



## Council Approves \$650K Structure

By Cole Rehbein  
SUN Staff Writer

The Española City Council at its Jan. 12 meeting approved a \$687,491.07 capital outlay expense to add an additional 1,600 square feet of climate-controlled storage to the fire station at 405 N. Paseo de Oñate. The storage is necessary to protect the department's ladder truck, which is currently left outside, from theft and the elements. Disagreement about the cost and procurement methods led to a heated discussion and a split council, with three councilors voting against the expense.

City Grants Administrator Di-ahann Jacquez presented the proposal.

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## Community Volunteer Honored

By Ari Levin  
SUN Sports Writer

Johnnie de Schweinitz, a community organizer and volunteer, was awarded the Northern New Mexico College Black and African American Student Organization's Drum Major Award recognizing her work in the community.

The Drum Major Award is presented to a community member who embodies the spirit of King. The winner of the award holds the trophy for a year, and then determines the successor.

Last January, the College hosted its first "King Feast" breakfast in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. with over 200 participants, and had speakers from around the country.

Northern President Rick Bailey said the award was created by Willie Williams, who is the community mentor for the College's Black and African American Student Organization.

The Feast was supposed to be an annual tradition, but it could not be held this year due to pub-



Johnnie de Schweinitz stands in the San Martin de Porres kitchen in June 2019 just before delivering her first Friday Night Dining experience to a group of hungry diners. (SUNphoto by Robert Eckert)

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## New Rep. Jumps Into First Session

By William Coburn  
SUN Staff Writer

Incoming New Mexico House of Representatives member Roger Montoya has a battery of bills he wants to bring to the floor in the congressional session that started Tuesday.

In a Jan. 16 phone interview Montoya said the centerpiece of his legislation was the Rural Opportunities Act.

"It addresses the severe disparity between rural and urban communities in New Mexico," Montoya said. "This legislation would authorize the creation of a rural opportunity committee tasked with developing potable water, wastewater, broadband and Internet. The goal is to provide measurable and quantifiable

See 'Rep. Will' on page A2

## Distance Learning Challenges Special Education Teachers

By Jacob Mulliken  
Special to the SUN

In the face of COVID-19, area special education programs have had to be more innovative than ever before.

In an aspect of education that is heavily reliant on interpersonal relationships and in-person one-on-one instruction, the chasm created by the COVID-inspired classroom model has been difficult to bridge, said McCurdy Charter School Director Sarah Tario.

"It has definitely been a challenge to support the unique learning needs of some of our students without being there with them," she said. "Adapting to the at-home model has been difficult for all of our students but having a learning difficulty compounds that obstacle. Like teachers, students didn't have time to prepare for a completely new system that happened overnight."

McCurdy's total student population is roughly 526 students with 15 percent of

the student body consisting of special education students. Hence the charter school's immediate move to provide Google Chromebooks to every student in the school, should the family require it, was a move adopted by school districts nationwide.

That universal accessibility to technology is one practice that needs to be commonplace as education eventually shifts back to an in-person classroom model, said April Miller, McCurdy special education coordinator.

"We will be staying virtual for the rest of the year," she said. "The pandemic has shown how inequitable education can be and I love that every student has a Chromebook, but we can still see that inequity, especially in terms of internet access for lower income and rural students. We have students that are working from their parent's workplace or have to travel to use the internet."

Communication with parents has

been vital to bridge the internet and technology gap in terms of the school not only providing them with resources to either acquire or access the internet but to learn and be able to help their students navigate the new online approach to learning, Miller said.

"We immediately notified families this summer and encouraged them to get the internet to prepare for the school year," she said. "Not only did we provide them with Chromebooks and resources to get internet access in their homes, but we were able to provide hotspots for lower income and our more rural students. Our technology department has also extended outside of providing support for school staff and is now aiding families in addressing issues that they may face."

### Modified plans

Bridging the technology gap was only the beginning for McCurdy, Española

Public Schools, Pojoaque Valley School District and Mesa Vista Consolidated Schools, especially in meeting the needs laid out in each district's special education students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

Through a Plan, students receive myriad support services ranging from physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, social work, transition services, psychology as well as recreational therapy.

The challenge in the in-home COVID-inspired classroom was providing these traditionally in person services virtually. A practice that McCurdy had already had in place for years prior to COVID-19, said Miller.

For others, ensuring Plans were met became a top priority that required educators, therapists as well as families to come together, said Deirdra Montoya, student services and wellness executive director for EPS.

"We have and will continue to hold all IE services in high regard," she said. "IEP services are being conducted remotely and each one looks a little bit different."

Of Española's 3,516 students, 546 of those are special education, including the district's gifted students, and while psychological, speech and social work services lend themselves easily to a remote model, providing occupational, physical and recreational therapy to those students that require one or all of the aforementioned services presented a unique challenge, she said.

"Occupational and physical therapy were challenging because they are so hands on," Montoya said. "Our occupational and physical therapists are leading exercises over Google Meet and our physical therapists are also delivering specialized equipment that is tradition-

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## Acequia Project Focuses on Drought, Community



Acequia defenders and supporters held a rally in February 2020 at the Roundhouse in Santa Fe during the legislative session. The group seeks dynamic ways to preserve and maintain acequias for their pure function and the community and relationship building that stems from them. (SUN Filephoto)

By William Coburn  
SUN Staff Writer

Over 120 people connected Jan. 14 over Zoom, the internet teleconferencing service that's taken off in popularity since the pandemic started, to discuss the future of the southwest's 400-year-old acequia system.

The meeting, Acequias and Science: A Community Conversation was hosted by the New Mexico Acequia Association to get community members in contact with scientists behind the recently published Acequias of the Southwestern United States: Elements of Resilience in a Coupled Natural and Human System.

The meeting also provided community members the time to brainstorm with the hydrologists, livestock researchers and anthropologists about the next research questions they need to ask, such as what sort of plants near the acequia can prevent water loss due to evaporation or what happens to land that was once irrigated by an acequia when they're removed.

Paula Garcia the director of the New Mexico Acequia Association said this was the first

major research project to bring multiple types of researchers in contact with the communities and manage and run the acequias.

"It's a really significant study for us," Garcia said. "It's done by a set of researchers at New Mexico State University that spent a lot of time listening to acequia irrigators about our observations and what we thought was happening. (It) was important that there was a relationship there and an appreciation of the traditional knowledge."

Garcia said the research team placed a high value of that traditional knowledge, and seeing as it was a diverse body of research that looked at acequias as cultural and social institutions tied with local hydrology.

"There's an important link between the earth and acequia and the shallow aquifer," Garcia said. "A lot of the water is returned to the same aquifer that adjoins the river. That's very good for the habitat and the river."

The study was also looking at the acequia's role as a social institution.

"The other takeaway of the research, because of the really

hands-on approach to sharing and allocating water as a cultural and social institution, the acequias are linked to the way the river is being used in any given year" Garcia said. "The acequias have customs to account for how much water there is, when there's less water they're able to shrink their collective footprint and when there's water they're able to increase their footprint."

### Drought concerns

The length of the ongoing drought has acequia irrigators worried about how the system which was designed in part to help with water scarcity, but the now years long drought is unprecedented.

"We don't really know how we're going to adapt or endure through what climate change could bring," Garcia said. "From listening to people the drought we're in now is worse than people have experienced in their lifetimes. It's starting to really sink in that this drought is worse

See 'Climate' on page A4





# Community Organizer Honored with Award

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lic health precautions, though Williams said they were hoping to expand it even further. The event last year also included a voter registration table and other community tables, and a musical presentation from as many cultures as they could find.

Instead, this year, they only did a socially distanced passing of the award.

Williams said she wanted to have something to commemorate the event and carry it forward, and to have something tangible associated with it, which is why she came up with the traveling trophy award.

“We have to share our cultural differences, we have to share our educational differences,” she said. “We have to share with one another and learn from each other. And, diversity is so beautiful. And I love celebrating our African-American heritage.”

Patricia Trujillo, then the College’s Director of Equity and Diversity, helped purchase through the College a statue of King to use as the trophy.

The award was first presented last year to Edith Brown for her work with her late mother-in-law on creating community events.

This year, Brown chose to present the trophy to de Schweinitz because of her community work.

De Schweinitz said she knew Brown through various events in the community, and Brown told her last week that she wanted to give her the award. She said she attended the Feast last year, but got there late because she was teaching a yoga class.

De Schweinitz has been instrumental in creating the Friday Night Dining program. The program provides a restaurant-like experience to low-income seniors with a sit-down dinner and decorated tables, though they have not offered a dinner since last March.

Friday Night Dining has 19

“We have to share our cultural differences.”

Willie Williams  
Award creator

volunteers, from waiters to bath-room attendants, with community chefs preparing food, and live music entertainment.

De Schweinitz grew up in Baltimore, Md. and attended Coppin State University. She moved to Northern New Mexico in 1998. She worked at the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation until her retirement in 2015, working with people with mental and physical disabilities and special needs students.

She also started a walking group for seniors to try to get people active during the pandemic.

De Schweinitz said she was shocked and excited to receive the award, and was happy that the community recognized her work.

The College posted a video to social media in honor of Martin Luther King Day that included remarks from Rep. Roger Montoya, Rep. Susan Herrera, Bailey, de Schweinitz and Williams.

“Dr. King once said, ‘The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice,’” Bailey said in the video. “In my opinion, those are the most profound words ever spoken in human history.”

De Schweinitz said she has been inspired by a quote from Norman MacEwan.

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

# Climate Change on *Parciantes'* Minds

Continued from A1

because it’s exasperated by higher temperatures. What the scientists have predicted we’re already seeing.”

Garcia said one of first changes they’ve noticed was the snowpack, which is both thinner and they lose more to evaporation every year due to the increased temperatures. This has shifted some of the older *acequia* traditions to compensate.

“We do cleanings in fall,” Garcia said. “In anticipation that water is going to be dried up by May.”

Crop yields have fluctuated wildly since the drought began for Garcia as well, she said she had 10 percent of their usual alfalfa yield in 2020.

“At a certain point there just wasn’t anymore water to share,” Garcia said. “Rivers are drying to the point where there isn’t enough water to go around. The future looks very uncertain for us.”

## River return

Sam Fernald, one of the researchers and the Director of New Mexico Water Resources Research said that despite the problems with water levels upstream the *acequia* system works to regulate water levels by returning unused irrigation water to the groundwater helping to reduce variability from climate change downstream.

“We had the good will of the community,” Fernald said. “They didn’t know if the science was going to support the method of the *acequia*, but in all cases so far the *acequia* has been supported.”

Carlos Ochoa, an associate professor at Oregon State University and one of the researchers who worked on multiple papers in the project said they found that only about 7 percent of the water in an *acequia* is used for irrigation and the other 93 percent returns to the river.

The water leaving the river, entering the groundwater and returning the river creates what

Ochoa called a delayed flow which is what leads to better regulation of water downstream.

Ochoa’s work also involved looking at different types of *acequias*, and what changes to them can cause.

“Lined *acequia* are pretty good at moving way from point a to point b but it loses that benefit but there are some situations where it’s needed,” Ochoa said.

## Societal collapse

Sylvia Rodríguez, one of the anthropologists who participated in the study said that she was concerned that an environmental collapse could lead to a societal collapse.

“I think the commodification of water is a catastrophic factor here,” Rodríguez said. “Given climate change and the desertification of the borderlands, I’m not sure how people are going to deal with it. One of the great tragedies of our era is the commodification of basically everything, and I think that’s one of the causes of what happened last week at the capitol.”

Rodríguez worries that with increasing demand for water in the state and elsewhere the *acequia* system may be at risk.

“Everyone at the capitol assumes the *acequias* are a necessary sacrifice, and that forgets that the *acequias* show us how to share water,” Rodríguez said.

Because the *parciantes*, the individual irrigators on an *acequia*, are small scale individual irrigators, Rodríguez says she doesn’t think there’s much money to be made in selling their water rights.

“They operate on a much smaller scale, instead of trying to make everything at a massive scale,” Rodríguez said. “It’s pretty clear that industrial farming and the growing of meat is one of the largest environmental problems. We have embarked globally, and locally on climate catastrophe, parts of the world, including the southwest will become uninhabitable. Scaling down is probably one of the

things people are going to think about doing, and be forced to do.”

Aside from scaling down agricultural industry, Rodríguez said she thinks there will need to be more of a focus on matching agriculture to the local environment.

“Scaling down, decentralizing, spreading out concentrations of population; It may be that different parts of the world need different patterns,” Rodríguez said. “One size does not fit all. Our ways of inhabiting the environment need to be acclimated to where they are.

“The knowledge about the solutions exist, how they get put together and by whom remains to be seen. We have very little time left, what we’re doing now is just making it worse.”

## Resilience

Jose Rivera, the research scholar for the University of New Mexico’s Center for Regional Studies said that studies like the ones done here are designed to understand why the *acequia* system has been able to survive for 400 years in New Mexico. One of the reason Rivera cites for their robustness in arid environments is the fact that they are decentralized compared to larger irrigation plans.

“Their resilience, in my view one of the major reasons is the autonomy,” Rivera said. “Whenever there is a drought like we have now they’re able to make decisions quickly, they don’t have to check with the state engineers for regular operations.”

Despite being centuries-old infrastructure, with even older designs that still work, there are uses for modern technology that Rivera observed.

“There’s a lot of complexity to understanding that snowpack,” Rivera said. “There’s anecdotal stories. If there’s a certain cabin, and you can’t see the top of the cabin they know that’s a good year. That’s just anecdotal, one of the stories they told me.”

Now the *mayordomos* are making decisions with weather satellites, and tracking snowpack instantly with National Science Foundation and National Weather Service data to know how much snowpack there is instead of hiking expeditions.

The resiliency also comes from the community minded mutualism Rivera said pointing out that in many parts of rural New Mexico the *acequia* is the only form of government under the county level and the annual cleaning of the *acequias* works as a tradition that brings community members together.

“Mutualism, the ability of people to respond and help each other out has been part of the culture too, these villages have been able to survive because of mutualism,” Rivera said. “As long as people are willing to put in the labor, you can always find somebody that can buy alfalfa bales. Same thing for livestock, you can always find somebody that’s willing to buy.”

Andre Cibils, a professor of range science at NMSU, said surveys of *acequia* irrigators found that just over 50 percent of respondents said that livestock was a better source of supplementary income than crops. Only 3 percent of irrigators Cibils found would be willing to sell their land, and of those they were respondents that found their herds to livestock waning due to drought.

The mutualism starting in the *acequia* Rivera said expresses itself in broader culture of New Mexico leading to parallel organizations and brotherhoods like the Sociedad Proteccion Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos to show up in New Mexico’s history.

“People are starting to get back to their roots,” Rivera said. “We’ve seen it through this pandemic with these food banks, with people donating food and their time to rebuild, and asking what it is that holds a community together and it’s people helping each other out. We’re going to see a new mutualism, and *acequias* are well into it.”

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