well honed, and he can handle sudden changes seamlessly—an especially valuable asset given the current climate in the restaurant industry.

With COVID-19 still bearing down on the country, the Gunters and Bortz-Johnsons have had to pivot. Everything from

The Ribs menu offers plenty of options to pair with their house barbecue and "sweet heat" sauces.

supply chain issues to increased costs and labor shortages have forced them into the kind of flexibility more common among vegan yogis than carnivores. Changes have included opening up Ribs 21—the bar on the side of the restaurant—for regular seating and expanding the patio and enclosing it with a wind break and heaters for year-round comfort. The hardest part has been maintaining exceptionally high standards in the face of so many setbacks and adaptations.

Even so, those at the helm remain committed entirely to their staff and customers. "We would rather have more folks coming in and being satisfied, than going after the supply chain to minimize costs," Asa says about the pricing instability caused by the pandemic. From the beginning, he and his partners made the decision to retain their staff and the quality of the product, even if it meant closing a few days a week and cutting into profits. Despite longer wait times and increased prices on the menu, the community has been "100 percent supportive," Asa says, providing the confidence they need to look forward and plan a brighter, bigger future for the restaurant.

And part of that future means more than just providing great food, service, and mountain views. The owners are committed to making positive impacts in the community, providing a line of consumables and retail products that align with their ethos and turning Ribs into a sanctuary that promotes connection, community, family, and love of country beyond the East Mountains and into the entire barbecue-loving world.

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Call of the Wildlife West

Edgewood sanctuary gives displaced animals a new lease on life

BY CHRIS MAYO • *PHOTOS COURTESY OF WILDLIFE WEST NATURE PARK*

Roger Alink doesn't think of himself as a visionary (he prefers "punster"), but the word fits nonetheless. As the founder and executive director of Wildlife West Nature Park in Edgewood, Alink has spent the past 30 years working tirelessly to create and maintain one of the most unique wildlife sanctuaries and educational facilities in the country.

Though he grew up on a farm in Minnesota, Alink's heart has been in New Mexico since he attended UNM in 1967. He joined the Army in 1970, then beat feet back to New Mexico as soon as he finished a two-year stint. Married with two children, he moved to the East Mountains in 1975. As someone who spent most of his time as a youth in the great outdoors, hunting, fishing, and camping, he wanted to raise his kids in a rural environment. After completing a master's degree in recreation, he taught high school for ten years before operating various businesses and then working in real estate. During all that time he never lost his passion for the great outdoors and the wildlife that inhabits it.

Most of us only have time to pursue our passions in our off hours, as hobbies or by volunteering. Alink directed his into what has become his life's work, a 122-acre sanctuary for animals who can no longer live in the wild. But he didn't want it to be a traditional zoo—he wanted the animals to live in an enriching environment as close to their natural habitat as possible and for the park to be a locus for scientific research and educational programs, while allowing visitors to observe and learn about the wildlife living there.

Building the park was the first hurdle. Not only did Alink need funds, but he also needed workers to help him build animal enclosures, fencing, buildings, walking paths, and more. Combining his passion for animals with his passion for youth education, he applied for a grant from the Youth Conservation Corps and began transforming the property with an all-youth workforce, who over the years have built habitats for a wide variety of wildlife, created walking paths, and raised buildings for a number of purposes. As a result, Wildlife West is the only animal sanctuary in the world built entirely by young people.

As for the future, Alink plans to keep on doing what he's always been doing. "Expanding, improving, and enjoying what I do," he says. "We always have projects going and we probably always will."

Visitors are welcome to tour the facility at their leisure—all paths are stroller and wheelchair friendly—or participate in one of the park's educational programs. In addition, they can attend a myriad of annual events, including a wind festival in May, a harvest festival in September, a release of white doves to commemorate those who died on 9/11, and falcon shows June through August by world-renowned falconer (and *East Mountain Living* contributor) Tom Smylie. Wildlife West is

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also a popular destination for school fieldtrips, with students coming from as far as Socorro and Santa Fe.

Then there are the popular Chuckwagon Supper Shows, held one Saturday evening a month in June, July, August, and September at the park's outdoor entertainment complex. The shows include a traditional barbecue dinner (there's also a vegetarian option), a wildlife presentation, a falcon show, and live music. With its amphitheater, pavilion, and a large, heated building known as the Bean Barn (a donation from Home Depot in Albuquerque), the entertainment complex is also available for rental for special events and can accommodate up to 500 people.

Even though the park is a sanctuary and not a zoo, Wildlife West is still mandated to carry legal zoo certification through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Though acquiring certification is no easy task, Alink leaned heavily on another of his talents—relationship building. Because he consulted with an array of zookeepers from the beginning, the habitats at the park have always met USDA specifications, and Alink has never failed to maintain the required levels of care. Alink says the zoo is inspected at least annually by the USDA, and inspections are random and unannounced.

Except for the gift shop employees and a few office staff, the zoo is run entirely by volunteers, who not only care for and feed the animals but also provide them with companionship and the physical

Continued on next page

FACING PAGE, LEFT: *The entrance to Wildlife West's facilities sports a colorful mosaic.*

FACING PAGE, RIGHT: *Wildlife West Nature Park's founder and executive director Roger Alink holds one of the sanctuary's animals.*

BELOW: *Chaco the elk stands in a clearing of wildflowers at Wildlife West.*

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and mental enrichment that most closely mimics what they would encounter in their natural habitats. Other volunteers provide maintenance for the grounds and animal habitats as well as assistance with regular programs and special events.

Wildlife West is a success in no small part because of Alink's vision and dedication, but community support has been crucial as well. All the food, including the USDA-certified meat required for the carnivores, is donated by private individuals and local grocers. Operating costs are covered almost exclusively through donations, admission fees, facility rentals, and grants. People can "adopt" animals as a way of donating as well, and some folks include the park in their annual giving plans.

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FACING PAGE, TOP: *Oreo the raccoon at Wildlife West.*
FACING PAGE, BOTTOM: *Max the caracara, a species of birds of prey related to falcons.*

While Alink has always anticipated and met a myriad of challenges, he was no more prepared than the rest of us for a global pandemic. When all but essential businesses were mandated to close, Wildlife West shuttered its doors for three months. However, because virtually all visitor activities take place outdoors, Alink was allowed to reopen a little earlier than some businesses.

Even after re-opening, pandemic-related challenges persisted. One of them was food service. Alink recalls that it took some time to adapt to the new COVID mandates for food service. True to form, Alink saw an opportunity to make lemonade out of lemons. He decided it made much more sense to utilize food trucks for future events rather than prepare and serve food on site. He says that will provide more choices for guests, and the

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events will require far fewer volunteers. And it will speed up food service beyond what it was even before the pandemic.

Unlike a traditional zoo, Alink does not look for animals to fill out any perceived deficits in the population for the benefit of guests. "We don't find animals for the park," he says. "They find us."

All animals housed at Wildlife West are there because they can no longer live in the wild. They're all indigenous to New Mexico. Each has a story, and that story, along with information about habitat, behaviors, and diet, are posted at their enclosures. Some of the stories are sad, some are funny, but all are ultimately uplifting since the animal has been saved by Wildlife West and will live out its life in as close to its natural habitat as possible.

Take Koshari, a black bear originally from the Navajo Lake area in Northern New Mexico. He required rescue due to some bad habits he picked up because of too much human interaction. He liked to swim out to boats, board them, and help himself to fish and snacks. Fish and Game tried relocating him, but he always came back and resumed his well-intentioned terrorizing of fishermen and boaters. The choice came down to destroying a healthy and relatively harmless animal or finding the right place for him to live. Alink took him in without a second thought. Now Koshari is a bit of a shameless showoff—he likes to lay on his back in front of his enclosure window and play with his feet for guest's entertainment.

> As for the future, Alink plans to keep on doing what he's always been doing. "Expanding, improving, and enjoying what I do," he says. "We always have projects going and we probably always will."

Wildlife West is a wonderful place to attend an event, host a birthday party or wedding, or spend a few hours walking the paths. The setting is great, but in the end it's all about the animals. They are what make the place truly special.

For prices, hours, and event information, go to wildlifewest,org.

A group of foxes relaxes inside an enclosure at Wildlife West Nature Park.

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Belle Garrison Wallace

This homesteader, bar owner, and fortune teller lived life on her terms

BY DENISE TESSIER

Before Sandia Knolls became an East Mountain subdivision in 1956, it was the grass-and-timber-dotted homestead of Belle Garrison Wallace, whose dealings in land sales and leases in the 1930s were unusual for a woman, especially so for a woman of color.

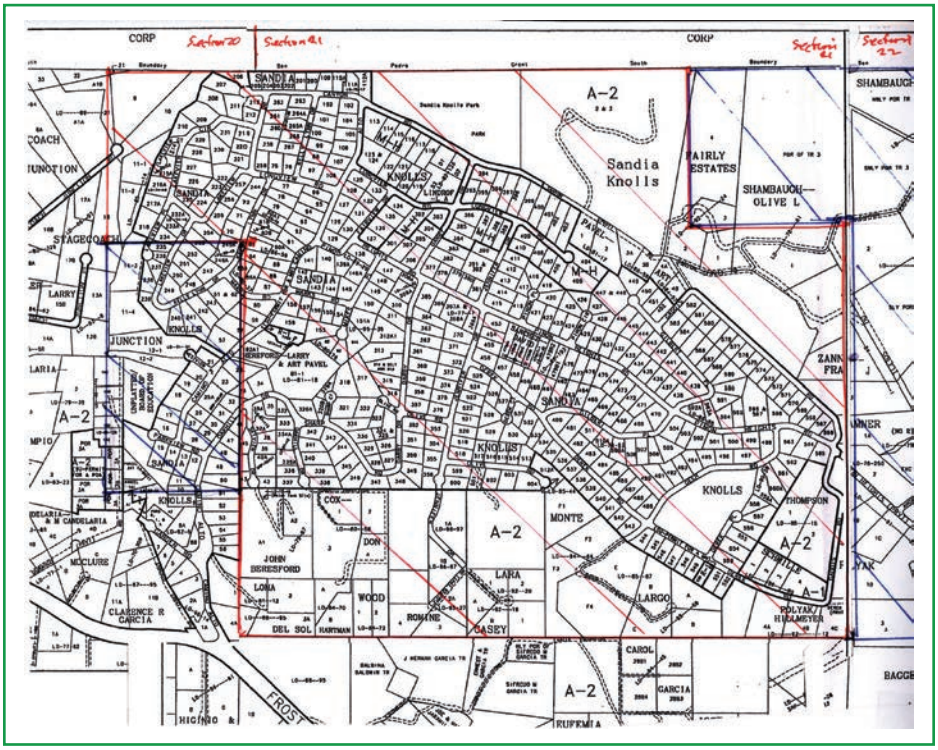
Wallace lived in a cabin east of San Antonito off what is now Frost Road. She also owned a home on Arno in Albuquerque and was part owner of a South Valley night club called the Black and Tan. And as "palmist" Madame Petite, her frequent newspaper ads claimed she predicted—"strictly from science"—the 1900 Galveston flood and President William McKinley's assassination.

After her death in 1950 at the age of 81, her obituary described Wallace as a musician who'd traveled widely in Asia and Mexico. This remains the only reference to such travels, but there's no shortage of stories in both New Mexico and Texas papers about other aspects of her life, including an article published in 1919 with the headline: "Divorce Number Four Separates Mrs. Wallace From Tenth Husband."

No photo of her has yet been found, although enough has been written about her to develop a picture of an enterprising woman who was no stranger to disputes or tragedy, as she outlived two of her three children, two of whom followed her to New Mexico when she and her husband, A.J. Garrison, whom Belle married in Amarillo in 1915, moved to the state in about the same year. Daughter Jessie Mae, who married East Mountain WPA writer Drury S. Sharp, died of cancer in 1931. Son Fred, who too had land near the Knolls, died in 1937 after being shot during a "misunderstanding" that made front-page Albuquerque news. It is not known what happened to her youngest daughter, Letha.

A 1900 Federal Census says Wallace was born Belle Burroughs in Alabama in 1870. It lists her ethnicity as black, although she likely was biracial because 1920 and 1940 Census records list her as white.

She was 16 when she married Frederick Hill Lancaster of Arkansas. They were married 11 years and had three children. But she left him, saying he "often threatened to kill me." Scandal arose two years after she left, divorce pleadings not yet heard, when Lancaster broke into her San Antonio, Texas, room at 2 a.m. and took their two youngest children, ages 6 and 2. She told a reporter she subsequently filed a police complaint and was on her way home when Lancaster "rushed in after me." She said she drew her gun—"I always carry a gun"—and Lancaster grabbed it away as she shot, "or I would have killed him."



The plat outlining Wallace's former holdings in the Sandia Knolls area of the East Mountains. The top of the photo is north. The red line indicates Wallace's holdings, the blue line her son's (a small rectangle in the middle of the bottom and a small square top left).

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In the Austin paper's account, carried statewide, both headline and story referred to Lancaster, a deputy U.S. Marshal in San Antonio, as a courteous "gentleman," siding with his assertion that Wallace was unfit to keep the children because she played piano in a brothel. Belle Wallace adamantly claimed piano her sole occupation, saying it earned her $20 a week, plus board and tips, "which amounts to a great deal." Fred declined to file charges against Belle; they divorced, and he was awarded custody of all three children.

Wallace was 58 when, 31 years and at least two husbands later, she secured a massive 628.24-acre parcel in the East Mountains. Her 1928 Homestead Act patent indicated she would conduct "stock raising." Less than a year later, son Fred Jr. homesteaded 273.49 acres abutting his mother's property to the east; in 1933, he acquired another 160 acres abutting her land on the southwest.

To put in perspective the size of the Wallace homestead, Sandia Knolls subdi-

Continued on next page

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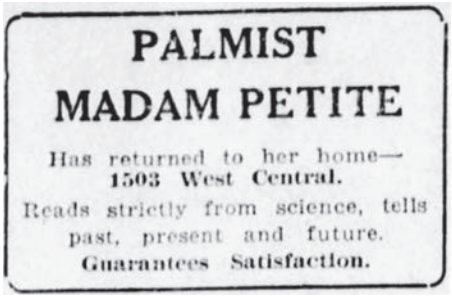
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A reprint of one of Wallace's newpaper fortune teller ads indicates she "reads strictly from science."

Continued from previous page

vision encompassed 300 acres in 1957—about half of Wallace's original holdings. Pre-sale ads in the *Albuquerque Journal* called Sandia Knolls the "Largest and most complete mountain subdivision in New Mexico. Superb views. City conveniences. All year-round road. Mail route. School bus. Electricity. Phone available. Fine water to all lots. No need to gamble thousands of dollars to get water. It's here."

In 1931, Wallace advertised tracts ranging from 5 to 66 acres for sale, all with grass and water. It's not known how much she sold, but three years later she placed a classified ad offering to lease her ranch. Less than a year after that, a man tried to foreclose on all 628 acres for an unpaid debt, but that appears to have been resolved by 1939, when Wallace advertised to "lease ranch, sub-irrigated, timber, gramma grass."

Before recording her 1928 homestead, Wallace had livestock there—and troubles. In 1925, she appeared before a Justice of the Peace seeking recovery of a horse allegedly taken by Perfiteo Salazar. In 1927, neighbor John Tocco said he went to Wallace in search of his mule and found its hide on a shed roof with four bullet holes, its carcass hanging from a tree. Wallace claimed the mule wandered into her yard and died, adding that her son and nephew were forced to skin and quarter it as they were unable to remove the entire carcass because they "only had one horse."

> To put in perspective the size of the Wallace homestead, Sandia Knolls subdivision encompassed 300 acres in 1957—about half of Wallace's original holdings. Pre-sale ads in the Albuquerque Journal called Sandia Knolls the "Largest and most complete mountain subdivision in New Mexico. Superb views. City conveniences. All year-round road. Mail route. School bus. Electricity.

In 1928, someone let stock out of her barn. A sheriff's search revealed a cow "killed with an ax and then abandoned," a news story said. Two years later, she offered a $25 cash reward for a stolen racehorse and a $150 saddle engraved with "two bulls' heads and two nude women." It's not whether her ad produced results.

The most serious incident occurred on a winter night in 1927, when Wallace, according to the *Albuquerque Journal* report, was "driving up the lonely road to her little cabin on her ranch with a wagonload of adobe," when she pulled over to let a car pass. "Flashes of flame pierced the night as occupants of the car opened fire on her," the *Journal* continued. "Displaying a woman's nerve, she walked and stumbled, half-blinded with pain, to the cabin of a neighbor, who promptly called the sheriff." Reportedly, because she instinctively pulled her arms tight into her body, a bullet passed through her left elbow, broke her little finger, and penetrated her right wrist. (These injuries were her defense when, that same year, Tocco accused her of shooting his mule; she said she was physically unable to fire a weapon.) Her assailants got away; the sheriff surmised that they were bootleggers who mistook Wallace for a prohibitionist.

Some years later, Wallace became a partner in the Black and Tan, a club serving "beer, wine and liquors" that was located between the Railyards and Broadway in southwest Albuquerque. Like Wallace, her business partner, Beatrice Watson, was a divorcee and property owner. In fact, Wallace gave Watson 30 acres of the East Mountain homestead in 1939,

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possibly to gain her share in the club. Watson appeared on a 1940 society page for hosting the pastors' aid board of the African Methodist Church, and, like Wallace, was no nonsense about business. She took club manager Joseph Earl to court in 1940 for allegedly failing to provide an accounting of the Black and Tan's profits. After that, Earl no longer placed ads seeking to hire "colored dancers" and instead published notice that he was no longer responsible for the club, "having sold his interest to Beatrice Watson."

The many advertisements for "Madame Petite" predate Wallace's homestead days, but they do mention her East Mountain land. "Madam Petite has returned from the ranch and will continue business at her home, 1503 W. Central," says one from 1919. This is the home where she and Garrison settled after moving from Texas. It was a prestigious address, just across from Huning Castle.

By 1918, "Mrs. Belle Garrison" had the place to herself, according to city records. A.J. filed for divorce two months after their marriage, claiming desertion. Then, in January 1919, Belle Garrison married Frank Wallace of Columbus, New Mexico, but divorced him in October for alleged cruelty and failure to support, prompting the Albuquerque headline that she'd been married ten times. At that point, she reportedly told a judge she was through with marriage.

Belle Garrison Wallace is buried in Albuquerque's Mt. Calvary Cemetery, but only grass adorns her grave; she had no survivors to provide a marker.

Belle Garrison Wallace was the subject of a story in the "People" section of the book, Timelines of the East Mountains, *published by the East Mountain Historical Society, and its writer, Rick Holben, contributed to research for this story.*

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RIGHT: *Scans of a matchbook cover from Wallace's nightclub, the Black and Tan.*

Quoth the Raven:

I'm No Ordinary Bird!

BY TOM SMYLIE

Almost anywhere you look in the skies of the East Mountains or the Estancia Valley, you'll note the large obsidian silhouette of the raven. In fact, they can be seen throughout the state and are the most widely distributed bird species in the world.

With their four-foot wingspan and two-foot bodies, they are the largest member of a group of highly intelligent birds classified as corvids, which consist of ravens, crows, magpies, jays, and nutcrackers.

Ravens are often confused with their cousins, the crow, due to their similar behavior and completely black plumage. However, a few things will help you distinguish the two. The raven is twice the size of a crow. It has a much thicker beak, with a wedge or V-shaped tail (remember: V for raVen) in comparison to the crow's square-shaped tail. The raven has a much deeper "gurgling croak," compared to the crow's simple, scratchy "caw." Ravens are usually found either alone, in pairs, or in family groups, but occasionally they'll gather in larger groups, in particular on a large food supply such as an animal carcass. When in a group, they're referred to as a "congress," whereas crows are usually found in flocks of hundreds to thousands and are referred to as a "murder."

New Mexico has two raven species—the widely dispersed common raven and the smaller, crow-sized white-necked or Chihuahuan raven, which is found only in the arid southeastern region of the state. The white-necked raven gets its name from a barely visible patch of white feathers on the nape behind the head.

Ravens mate for life and have a lifespan of more than 20 years. Although they don't migrate like many other bird species, they do leave the Estancia Valley and Edgewood area nightly for the foothills of the mountains to roost for the night. Start paying attention early evenings and mornings and you might catch them on this daily trek. When temperatures get extremely cold, crows will often disappear from the East Mountains and head to the warmer Rio Grande Valley. Ravens, however, will stay. They are so hardy, in fact, that they can even be found wintering above the Arctic Circle.

Nesting begins in April and May, during which time they'll either build a large stick nest on a cliff or tree or repur-

The common raven above and the white-necked or Chihuahuan raven to the right both make their homes in New Mexico.

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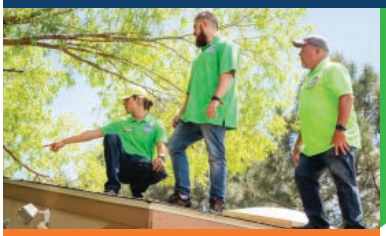
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pose old owl and hawk nests. Today they can even be found using windmills, towers, old buildings, and other manmade structures historically never before available. The female will lay four to six grey–green eggs with brown spots that hatch in 20 to 25 days. The young will leave the nest in about 45 days and accompany their parents for several months, learning the ways of the adults.

Ravens are not fast flyers, but they are masters of the air. You can often see them doing arial maneuvers, chasing each other or tumbling, diving, and somersaulting. Contrary to crows, ravens will soar, flying in thermals of rising air, and have been spotted many times flying over Mt. Everest at 30,000 feet.

Ravens are omnivorous and will basically eat anything that doesn't eat them first. They'll feed on a wide variety of insects from caterpillars to grasshoppers. They catch and consume lizards, snakes, small rodents, and the eggs and young of other birds. They're also carrion eaters and can be seen with vultures feed-

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ing on dead animals. Several times I've seen pairs of ravens in the skies over my Edgewood home chasing and catching pigeons, much like hawks.

Historically, ravens were almost exclusively birds of wilderness and remote areas. Now their numbers have exploded due to our providing them with water, food, and manmade structures for nesting. Where once ravens were seldom seen, now they are a common sight in cities and other human developments.

In some places, their increased numbers have become a detriment to wildlife and humans alike. These intelligent and resourceful birds will feast on the eggs and young of threatened wildlife like the California desert tortoise and the sage grouse, and they will tear open garbage bags, take over bird-feeding stations, steal pet food, and exhibit other mischievous behaviors, all because we humans continue to provide everything they need to survive, multiply, and thrive.

With intelligence on par with parrots, dolphins, and even chimpanzees, ravens are able to unlatch doors, use tools, and mimic other bird and animal sounds, including the human voice. Researchers have found that they can solve puzzles and count up to the number three.

They are also incredible problem-solvers. Take the ravens of New Caledonia in the South Pacific, who favor a very hard nut that is incredibly difficult to open. The ravens have been observed waiting in trees near stop signs and traffic lights, nuts in their beaks. When a vehicle stops at the sign or light, the raven will hop down from their perch, place the nut in front of a tire, and go back to the tree. When the car drives over the nut, breaking it open, the raven will then fly down and retrieve the nut's meat from the broken shell.

They possess a good memory as well. In one study, participants deliberately disturbed a series of raven nests and young birds. Turns out, the ravens remembered the participants' faces for years afterward, calling out in distress when they saw them again.

Ravens have played a role in human mythology as creatures both revered and feared dating back to Greek and Roman times. For some cultures, they're a symbol of hope and spirituality. In the regime of King Charles II in the mid-1600s, it was believed if ravens were ever to leave the Tower of London, the crown and Britain would fall. Since that time, six ravens, at a minimum, are kept at the tower. To be sure they're always present, there are professional keepers to attend to their needs and have one of their wing feathers clipped to prevent them from flying away.

Native American cultures believe they bring luck and good spirits and are often on par with the coyote as nature's trickster. The totem poles of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska will often have a raven at the most respected position at the very top of the pole, symbolizing their importance.

Ubiquitous but by no means ordinary, the raven is a common, almost daily reminder that we live in close quarters with an intelligent, mystical, and profound member of the natural world.

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TOP LEFT: *Lazauski and Channey set up a display of their pieces at their rented space inside the Country Friends Antique Store in Moriarty.*

ABOVE: *"Mad Joe" Channey begins a new sculpture on his lathe.*

The Couple That Creates Together

For these Florida transplants, the East Mountains is great place to live and make art

BY MEGAN KAMERICK

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAURIE LAZAUSKI AND JOE CHANNEY

Perhaps it was always meant to be.

Long before Laurie Lazauski moved with her husband, Joe Channey, to Tijeras, Southwest designs were finding their way into her geometric patterns for tiles and quilts. Laurie, 73, is a ceramist and fiber artist who now concentrates on quilting.

"I was surprised," she says. "I must have been walking by stuff and it just settled there."

The couple also bought stained glass windows at an auction in Florida featuring mountains that they hung on the walls of their home in Englewood on Florida's Gulf Coast. Now, years later, they look out each day on actual mountains, the Sandias.

"How weird is that?" Laurie asks.

The couple first visited New Mexico on a road trip over a decade ago. Joe, 81, specializes in wood turning, so they eventually made yearly treks to Albuquerque, to show his work at the Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Festival at EXPO New Mexico, held every Thanksgiving weekend.

They moved to New Mexico permanently in May 2020, settling in the East Mountains. Laurie's brother had retired to Albuquerque, so that was one draw. But they also both love the scenery here. "There aren't many hills in Florida," Joe says as he points to the amazing mountain views from their porch.

Since arriving, the two have become active members with the Route 66 Art Alliance. "They've shown up for everything we've done, so they've been great," says the organization's president, Sandra Holzman. "They're really becoming part of the arts community and have a lot to contribute. We already have jokes. I think it's a good match."

The Arts Alliance has also helped them connect with the community more widely, which was difficult during the

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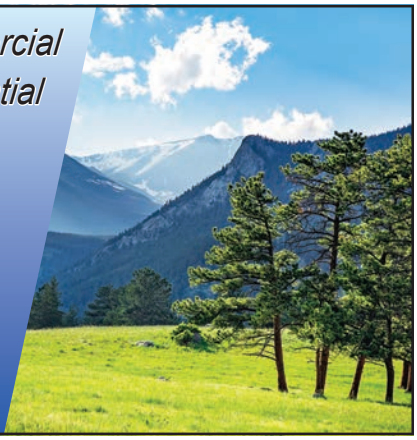

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LEFT: Deep Star, *a door hanger by Laurie Lazauski.*

height of the coronavirus pandemic. "We went looking for people because we knew there were quite a few around here that we didn't meet at shows," Laurie says.

As restrictions have lifted, they've been able to move from Zoom meetings with other Alliance members to meeting in person. Joe has hosted several open houses in his workshop next to their house as well.

Joe and Laurie also rent space in Country Friends Antiques in Moriarty. "She's probably one of the best quilters I've seen," says Cindy Arnett, owner of Country Friends. "And Joe with his wood turning, goodness gracious, people go crazy over that here."

The couple met in 1977 when both were working in a fiberglass factory in Goshen, Connecticut. Joe's artistic explorations would come later in life, but Laurie had leanings even in her youth. She started drawing with pen and ink, which she parlayed into graphic design and advertising for different employers. She also attended the Rhode Island School of Design for a year, where she got a basic overview but did not specialize in any medium in particular. Later, she became interested in ceramics and knitting.

In 1978, the couple moved to upstate New York—Joe wanted a house with land and Laurie had two horses—and married in 1983. Three years prior, they'd opened a country store, called Mad Joe's Country Store after Joe's longtime nickname, where they sold sandwiches and other food stuffs. Laurie put her design skills to

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work, creating their logo and all their advertising. Later, she began to knit, thanks in part to her grandmother, who taught her all kinds of needlework.

She used some of the inheritance after her grandmother passed to buy a knitting machine that allowed her to mix colors like a painting as well as create actual pictures that could be translated into knitted products. For a time, she made scarves and hats for a wool farm in upstate New York.

In 1996, they sold the business and moved to Englewood, Florida, where Laurie learned ceramics so she could tile their house. Later, a stint working at JoAnn Fabric got her interested in sewing. Eventually, she hooked up with the large community of quilters in her part of Florida, creating her own quilts in addition to quilting pieces clients had sewn together.

Today, her works range from large quilts that can cover an entire wall or bed to small art pieces full of geometric designs. She also creates home accessories like placemats and lap quilts, which she sells at Country Friends.

For Lazauski, there is no division between utility and beauty. "Because what you have and what you use should mean something to you," she says. "There's no reason why useful stuff can't be meaningful and artistic."

Other works include a donation to help raise money for animal rescue, small cloth butterflies that evoke origami, and art quilts that incorporate the butterflies along with stitched haikus.

"Fiber is her palette," Joe says.

Laurie nods. "It's my paint."

Joe's journey as an artist began around 2008. He had worked in construction and remodeling since relocating to Florida,

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FACING PAGE TOP: *A thorned urn made from Norfolk pine by Joe Channey.*

FACING PAGE BOTTOM: Paisley in New Mexico, *a queen-size quilt, left, and a wall hanging with butterfly and haiku by Laurie Lazauski.*

but then the recession hit. Bored at home with nothing to do, he got more interested in woodworking. He had worked most of his life with wood in one way or another, remodeling or building furniture, but he wanted to pursue making art pieces through woodturning.

"A guy had a lathe on his front lawn, and I talked him into selling it," Joe says.

And there were lots of trees in the backyard that needed cutting down. He started teaching himself how to turn wood on the lathe, starting with Australian pine and Norfolk pine. Since coming to New Mexico, he's expanded into Siberian elm and crocodile juniper.

"A lot of times it's the smell of certain woods," he says of why he's drawn to that medium. "It's the grain work and the colors and what's happening in there."

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His work includes urns, bowls, goblets, and boxes, all fashioned in such a way as to show off the inner patterns of the tree, often incorporating bits of silver, turquoise, and dead cholla. With their smooth surfaces and swirling grain patterns, his work has the elegant, sculptural quality of fine ceramics.

Joe often brings his creations into the kitchen and eyes them with his wife. "She always finds something wrong," he jokes, but allows that she is usually spot on in her assessments. As a former potter, she has an eye for shapes. He goes on to share that sometimes they might spend a few days without talking after an artistic dispute, but they nonetheless respect each other's opinions. Afterall, that impulse to create is part of what drew them together all those years ago, and it has remained a constant in their lives as a married couple. "We both like to make things," Laurie says. "We both get up in the morning and have these ideas."

Sometimes they'll even collaborate on a project. Together they create what they call "protection boxes," urns topped with thorns that resemble exotic horns, that are meant as either repositories for hopes and dreams, written on slips of paper, or as a way to keep worries and fears safely contained. Joe sometimes tells customers that they can put their troubles in there and in two weeks they'll go away. "Then you've got new troubles," he jokes.

A banded vase made from wood and turquoise by Joe Channey.

It's one more way to attract customers at a big show, he says, like the Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Festival, in which he still participates. Attendees should look for the silver-haired gentleman in a Hawaiian-print shirt and cowboy hat, sometimes wearing the electric lights his wife strings around him as another way to draw people in. "You gotta give them a story," Joe says. "You only have them for 60 seconds and then they move on. I try to make people smile."

Now in retirement, the couple is free to work on their art full time, on their terms. Laurie's longarm quilting machine takes up a large portion of the living room, while Joe's workshop fills most of the attached garage space. The Mad Joe's Country Store sign is still outside, a throwback to their previous life in New York.

"It's a fulltime job," Channey says of his woodworking and Laurie's quilting. "I don't know how we ever did it before."

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Born to Serve

Hometown boy makes good as Mountainair mayor

BY DIXIE BOYLE

Getting elected at age 31 as the youngest major of your hometown is not the easiest or most appreciated undertaking. Yet, during his term in office, Mountainair native Peter Nieto has not only earned the respect and devotion of the small town where he grew up but he has been instrumental in the growth of the town's economy as well.

Nieto was elected to a four-year term as mayor in 2018 after serving on the Mountainair City Council for two years. "I have always loved politics and am one of those people who truly believes in democracy," he says when asked why he wanted to be mayor. "When I was in high school, the Iraq War is what brought it home to me. I saw dead bodies on the evening news and realized this wasn't a video game. It was real. I wanted to become involved in keeping our country working as a democracy, and being elected mayor of my hometown was a good way to get started."

Whether directing traffic at a local house fire, leading the light parade during the holidays, creating a movie night and other community activities, or starting a scholarship program at Mountainair High School, Nieto is a hands-on advocate for his hometown.

He was instrumental during the recent pandemic as well, working long hours both on and off the job. He seemed to be everywhere at once: In addition to his regular duties as mayor, he passed out hand sanitizer and masks to those in need, checked on the community's older population, organized more than one vaccination clinic, and gave out his personal phone number to those with questions about the virus and local and state mandates.

Norma Pineda, the Head Ranger at Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument, feels Mayor Nieto has demonstrated great leadership skills throughout his term and was truly the best person for the community during the trying time of the pandemic. "When everything was shut down, he kept the town informed by providing weekly updates on his Facebook page," she says.

Mountainair mayor Peter Nieto at Monte Alto Park, north of the Shaffer Hotel, with downtown in the background. His tenure has been a popular one, with citizens overwhelmingly praising his dedication to the safety and growth of their community. Photo by Dixie Boyle.

The safety of the community in general has always been one of Nieto's top priorities. With police departments throughout the country often coming under attack, he is proud of the changes made in Mountainair's police department during his tenure. Not only has he upgraded the police vehicles but he also increased wages for incoming police officers and actively recruits for them to come to Mountainair.

"There are members of the community who have complained about the local police never being seen on the streets during the evening hours when most crimes occur," Nieto points out. "But the public needs to realize we have four high-powered cameras with multiple cameras on each system at the police station, where the officers can monitor all corners of the town. We have made more than one arrest by using footage found on our cameras. Maybe the police aren't always seen on the streets but this does not mean they are not working to keep the town safe."

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Nieto also works as the business manager for Mountainair Public Schools, so education is another of his priorities. He has been instrumental in the development of the all-volunteer-run Mountainair Education Center, a major need in the community. "There are those who have never experienced a job interview or know how to establish their credit," he says. "In many cases, we need to teach basic life skills." The mayor worked hard on this project and received grants to cover the cost of computers, television screens, a white board, and brand-new desks and chairs. In addition to life skills classes, the program will offer GED courses for those wanting to get a high school diploma.

Nieto continually looks for new and innovative ways to help the town grow and prosper. He would like to attract a second gas station so residents don't have to drive to Estancia or Belen to fill up when there is an issue locally. "The town could easily support more than one gas station," he says, pointing out that at one time there were five gas stations in Mountainair. He

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is also encouraging greater use of Chavez Park on the north end of town and plans to have a pond stocked with fish built at the site.

With its central location and surrounding natural beauty, Nieto feels that Mountainair has a lot to offer visitors. Taking as inspiration the annual Sunflower Festival, which attracts thousands of visitors each August, Nieto has added similar events to Mountainair's yearly agenda. In 2019, he organized the successful Balloon Festival & Matanza and a New Year's Costume Ball with a Roaring Twenties theme. During the summer months he invited a carnival and food courts to set up in the downtown area. He feels it is important to have these types of events in order to bring the community together and bolster the local economy.

He also feels it is important to develop strong relationships with other small towns in the region. He reached out to the mayors of Ft. Sumner, Belen, Socorro, Vaughn, Corona, Santa Rosa, and Tijeras to discuss their challenges and successes. "I wanted to know what was working for them, but I also wanted to create good relationships with other towns so we can work together and support one another," he says.

Even though Nieto is busy with his mayoral and public-school duties, he still finds time to help his mother, Anita, raise her foster children. Anita took in her first foster child in 1987 and has since adopted 13 more in addition to raising three of her own. Unfortunately, Anita was involved in a car accident in 2017 that left her with limited mobility. Mayor Nieto not only cares for his mother but is often seen conducting his duties around town with one or more of the children he helps to raise.

> Nieto also works as the business manager for Mountainair Public Schools, so education is another of his priorities. He has been instrumental in the development of the all-volunteer-run Mountainair Education Center.

Residents give their mayor high marks for going above and beyond the call of duty to ensure the safety and upkeep of the town. Donna Deiner, who moved to Mountainair from New York a decade ago, feels Nieto is much different from the mayors back in her home state. "Mayor Nieto listens and acts on behalf of the people who put him in office, while mayors from New York did little to support the people once they were elected," she says. "He is not afraid to stand up for his beliefs. More importantly, he's a caring person and always puts the community and the people first."

Linda Carol, co-owner of the La Galeria Art Gallery in the Shaffer Hotel, sums up the majority of the community's feelings about Mayor Nieto, who was elected to a second term this November. "He has done a wonderful job. He's had many challenges throughout the last year, yet he's always put the town and the welfare of the people first," she says. "We really couldn't ask for a better person to represent Mountainair."

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Love, Interrupted

A budding romance in a Mountainair cemetery ends with a ghostly encounter

BY ANTONIO GARCEZ

Here is Mountainair resident Andrea Santillan's ghost story, as she told it to me in 2014, edited slightly for brevity from its original publication in my book *New Mexico Ghost Stories, Vol. II*. Mountainair is located ten miles from the geographic center of New Mexico. From there, you can reach many of the state's most popular destinations within a few hours. Santa Fe is only a two-hour drive to the north, Ruidoso is only two hours to the south, and Albuquerque is only a one-hour drive away.

Santillan's story took place in 1994, when she was 18 years old. At the time she was living with her family in the small community of Tajique, which lies about 22 miles north of Mountainair. It was in Mountainair that she met a boy named Gustavo, who shared her experience:

I met Gustavo one day when my brother Jerry was delivering a truckload of sacks of stucco to a Mountainair contractor. Jerry asked me if I wanted to accompany him on the delivery. While my brother and two other guys were unloading the sacks off the truck, I began a conversation with one of them, named Gustavo. Gustavo and I hit it off immediately. He was a very smooth talker, and it didn't hurt our situation that he and my brother knew each other, having spent time together working one summer with the forest service.

It was early evening when the unloading was done. Jerry knew that Gustavo and I wanted to spend some personal time together, and my brother had a couple of his friends in Mountainair that he also wanted to drink a few beers with. My brother knew I was trustworthy, so he asked me if I wanted to visit with Gustavo. You can imagine it didn't take much time for me to respond by saying, "Sure, thanks."

So, Gustavo and I went for a drive. As we were about to pass the Punta de Agua Catholic Cemetery, I asked Gustavo if he wouldn't mind if we stopped for a few minutes so I could pay my respects to my Uncle Kiko, who was buried at the eastern end of the cemetery. Gustavo stopped

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the car and we got out. The cemetery was totally empty of any other living beings.

I remember, as we were walking through the small, gated entrance, the shadows were getting longer as the sun was setting. I hadn't planned on this stop, but it did give us both the opportunity to hold hands and kiss in private. We found a stone grave marker where we sat down. From my peripheral line of sight, I thought I saw the figure of a person. It looked like a man had run quickly by us

Continued on next page

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just a few yards away. Thinking that my eyes were playing tricks on me, I disregarded the image and focused my total attention on Gustavo.

Just about a minute later, Gustavo excused himself to go pee. I watched as he quickly walked away and disappeared behind a juniper tree that was surrounded by several stone markers. Just a few seconds after he disappeared from view, I heard him yell. Then he came out from behind the tree and walked quickly to where I was seated. His eyes were nervously darting around, looking in all directions. I was about to ask him what was going on, but before I had the opportunity to do this, he said, "Let's get out of here—NOW!"

The authority in his voice was so intense that I didn't chose to question his reasoning. I simply stood up as he grasped my hand and we headed for the car in a full run. Once in the car, he turned the ignition and we sped back to Mountainair. Gustavo was almost yelling at me: "I saw a ghost! I just saw a ghost!"

I asked him, "You did—what did you see?"

For a few minutes Gustavo remained silent. I could see that whatever gave him the fright of his life, it also affected him so severely that he began to shake as a tear ran down his face.

He answered, "Andrea, you're not going to believe me, but as I was about to un-zip, I felt the presence of a person standing beside me. When I turned my head, a woman dressed in a black dress was standing just about two feet from me. I froze and she took her right hand and slapped my face!"

I didn't know what to say, so I just blurted out, "Are you sure? Are you all right?" For a few minutes Gustavo remained silent. I could see that whatever gave him the fright of his life, it also affected him so severely that he began to shake as a tear ran down his face. I took hold of his right hand and said, "Don't think about it anymore. Let's just get to town safely. We're away from there, so we're okay now." On the remaining miles to town, I glanced twice at his face. I didn't see anything at all. No red marks or scratches.

By the time we arrived in town at the corner of Forest Avenue and West Third Street, he stopped the car to gather his composure. As we sat in the car, I asked him if I could take a good look at the right side of his face. Again, I didn't see anything that would indicate he had been slapped or that his face had been touched in any manner. It was at this time that I told Gustavo that I had seen a man, which I thought was my imagination, running just a few yards from where we were seated.

Gustavo said, "No Andrea, that was not a man. It was a woman and I'll never forget the look on her face. She was angry and her skin's complexion was gray, a dark yellow-gray, just the color that a dead person has when displayed in a coffin for viewing. Andrea, I'm telling you I saw a ghost!"

We then vowed that we would never mention our experience to anyone. Not to my brother or to any family member.

Later that evening, after my brother and I returned home, I asked my mother if she had ever experienced a ghost. I needed answers, and although I was tight-lipped about what had happened a few hours before in Mountainair, I was still curious and wanted something to make my lingering fear go away.

My mother said, "Why do you ask?"

I responded, "Oh, nothing, I'm just thinking about things."

She quickly and sternly said, "Well, Andrea, you better stop thinking about such things as that. If you keep thinking about the dead, they'll hear you and appear to you in your room at night!" Even though I knew her warning was a little sarcastic, it was enough to make me keep

my thoughts to myself. I never mentioned the experience again.

Since that time, this is how I've chosen to leave things. Only after I married my husband, Luis, did I break my promise. I told him all about what happened at the cemetery, and because he's from a very spiritual family, he totally understood my situation and gave me the necessary comforting support I really could have used 22 years ago. I'm very fortunate to have married this man.

As for Gustavo, he and I never did see each other after that night. I understand that he joined the army and moved to Texas. Aside from this, I've not had any further contact with him. I hope he has left the negative memories of the cemetery ghost behind him as I learned to do. But I'll tell you this: I'll never venture into any cemetery again. The only time you'll find me walking in one is when I'm attending a funeral surrounded by a least a hundred or more living people.

This story was originally published in New Mexico Ghost Stories, Vol. II, *which can be ordered at www.ghostbooks.biz*

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The Mind-Body Connection

Alternative practices to lower stress and live well

BY JEANNE C. DRENNAN, OT/L

The fact that exercise is a way to decrease stress is no great secret. Swimming, running, weight training, hiking, and even walking on a regular basis can help improve both physical and mental health. However, most of us engage in these activities while plugged into a set of earphones streaming music, news, audio books, or a favorite podcast, essentially separating our minds from our bodies. Some might call that *mindless movement*. There's nothing inherently wrong with this manner of exercise, but if you'd like to be more connected to how movement affects your body, then mind-body practices may be the key for you.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), many studies show that stress contributes to 50 percent of all illnesses in the US, and that two-thirds of doctor visits are for stress-related illnesses. Additionally, an article posted on PsychologyToday.com, reports that an estimated 80 to 90 percent of doctor visits are stress related. Sadly, less than 3 percent of doctors actually talk to their patients about stress reduction. The article goes on to say that yoga, meditation, and other mind-body practices train your body and mind to better be able to cope with stress and improve overall health and well-being.

Tai Chi (*tie chee*) and Qigong (*chee gung*) are two non-traditional or alternative forms of movement that offer a wide range of health benefits and deepen the mind-body connection. Tai Chi has been an integral part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for centuries. Its movements are designed to energize and balance your body's energy, or qi (*chee*). According to TCM principles, when your qi is balanced, your body can function at its best.

Originally developed for self-defense, Tai Chi, also called *chi chuan*, has evolved into a form of exercise that is now used for stress reduction and a variety of other health conditions. The Mayo Clinic refers to Tai Chi as meditation in motion, promoting serenity through a series of slow and gentle movements that flow into each other, without pause, keeping your body in constant, purposeful motion. To successfully practice Tai Chi, you have to think about your breathing and the movements, thus entering a state of mindfulness that allows you to forget about everything else that may be clamoring for your attention.

There are many different styles of Tai Chi. Some focus on health maintenance while others incorporate a martial arts aspect. According to the Mayo clinic, when

learned correctly, Tai Chi can decrease stress, anxiety, and depression. It can also improve mood, aerobic capacity, energy, stamina, flexibility, balance, agility, and muscle strength and definition.

Personally, I find it very helpful for brain health because concentration on and memorization of the various forms are a part of this practice. The positive effects on the brain are supported by the Tai Chi for Health Institute. They state that the balance exercises and learning movement sequences help save our memory as we age. Some evidence indicates that regular Tai Chi practice may also help to optimize sleep and the immune system, help lower blood pressure, reduce fall risk in older adults, improve joint pain, and even alleviate the symptoms of COPD.

Qigong, an ancient form of martial arts developed in China, has been used in that country for thousands of years to improve physical fitness and stamina. Much like Tai Chi, the basic components of Qigong include concentration, relaxation, meditation, breathing regulation, body posture, and movement.

The philosophy of TCM states that the goal of Qigong exercises is to achieve a harmonious flow of vital energy, or qi, and regulate the functional activities of the body through regulated breathing, mindful concentration, and gentle movements. Qigong is more of a free-form practice, and is said to be less rigid than Tai Chi. Because of this, it's also easily adaptable to anyone's level of physical ability.

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Most everyone has heard about, if not participated in, yoga at some point. And I'm sure it's no surprise that this practice can reduce stress. *Psychology Today* cites a national survey in which more than 85 percent of people who did yoga reported that it helped them relieve stress. Yoga is different from traditional forms of exercise like spinning or cross-fit in that it powerfully combines both physical fitness with an underlying philosophy of self-compassion and awareness. Being non-judgmental toward yourself and others, along with the belief that your body and mind are one, are fundamental yoga concepts. Yoga helps you balance and tone the connection between your body and mind. Additionally, yoga trains your counter-stress response system, called the parasympathetic nervous system (rest and digest system). Engaging in a regular yoga practice is preferred for lasting benefits, but even after just a few yoga sessions, a decrease in your daytime stress hormone levels and an increase in your heart rate variability, which are measures of your ability to tolerate stress, can be seen.

Even though it's widely recognized as a stress-reducing modality, meditation sometimes gets a bad rap. Meditation

Continued on next page

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is not an emptying of the mind as some might think, rather it's a practice in which the individual uses a technique such as mindfulness, or focusing the mind on a particular object, thought, or activity, to train attention and awareness to achieve mental clarity, emotional calmness, and an overall stable state of being.

Numerous studies have shown that meditation is an effective stress-management tool that can reprogram the brain to a point where the meditator's capacity to manage stress increases.

According to Headspace.com, ". . . in training the mind to be more open and less reactive, we're better able to cope when life's stressors start accumulating." Rather than being consumed and overwhelmed by our stress, meditation teaches us to become the observers of certain mental patterns and, therefore, learn to become less affected by them.

There are many online resources and apps to aid you in your meditation journey, but if you prefer a local, in-person option to get you started, the Mindful Center (themindfulcenter.com) is a fabulous resource. Michelle DuVal, MA, the center's director and leading provider of mindfulness training in the southwestern United States, is a skilled and compassionate meditation teacher and facilitator. Her ongoing programs appear in such top organizations as Presbyterian Hospitals, the University of New Mexico, Sandia National Laboratories, the New Mexico Heart Institute, the Albuquerque Public School system, the City of Albuquerque, the Department of Energy, and more.

"The one thing standing between you and living the life you want," DuVal says, "is . . . stress!" The worries, fears, self-judgements, endless rehashing of the past, and constant rehearsing for the future are eroding the quality of our happiness, and therefore our lives. She goes on to say that most people have never been taught how to more skillfully use their minds to create benefit for themselves and those around them. "Left to its own devices, the mind tends to linger and loiter in unhelpful and unbeneficial places," she says.

With the busy and potentially stressful holiday season upon us, wouldn't this be a great time to engage in some form of mind-body exercise? Whichever practice, or combination of practices, you choose, learning to connect your body and mind will have tremendous benefits to your overall spirit.

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