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ALBUQUERQUE'S INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY NEWS



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By Sara Atencio-Gonzales, The Paper.

The county is looking for artists to spruce up a community aquatic center

Bernalillo County is searching for an artist or team of artists to create a public art piece for the North Valley Aquatic Center. The Aquatics Center is currently under construction at the Raymond G. Sanchez Community Center located in the North Valley.

Whoever is chosen for this project will be tasked with creating a piece with the help of the local schools in the area. The artist or artists will be given a budget of \$75,000 that will be distributed over two phases of the project.

All artists who apply for this project have to meet some requirements to be considered. They must reside in New Mexico, have the ability to complete projects on time and within budget, have an understanding of the region and its history and population, and experience with community engagement, especially with youth. The chosen artists should also consider the North Valley as a source of inspiration when coming up with a design for the project.

The application process opened this week and will close on Feb. 16. Once the county receives applications there will be a "jurying" process to choose who will move forward with the project. The jury will be made up of local folks from the North Valley who are closely associated with the Aquatic Center.

"The local selection committee is made up of neighborhood association representatives, Arts Board members who serve on the county's Arts Board, the (Courtesy Bernalillo County)

manager of the community center, and the engineer is managing the reconstruction of the pool in the facility," says Kent Swanson, Public Art Project Coordinator for Bernalillo County.

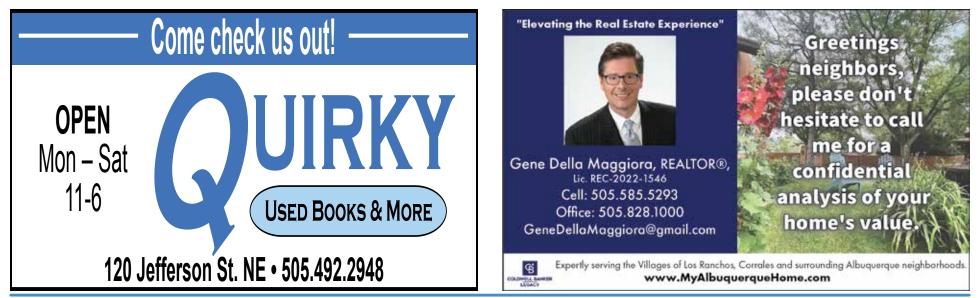
The effort to revamp the North Valley Aquatic Center comes after the community center's pool was demolished back in 2010.

Since the reconstruction of the aquatic center, voters approved using one percent of all county facility funds for public art.

"It actually applies to all county facilities that have that bond funding attached to it," says Swanson.

The project is expected to be completed by the Summer of 2025.

More information about the "Call to Artists" can be found at www.bernco.gov/ community-services/



It's Settled: New Mexico to Bankroll Plugging of Oil Wells for Texas Company

The company at the center of the settlement is called a "poster child" for state Oil and Gas Act reforms

This New Mexico well, owned by Ridgeway Arizona, last produced oil in 1982, even though it is marked as "active" in the state's database. (Jerry Redfern)

By Jerry Redfern, Capital and Main

A settlement between the state of New Mexico and Ridgeway Arizona Oil Corp. will plug 299 of the company's moribund, nonproducing oil wells, with the state paying the costs and the company reimbursing the state \$30,000 a month until the bill is repaid.

Plugging costs could top \$30 million, said Sidney Hill, public information officer with the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, the parent of the regulatory and enforcement Oil Conservation Division. At \$30,000 a month, the repayment process could take more than 83 years. The settlement also waives more than \$270,000 in proposed fines for produced water violations and an unlit flare at a facility owned by Ridgeway.

The Oil Conservation Division has not reached a settlement quite like this before, Hill said. During negotiations between the division and the company, "It became clear that Ridgeway was not positioned to bear the projected liabilities of remediation and plugging and abandonment of 299 wells,"

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which necessitated the deal, he said. Last year, Capital & Main highlighted Ridgeway's numerous inactive wells and its politically connected CEO, Simon Kukes, a former executive in the Russian petrochemical industry, a onetime ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and a supporter of former U.S. President Donald Trump.

Hill said the settlement offered "the best opportunity to alleviate financial risk to the State of New Mexico while plugging the inactive, and potentially venting ... wells in the shortest possible timeframe."

Andrew Forkes-Gudmundson, senior manager for state policy at Earthworks, a nonprofit watchdog of the mineral and fossil fuel industries, said in an interview that he understood the reason for the deal between the division and Ridgeway and that it might be the best option available in light of the circumstances. "But I'm not sure that makes it actually, like, *reasonable*."

New Mexico "is doing that because they don't have any other tools available," Forkes-Gudmundson continued. "This is as good as they can hope for in their current framework, so we've desperately got to change the framework. Because this is not a good deal for the residents in New Mexico."

Officials at Ridgeway Arizona Oil Corp. and its parent company, Pedevco Corp., did not respond to Capital & Main's requests for comment on this story.

The framework mentioned by Forkes-Gudmundson is the state's Oil and Gas Act, the primary law outlining how oil and gas are produced in New Mexico. It covers the full lifespan of a well, from drilling to plugging and everything in between. Hill previously said that the 1935 law hasn't had a major update since the 1980s and '90s, rendering it "stale."

"I hope this is a wake up call for the legislature to take action this session to protect against this catastrophe repeating itself," said Tannis Fox, senior attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center.

Since September, Fox, Forkes-Gudmundson, Oil Conservation Division representatives and roughly four dozen others from environmental protection groups and the oil and gas industry have been meeting to craft an update to the act, an effort initiated by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's office. The group is scheduled to unveil a draft bill by Dec. 22 to be introduced at the legislative session beginning in January. A similar bill, without the governor's direct backing, died last session. Hill called the Ridgeway violations "important examples" in support of Oil and Gas Act reform.

In August 2022, Ridgeway was at the center of a Capital & Main investigation into companies taking advantage of a state program allowing oil and gas producers to temporarily shut off wells due to the collapse of the fossil fuel market following global COVID-19 economic shutdowns. Instead of forcing companies to produce oil and gas at a loss during the pandemic which has the side effect of lowering state tax revenue from undervalued oil and gas sales the Oil Conservation Division implemented an emergency rule allowing companies to shut down wells for up to

2022.

new wells. In addition, the

company's annual report said its

top four executives received \$2.3

million in total compensation in

Pedevco owns Ridgeway

through a holding company

when dealing with corporate

structures like this, "In most

be legally distinct from the

operator's parent corporation and [the parent is] afforded a

degree of protection from the

after the parent would require

a "significant allocation of legal

resources," he added. Even so,

the Oil Conservation Division

"has not waived its right to

point is to keep Ridgeway

operating. "If the operator is

Hill said. "If Ridgeway is not

able to bring new wells online,

its rate of reimbursement [to the

state] will increase dramatically,"

able to bring new assets online,

OCD projects that Ridgeway will

Plugging and remediation

only be able to make minimum

corporations."

payments."

seek such responsibility and

indemnification from parent

The division's goal at this

liability of the subsidiary." Going

cases, the subsidiary will

called Pedco. Hill said that

costs will likely come from the state's orphan well reclamation

fund, Hill said. "The state needs to really look closely at this Ridgeway example, and see how quickly the numbers get really, really, really big for taxpayers," Forkes-Gudmundson said. "I mean, \$30

million is a lot of money." By comparison, in 2022, New Mexico started a new Office of Family Representation and Advocacy, which provides legal representation to underserved parents, children and guardians who appear before the state's child welfare system. Its total annual budget is a little more than \$10 million.

Forkes-Gudmundson praised the Oil Conservation Division and Dylan Fuge, its director, for doing as much as they do with the limited funding they get from the New Mexico Legislature.

"They clearly don't have the support that they need," Forkes-Gudmundson said. And with at least 1,700 known abandoned wells in the state, he said, "the math gets really scary really, really quickly — and New Mexico needs to grapple with that really seriously."



three years without penalty. Normally, companies can idle only a few operational wells for a maximum of 15 months, at which point they must be put back into production or plugged.

Dozens of companies shut down thousands of wells under the program. Ridgeway didn't have the most wells in the program overall, but it did have the most that had already ceased production - some for years, some for decades and should have been plugged long ago. When asked about Ridgeway's inactive wells in 2022, the division's thendirector Adrienne Sandoval said Ridgeway was already on the agency's radar. The initial violation notice the division sent to Ridgeway this April showed that the division twice sent an inspector to check the company's field operations: once after Capital & Main raised the initial questions in June 2022 and again after the story ran two months later.

The company was charged with breaking several laws in its field operations but Ridgeway complied with state-mandated financial assurance obligations - also a part of the Oil and Gas Act. Like other oil-andgas-producing states and the federal government, New Mexico requires companies to buy assurance bonds that can be cashed in to pay for plugging and cleaning up abandoned wells should the company go broke and leave wells behind. Ridgeway Arizona has such bonds as required by state law. But Ridgeway isn't bankrupt, so the state doesn't have access to that money. Even if it did, Hill said it wouldn't be enough — just \$1.25 million — underscoring what he called "the extreme disparity" between plugging costs and New Mexico's current bonding requirements. As a result, the department allowed the company to continue operating and incrementally paying the plugging and cleanup bills.

The settlement order said that the division wanted "to resolve the alleged violations without the cost and expense of a hearing on the legal and factual issues." Basically, it didn't want to tie up more of its limited finances and human resources in a long and expensive legal fight.

Western Environmental Law Center's Fox called the Ridgeway situation "a poster child for the need for financial assurance reform under the Oil and Gas Act."

Ridgeway Arizona is a wholly-owned unit of Pedevco Corp., a small Houston-based publicly traded corporation with two other oil production companies in its portfolio: EOR Operating Co. in New Mexico and Red Hawk Petroleum in Colorado. Kukes, Pedevco's majority owner and CEO, bought his controlling interest in the financially distressed company in 2018 for pennies on the dollar. He is a Russian-born American who first entered the public eye in the 1990s, during the post-Soviet free-for-all in the Russian oil industry. Kukes ran oil companies, sometimes controversially, culminating in 2003 when Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed him to run Yukos Oil Co., the country's largest petroleum company at the time, after throwing its previous head, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, in prison. Following more years in the industry, Kukes entered the spotlight again in 2016 after donating \$443,400 to multiple Republican committees and candidates, including \$273,000 to the Trump Victory committee. According to reports at the time, he told a Russian official, "I am actively involved in the Trump presidential campaign and am part of the election strategy development group."

In the U.S., publicly traded companies are required to file quarterly and annual reports with the Securities and Exchange Commission outlining (among other things) profits, losses and potential legal liabilities. Pedevco's latest quarterly report, signed by Kukes on Nov. 9, makes no mention of the company's legal troubles with New Mexico through Ridgeway Arizona. Under the heading "Legal Proceedings," it said, "We are not aware of any material legal or governmental proceedings against us or contemplated to be brought against us."

The report showed the company had increased total sale volumes of oil and natural gas (measured in barrels of oil equivalent) by 43%. It also showed a working capital surplus of \$15.1 million. That's down \$1.2 million from 2022 — not from plugging and remediating its nonproducing wells but from buying new leases and drilling

EVENTS.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

1/04	Adulti-Verse 21+ Exhibit Hours	1/27	Zeke Beats	
1/09	Slaughter Beach, Dog with Sun June	2/7	An Evening with Lettuce	
1/21	Mayer Hawthorne with Chulita Vinyl Club	2/10	One More Time: A Daft Punk Tribute	
1/23	Kitchen Dwellers with LEON III	NM re MOND	Y MONDAY: sidents use code DAYFUNDAY for half mission after 3pm	

Get your tickets at meow.wf/santafeshows



Temple of Sound Presents CIRCUITRY

Calling all replicants and netrunners! Temple of Sound returns to Lizard Tail Nob Hill (3417 Central Ave NE Suite C) on Saturday, Jan. 6 with CIRCUITRY. Get ready to dance in the New Year with a night of dark techno, industrial and cyberpunk tunes. Resident DJs \$uspence and Red-209 will bring the latest and greatest in cybernetic dance music while C.H.E. wil be on visuals and decor, turning the brewery into a Blade Runner-worthy club. Music runs from 7 to 11:45pm. There is no cover charge and this is a 21+ event.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 4

Class / Workshop

Beginning Square Dance Classes (18 weeks) \$120 All Day 4915 Hawkins St NE 4915 Hawkins Street Northeast

Comedy

Howling at Hollow's \$10 7-9 pm Hollow Spirits 1324 1st ST NW

Dance

Friday Night Square Dancing 7 - 9 PM Fridays Albuquerque Square Dance Center 4915 Hawkins St NE

Exhibit

Colors That Speak Words/Phase II 9am -4pm Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 2401 12th Street NW IPCC's 43rd Annual Native American Student Art Show: Celebrating Our Pollinators 9am - 4pm Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 2401 12th Street NW

Festival

Pueblo Gingerbread Experience All Day Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 2401 12th St. NW

Music

"Affirmations" Release Party with Alex McCue 7-9 pm Tractor Brewing Nob Hill 118 Tulane SE

Blot Xenia 8:30-11:30 pm Launchpad 618 Central Avenue Southwest

Music on the Patio: Songwriter Showcase With Adam Hooks and Jer Killinger 6-9 pm Canteen Brewhouse 2381 Aztec Road Northeast

Sadness, Madness, & Mayhem: A Haunted Folk Formal with Dust City Opera \$25-\$30 6:30-9 pm FUSION | 708 708 1st St NW

FRIDAY, JANUARY 5

Art

ABQ Artwalk 5-9 pm Downtown Albuquerque Downtown

January ABQ Artwalk at the Orpheum 5:30-8:30 pm Orpheum Arts Space 500 Second St. SW Apt 21

Art Openings

ARTScrawl - Masterworks Awardees Reception 5-8 pm The Gallery ABQ 8210 Menaul Blvd NE

Comedy

First Fridays Comedy Contest 8-10 pm Tractor Brewing Wells Park 1800 Fourth St. NW

Hardcore Comedy w/ Clayton Horwitz! \$15 7:30-9 pm Dry Heat Comedy Club 521 Central Áve NW STE G

The Show - Live Comedy Improv \$12 8-9 pm The Box Performance Space 114 Gold Ave SW

Music

Alex McCue 7-9 pm Marble Brewery NE Heights 9904 Montgomery Blvd NE

Alex's Birthday Bash 9 pm-1 am Historic El Rey Theatre 622 Central Ave SW

First Fridays w/ DJ Flo Fader 8-11 pm Tractor Brewing Nob Hill 118 **Tulane SE**

Prairie Dawg \$10 8:30 pm-12:30 am Launchpad 618 Central Avenue Southwest

RJ Perez 6-9 pm Albuquerque Distilling 5001 Central Ave NE Suite A5

VAIDA + OneOfLess \$5 8-11:30 pm JUNO brewery + cafe + art 1501 1st Street Northwest

Sports

Ice Wolves vs. El Paso Rhinos \$15-\$27 6:30-9:30 pm Outpost Ice Arenas 9530 Tramway Blvd NE

SATURDAY, JANUARY 6

Comedy

The Show - Live Comedy Improv \$12 8-9 pm The Box Performance Space 114 Gold Ave SW

Dance

Belly Dancing Night 6-8 pm Sahara Middle Eastern Eatery 2622 Central Ave SE Suite A

Discussion / Lecture

UFO Disclosure with Stephen Bassett 11 am-1 pm Main Library, Albuquerque 501 Copper Ave. NW

Literature/Poetry

Author Visit: Khadijah VanBrakle 11 am-1 pm International District Library 7601 Central Ave NE

Miscellaneous

Beyond the Case: Whodunnit & Wine 7-10 pm Tractor Brewing Wells Park 1800 Fourth St. NW

Music

Felix Gato Peralta 7-9 pm Tractor Brewing Nob Hill 118 Tulane SE

Grupo Super Verza \$15-\$409 pm-12:30 am JUNO brewery + cafe + art 1501 1st Street Northwest

Noche de Tributo de Dani Flow \$15 10 pm-1:30 am Cake Nightclub 515 Central Ave NW

Operation Rewind 7-9 pm Voodoo Girl Pizza & Pints 1401 Second St. NW

Roman's Birthday Show \$8 8 pm-12 am Launchpad 618 Central Avenue Southwest

SOMOS ft. DJ Diesel (aka Shaquille O'Neal) \$45-\$85 6 pm-1 am Tractor Brewing Wells . Park 1800 Fourth St. NW



SHARE

EVENTS.

January 03, 2024 WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10

Games

Brain Gang Trivia 6-8 pm Canteen Brewhouse 2381 Aztec Road Northeast

Miscellaneous

BernCo Animal Care Services Vaccine and Microchip Clinic 9 am-12 pm Bernalillo Animal Care and Resource Center 3001 Second St. SW

Bike Night 6-9 pm Sunday Service Motor Company 2701 4th Street NW

Music

Acoustic Showcase and Open Mic Night 6-11:30 pm Hotel Zazz 3711 Central Ave NE

Hump Day Karaoke Show 6-10 pm Kilt Check Brewing Company 4814 Hardware Dr. NE

Reading

Animal Tales with the ABQ BioPark 10:30-11:30 am South Broadway Library 1025 Broadway SE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 11

Class / Workshop

Beginning Square Dance Classes (18 weeks) \$120 All Day 4915 Hawkins St NE 4915 Hawkins Street Northeast

Music

Anima \$8 8:30-11:30 pm Launchpad 618 Central Avenue Southwest

Songs Without Purpose \$22 7:30-9:30 pm Guild Cinema 3405 Central Ave NE

FRIDAY, JANUARY 12

Comedy

The Show - Live Comedy Improv \$12 8-9 pm The Box Performance Space 114 Gold Ave SW

Music

Goth Night & Dark Market: New Year, Same Goth 8-11 pm Tractor Brewing Wells Park 1800 Fourth St. NW

Sandia Mountain Dulcimers: Sweet Sounds of History 2-3 pm Central & Unser Library 8081 Central Ave NW, 87121 Seth Hoffman 7-9 pm Marble

Brewery NE Heights 9904 Montgomery Blvd NE

Temple of Sound Presents CIRCUITRY 7-11:30 pm Lizard Tail Brewing Nob Hill 3417 Central Ave. NE Suite C

Sports

Ice Wolves vs. El Paso Rhinos \$15-\$27 6:30-9:30 pm Outpost Ice Arenas 9530 Tramway Blvd NE

SUNDAY, JANUARY 7

Music

Music on the Patio: Felix Peralta and Friends 4-7 pm Canteen Brewhouse 2381 Aztec Road Northeast

Sports

Ice Wolves vs. El Paso Rhinos \$15-\$27 2-4:30 pm Outpost Ice Arenas 9530 Tramway Blvd NE

MONDAY, JANUARY 8

Games

Brain Gang Trivia 6-8 pm Canteen Taproom 417 Tramway Blvd NE

Music

Old Time Jam Band 7-10 pm Tractor Brewing Nob Hill 118 Tulane SE

TUESDAY, JANUARY 9

Games

Brain Gang Trivia 7-9 pm Lizard Tail Industrial 3351 Columbia Dr. NE

Literature/Poetry

A Word With Writers - Michael Cunningham \$33-\$38 7-9 pm Main Public Library 501 Copper Avenue Northwest

Music

Fondants with OMI.O \$5 8-11 pm JUNO brewery + cafe + art 1501 1st Street Northwest

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FEATURED.

Michael Hodock, The Paper.

The dining area of what was once Milton's Family Restaurant just east of Downtown Albuquerque was crowded and bustling. The once popular spot for breakfast and a hot cup of coffee has been closed for a number of years and since then a few eateries have unsuccessfully tried to fill the space. The throng of people on this recent evening weren't there for huevos rancheros or short stacks, but instead setting up cameras and lights for a local film production. The sight of film crews taking over spaces in Albuquerque is nothing new these days, but this specific shoot was a little different. Not only was the former diner peppered with familiar faces from the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), but two notable New Mexico denizens were also serving as ringmasters of the controlled chaos.

Like many other shoots, everyone inside and outside the building was actively engaged in a task. As lights were still going up in the parking lot while the sun was setting, former mixed martial arts fighter and film producer Keith Jardine was knee-deep in getting things ready for the overnight shoot of Killer Kafe, a film he wrote and directed. Jardine has acted and performed stunts in numerous films for nearly 10 years, but it was a connection with former law enforcement officer and cannabis CEO Darren White that spurred Jardine's current project. Jardine tells The Paper. he had asked White for help with Jardine's 2022 short film El Paso 11:55, which led to the two creating Broken Ear Productions in early 2023.

"I came to [White] to help me with my short," Jardine says. "He helped me out and we've bonded ever since."

He says the end of the Screen Actors' Guild strike late last year gave the two an opportunity to kick off the production on their latest feature, albeit with very short notice. The partners acted quickly with White noting the SAG contract was ratified a little more than a week before actors and crew members filled the former restaurant.

When the strike ended, Jardine says he thought, "Let's take advantage of this. The big studios aren't doing movies so let's get a SAG waiver and make [our] own independent film. I can get the best crew in Albuquerque and everything,

From Fights to Film

UFC veteran Keith Jardine has teamed up with former cop, turned retired weed man Darren White for a 'Killer' movie filmed in The Duke City



Killer Kafe lead actor Brendan Fehr and the film's writer, director and producer Keith Jardine. (Courtesy Broken Ear Productions)

they're all available."

The crew was in fact ready to work, and they rose to the challenge of a fast-paced production environment.

"We're at breakneck speed," he says. "We're doing 12 days, we're doing nine pages a day. The industry standard is five so we're hustling, we're jamming, and we're getting it."

Jardine says he remembers the antsy feeling leading up to filming while SAG members were still on strike.

"I couldn't reach out to [the] cast, besides friends and family," he says, adding that he felt it was imperative to secure a local crew and cast. But he says he also knows the importance of having a unionized crew.

"I'm SAG and I appreciate the value of that," he tells *The Paper*.

The production consists of a "100 percent local crew, 99 percent local cast," according to Jardine. As for the story's setting, Jardine says, "We don't really refer to it, but it's obviously in Albuquerque." With noticeable locations like the former home of Milton's, he is confident locals will "definitely recognize"

Albuquerque in his film. It's somewhat expected that Jardine's cast includes some of his old MMA buddies such as Michelle Waterson, Maurice Green and Donald "Cowboy" Cerrone. But Jardine insists the film is not about the ring at all. As its title suggests, the film deals with violent subject matter, but the director assures that his creation is not a traditional horror flick.

Jardine calls Killer Kafe a "Psychological-thriller-slashslasher," and he is tight-lipped when asked about the plot, promising, "There's a bunch of twists, I've tried my best not to give it away."

He does divulge though that the movie's main character is a serial killer in crisis, and describes the central figure as, "Caught in a precarious position and then he starts to take advantage of it, and starts relishing the opportunity... after a while it gets really old, and the world caves in on him, and he starts to have a breakdown."

When asked about his acting role in the film, Jardine admits with a smile that he is, "Always the bad guy."

Born in Butte, Montana, Jardine earned his position as a combat sports veteran, fighting for most of his career out of Albuquerque. He is well-known on television from his breakout performance on season two of the successful The Ultimate Fighter reality series and his thirty UFC appearances, with memorable victories against Forrest Griffin and Chuck Liddell. Retired from fighting, he can still be seen on the big screen in dozens of films and TV roles including *Copshop*, *An American in Texas*, and 2023's *Surrounded*. Careful film enthusiasts can see him killed by Keanu Reeves in the first *John Wick* film.

The UFC fighter-turneddirector has had a career trajectory one might expect from a professional athlete finding his niche in the film industry. Jardine explains, "I fought in UFC for a while, and that got me into acting. I really geeked out on acting for a long time, and then I wanted to start creating my own roles, the kinds of roles that I wanted to play, so I got into writing. I didn't know I had a knack for it, and all of a sudden I got a bunch of scripts that people want to do... I decided I want to do my own script. So I did a short last year that won a bunch of awards, and it did really well."

Jardine says he hopes to get his latest project in front of audiences by the end of this year.

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You can follow the film's progress at **killer_kafe** on Instagram.

Old Restrictions on Legislature No Longer Work

Sherry Robinson

By Sherry Robinson, All She Wrote

hen New Mexico became a state in 1912, the first legislative session was 90 days long because legislators had a lot to do in forming the new state. After that, sessions, held after every general election, were 60 days until 1940, when a constitutional amendment divided it into two 30-day terms, with a 30-day recess between terms.

In 1946 a second amendment did away with the recess, and sessions returned to 60 days.

In 1964 a third amendment set the lengths we have today – 60-day sessions in evennumbered years and 30 days in odd-numbered years. Short sessions were limited to budget and finance except for matters the governor added to the agenda. That setup has now been in place for 59 years, and it stopped working years ago.

What we can expect of the 30-day session that starts Jan. 16 is that, as usual, lawmakers will introduce too many bills for anyone to read and understand. In the crush of activity, floor sessions will run into the wee

hours. Bills, good and bad, will die, and our sleep-deprived public servants will pass flawed legislation that must be fixed next year.

Any measure aimed at complex problems—say, crime or healthcare-will take several years to pass because New Mexico has the nation's third shortest legislative sessions. New Mexico takes more than two years All She Wrote to accomplish what Colorado legislators do in one year.

Last year, a group of women legislators introduced two measures intended to modernize the Legislature.

House Joint Resolution 2 called for 60-day sessions yearly with a five-day recess after the first 30 days. The pause would allow legislators to study bills and work out kinks that could bog down the process. Also, in the following year legislators could take up where they left off and not have to start over again.

HJR 8 would have created a commission to set salary levels for state legislators. Pay in

other states ranges from \$100 in New Hampshire to \$114,877 in New York, which has a fulltime legislature. Our neighbors' payment is \$7,200 in Texas, \$24,000 in Arizona, \$40,242 in Colorado and \$47,500 in Oklahoma.

New Mexico is the only state in the country with an unpaid legislature, although our per

diem is more generous than some states' salaries.

'The time has come to enact some common sense reforms... and enter the modern era," said Mario Jimenez, executive director of

Common Cause New Mexico. "The public is behind it, and the reforms are long overdue"

The organization's survey showed that 64 percent of respondents supported legislator salaries, and 70 percent supported longer sessions. Support cut across party and regional lines.

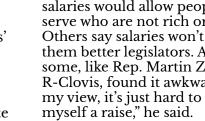
The two measures ran into walls and died, but they stimulated a healthy discussion.

Many lawmakers argue that salaries would allow people to serve who are not rich or retired. Others say salaries won't make them better legislators. And some, like Rep. Martin Zamora, R-Clovis, found it awkward. "In my view, it's just hard to give

Some were lukewarm on salaries but liked the idea of having staff to help with constituent issues. From this discussion came a proposal for each lawmaker to have a local office with staff. Because some of our districts are larger than eastern states it's an idea, but the price tag could be a shocker.

My reading of the situation is that they all know this isn't working, but extending the sessions would take a bigger bite out of their lives and incomes. They'd rather put up with current time limits. A salary might make a difference.

Sponsors may reintroduce their bills but can't do much in 30 days, so they will be back in 2025. If you've ever wondered why it takes so long to get anything done in New Mexico, this is a big reason.





Celebrate Women of Inspiration

Corner to Corner

Diane Denish

By Diane Denish, Corner to Corner

This time of year provides an opportunity to think about the year just passed. We do this in diverse ways. Reflecting on lives lost, major events, best movies, or what impacted us on a personal level.

I tried something new this year. I thought about women who were authentic and inspirational. The more I read, the more I was uplifted. Around the world, in the country, and closer to home, women inspired us. Here are a few of my favorites.

First Lady Rosalynn Carter. At her memorial, family and friends provided a glimpse into her life of service to others. In her role as First Lady both in Georgia and at the White House, she was a staunch advocate for those with mental illness. After politics, in partnership with President Carter, she helped to define what a post-presidency should be: modeling a life of service, side by side, to improve lives.

The trailblazing jurist Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. The first woman appointed to the Supreme Court, her tenure defined what it meant to be a swing vote. That role had a profound effect on key issues. In a 5-4 vote the court upheld Roe v. Wade, determined the outcome of Bush v. Gore in 2000, and protected minority voters in redistricting. Her tenure became an inspiration for women in the law.

Fortunately, women in the law continue to inspire us: Supreme Court Justice Ketanji

Brown Jackson, federal Judge Tanya Chutkan, and Fulton County D.A. Fani Willis in Georgia. All are involved in some of today's most challenging legal cases. Brown Jackson distinguished herself as the newest justice by participating fully

in court hearings. Chutkin and Willis have been examples of strength and calm, refusing to bend to threats and pressure. Speaking of courage and

calm, two of the most public examples of 2023 are Cassidy Hutchinson, who worked in the Trump White House, and former Congresswoman Liz Cheney, co-chair of the January 6 Committee. Both Republicans, they stepped forward to testify about the events of Jan. 6, 2023, and inspired others to do the same.

Generous women inspire me as well.

MacKenzie Scott (Bezos) inspired me by redefining giving. In 2022 and 2023 she donated \$12 billion of her \$46 billion fortune to organizations focused

on social justice and equality, including six in New Mexico. What's the difference? Instead of putting organizations through an application meat grinder, she sought them out. And her gifts have no strings attached. A welcome

change. While I'm at it, inspiration

and philanthropy are synonymous with Dolly Parton. Her giving is simple and spontaneous, from \$1 million to vaccine research to the nonprofit Dolly Parton Imagination Library in 1,800 communities around the country, including New Mexico. She inspires with her downhome quotes, eliciting smiles and expressing encouragement. Closer to home, we have our own inspirational women:

• Miranda Viscoli, founder of New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence, teaching kids and families about the consequences of gun violence and benefits of gun safety and helping to get guns off the streets through gun buybacks.

• Dr. Cheryl Willman, who put New Mexico on the map by building UNM Cancer Center into a world class operation.

• Deb Haaland, taking her heritage and her heart to the national stage to help highlight and protect Indigenous communities.

My 2023 personal favorite is the phenomenal Taylor Swift. Swift, through her songwriting, performing, business acumen, and uncanny ability to communicate with and empower her audiences has become a force for good. With 75 million followers on social media, she is the definition of inspiration for a younger generation.

2023 women of inspiration are everywhere. Celebrate them.

Letters to the Editor

Sharing is caring

ike MANY LGBT and straight people, I am able to be openly and deeply in love with more than one person at the SAME time.

We teach children to share food, toys and friends. How selfish, how cruel the child who demands that his child friend have no other friends or playmates! We adults can learn to share our lovers with others. We enjoy a variety of flowers, fruits, vegetables, colors, books, songs... Many of us also enjoy a variety of lovers!

A loving parent can have a deep special bond with each of several children. Can someone be a "faithful" parent only if he or she has and loves just one child? I REFUSE to let any man cage or fence me in romantically, so I have NO right to cage or fence him in.

Every man I have been in love with has taught me—helping me become a wiser and better friend and lover.

ALL romantic relationships face hurdles, bumps, conflicts... WHY put all our eggs into one basket? Invest our hearts in more than one lover and do it honestly with ALL involved! So if one lover backs out, moves away or dies, we may feel less devastated, less desperate, less abandoned and more able to cope in our sad loss.

I do NOT OWN any man, no matter how deeply I am in love with him. Good romance is NOT slavery! I cannot make any man FALL in love with me, I cannot make any man STAY in love with me and I am a fool if I try to force him!

I ask every couple getting married to PONDER—Do I even know myself or the other person or the future well enough to know for sure we BOTH will do WELL with ONLY each other romantically until death?

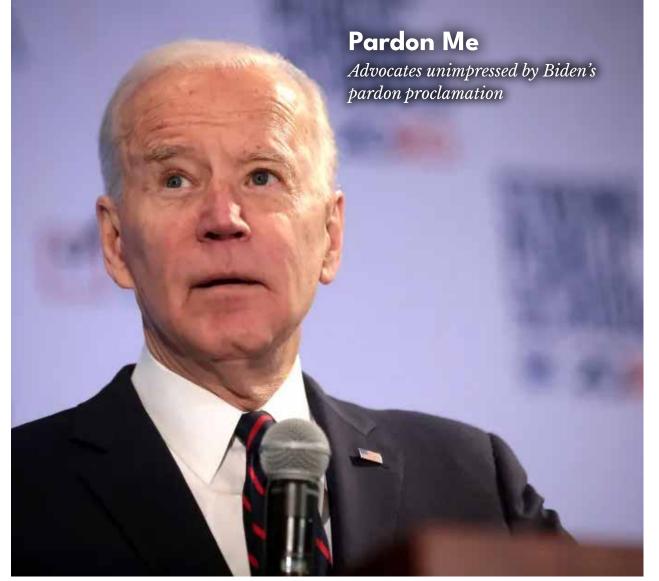
HELL NO to cover-ups, LIES, "cheating," double standards, and insane jealousy! YES to deep intimacy and sexual pleasure shared generously with more than one person.

-Don Schrader



The Paper.





By Josh Lee, The Paper

ust in time for the New Year, President Joe Biden has once again tipped his

hat toward the cannabis vote by issuing mostly performative federal marijuana pardon to those who are incarcerated. But the pardons will not actually free anyone from prison, and advocates say the president is still not doing enough to address the harms of the drug war.

Near the end of last month, the president issued a federal pardon to those arrested for simple possession of marijuana, attempted simple possession of marijuana or use of marijuana in violation of federal and Washington D.C. laws. The new round of pardons expands on Biden's previous proclamation, made in October 2022—just before the midterm elections—pardoning the offense of simple possession of marijuana alone.

The proclamation also commuted the sentences of 11 people who were arrested for non-violent drug offenses that were not related to cannabis.

As with the previous pardoning, the White House claims that thousands will be affected by the proclamation.

"Criminal records for marijuana use and possession have imposed needless barriers to employment, housing, and educational opportunities," Biden said in a statement. "Too many lives have been upended because of our failed approach to marijuana. It's time that we right these wrongs."

(Gage Skidmore at Wikimedia Commons)

But advocates are pointing out that the most recent set of pardons, similar to the first set, will not actually result in anyone being released from federal prison.

Most cannabis arrests are related to the possession of small amounts of the drug, but those cases involve the violation of state laws, so they are handled at the state level. For someone to violate federal possession laws, they would have had to be in possession of much larger amounts.

That means people locked up for "simple possession of marijuana" are all but non-existent.

Cannabis reform advocates criticized the previous pardon as a performative flex with no substance meant to bolster waning support for the Democratic party ahead of the midterms.

Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris both made a lot of promises to weed advocates during the 2020 presidential campaign but failed to deliver on any of them. The first set of pardons was seen as an attempt to pacify those advocates without actually following through on those campaign trail promises.

This second set of pardons may have been drafted with the same goal in mind, but it might instead be seen as a slap in the face to those who criticized the first. The two additional crimes being pardoned are even less serious than simple weed possession. The first is *attempting* to buy a small amount of weed, and the second is using weed.

Advocates say it doesn't go nearly far

enough to address the harms that the War On Some Drugs has had.

"With the simple stroke of a pen, President Biden could release nearly 3,000 people currently incarcerated in federal prison for cannabis," said advocacy group Last Prisoner Project in a statement. "We urge the President to use his clemency power to commute all federal cannabis sentences and urge Congress to enact a federal expungement law."

Biden's pardon isn't exactly automatic, either. Anyone who was incarcerated for the offenses in the past will have to submit an application to the Department of Justice (DOJ) to receive a certificate of pardon.

To the president's credit, he did call for state-level marijuana pardons as well.

"Just as no one should be in a federal prison solely due to the use or possession of marijuana, no one should be in a local jail or state prison for that reason, either," he said in a statement. "That's why I continue to urge Governors to do the same with regard to state offenses and applaud those who have since taken action."

Of course, "urging" governors to take reformative action in a public statement isn't quite the same thing as personally requesting it in private or calling for a new plank in the party's platform. Cynics may also note that this latest pot clemency action comes right before the start of an election year, just as the previous clemency action occurred ahead of the midterms.

One thing the president could do to gain back angry voters would be to push the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to reschedule cannabis under the Controlled Substances Act. Last year, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommended that marijuana be reclassified from Schedule I to Schedule III. The current designation classifies weed as a drug with high potential for abuse and no accepted medical use—despite the fact that nearly 75 percent of states have legalized its medical use. Drugs in Schedule III have a "moderate to low" chance of causing use disorders and some medical value.

The DEA has the final say on whether it will be rescheduled, but it's expected to do so, since the HHS is the federal authority on science in this area and the DEA has no reason to contradict it.

While rescheduling cannabis wouldn't decriminalize the drug—a campaign trail promise made by Harris—it would make it easier for researchers to study the drug, and it would be a big reform step that would gain back some lost graces among pot activists. The HHS recommendation came at the behest of Biden, and the administration still has time to put pressure on the DEA to hurry up and act on it before the presidential race heats up in earnest.

Rescheduling weed would make a much bigger splash than either of these pardon proclamations—in both the headlines and in the everyday lives of actual cannabis users. The single-issue voters out there who support weed law reform can be won over if the administration at least makes the effort to appear to move the dial toward decriminalization. The way things are going, it will need every vote it can get. January 03, 2024

The Paper.

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Feds Say Legal Weed Workers Trafficking

By Josh Lee, The Paper.

Rederal officials are treating immigrant workers at legal marijuana companies the same as drug traffickers. According to a *Politico* report, immigrants who work in the cannabis industry are considered drug traffickers by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). For non-citizen workers, this can mean that they will be unable to naturalize

or secure green cards and could potentially be deported for being criminals. American citizens who work at cannabis

companies are not considered drug traffickers by the DHS.

Experts say thousands of weed workers could potentially be affected by the DHS' stance. Advocates have been calling on the Biden administration to order the DHS to halt the practice and recognize legal cannabis workers as lawful citizens.

In October 2022, President Joe Biden pardoned everyone who has been convicted of federal-level simple marijuana possession. At the time, advocacy group Immigrant Legal Resource Center published a statement calling on the administration to deschedule cannabis and block the DHS from criminalizing legal weed workers.

"No civil or criminal penalties for 'drug trafficking' fall on the executives of these corporations, or even any of the U.S. citizen employees; the only enforcement targets are immigrant workers," wrote the group.

The White House has never responded.

Interstate Weed Plan Destroyed

A plan to set up interstate cannabis commerce on the West Coast has been put to rest. California's attorney general says the plan will put the state at risk of federal intervention.

Last month, California Attorney General Rob Bonta sent a letter to the state's Department of Cannabis Control noting that plans to allow interstate marijuana trade between California, Oregon and Washington—all of which have legalized adult-use cannabis.

According to Bonta, the plan will have to be dropped because it could open the state to

prosecution from federal authorities under the Controlled Substances Act.

The letter was sent after a year-long investigation by Bonta's office following the passage of a 2022 California law that legalized interstate cannabis commerce. The law will stay in place, however, and the state will be ready to initiate interstate commerce if the drug is descheduled or legalized at the federal level.

Sunland Park Breaks Records

A New Mexico border town was busy selling weed last year. According to state records, Sunland Park sold \$32.1 million in recreational cannabis between January and November last year.

Sunland Park is a small town near the southern border that is only a short drive to El Paso, Texas. Las Cruces, the nearest New Mexico urban center, only sold \$22.6 million in weed during the same time period, despite having nearly 100,000 more residents. Sunland Park's cannabis retailers say most of their customers are Texans.

The Paper.

SERVICE GUIDE.

January 03, 2024

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FREE WILL ASTROLOGY

ARIES (March 21-April 19): The plan I will propose in this horoscope is for temporary use. I'm not recommending you stick to it for all of 2024, but just for the next 15 to 18 days. If you do, I believe it will set you up for beautiful success in the coming months. Here's my idea: Embark on a free-form extravaganza of plaving and having form extravaganza of playing and having fun. Just for now, set aside your ambition. Don't worry about improving yourself and producing results. Simply enjoy a phase of suspending inhibitions, creatively messing around, having nothing to prove, and being motivated by the quest for joy.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Climate change is impacting rainbows. Rising temperatures and dryer conditions mean that some parts of the world will get fewer rainbows, parts of the world will get fewer rainbows, and other areas will get more. Canada and Siberia will benefit, while the Mediterranean will be less well-endowed with sky-borne arcs of color that come from sunlit rain. But I predict that no matter where you live, the rainbow will be a potent and regular symbol for you Bulls in 2024—more than ever before. That means you will have increased reasons to entertain hope and more power to find beauty. On occasion, there may even be very good luck at the metaphorical rainbow's end. If you're an LGBTQIA2S+ Taurus, be on high alert for breakthroughs in your ability to get the appreciation you deserve. deserve.

deserve. GEMINI (May 21-June 20): As one of your inspirational stories for 2024, I offer this tale from singer-songwriter Tom Waits: "Once upon a time, there was a crooked tree and a straight tree. They grew next to each other. Every day, the straight tree would look at the crooked tree and say, 'You're crooked. You've always been crooked, and you'll continue to be crooked. But look at me! I'm tall, and I'm straight. Then one day, lumberjacks came to the forest and looked around. The manager in charge said, 'Cut all the straight trees.' And that crooked tree is still there to this day, growing strong and growing strange." (PS: Here's more from Gemini writer Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Be true to your own act, and congratulate yourself if you have done something strange and extravagant.")

CANCER (Jone 21-July 22): Japanese artist Hokusai (1760-1849) developed a fascination for his country's iconic Mount Fuji. In his seventies, he produced a series of woodblock prints titled Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji. Later, he added three books of prints collectively called One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji. Some art historians say his obsession stemmed from the legend that the mountain was home historians say his obsession stemmed from the legend that the mountain was home to the secret of immortality. The coming year will be a fine time for you Cancerians to celebrate and concentrate on your own Mount Fuji-like passion. Sometime soon, identify what it is, and start making plans to commune with it intensely.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): If you will ever in your life go viral—that is, create or do something that suddenly becomes widely known and influential—I bet it will be in 2024. Even if you don't produce TikTok videos seen by 10 million people, you are at least likely to become more visible in your local computative field of and approximately and the set of and approximately and the set of and approximately set of a set of approximately set of approximately set of a set of approximately set of approximately set of a set of a set of approximately set of approximately set of a set of approximately set at least likely to become more visible in your local community or field of endeavor. Of course, I would prefer that your fame and clout spread because of the good deeds you do, not the weird deeds. So I urge you to cultivate high integrity and a wildly generous spirit in the coming months. Be a role model who inspires and uplifie uplifts.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): I expect 2024 to be a free-spirited, wide-ranging, big-vision type of year for you, dear Virgo. I predict you will feel an abundance of urges to travel, roam, and explore. You will be more excited than anxious about the prospect of leaving your comfort zone, and you will have a special fondness for getting your of leaving your comfort zone, and you will have a special fondness for getting your mind expanded by interesting encounters. That doesn't mean you will avoid all awkwardness and confusion. Some of that stuff will happen, though it will usually evolve into educational adventures. And the extra good news is that wandering out in nature will provide even more

Week of January 3 © Copyright 2023 Rob Brezsny

inspiration and healing than usual. Treasure this quote from conservationist Rachel Carson: "Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure: the migration of the birds, the ebb and flow of the tides, the folded bud ready for the spring."

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): I am pleased to inform you that a visit to hell will not be on your itinerary in 2024. You may be invited to take a few excursions into the invited to take a few excursions into the realm that depth psychologists call the underworld, but that's a good thing. There you will be able to hunt for treasures that have been hidden and uncover secrets that will illuminate your epic, months-long quest for wholeness. It may sometimes be dark and shadowy down there below, but almost always dark and shadowy in ways that will lead you to healing. (I will reiterate what I implied above: The underworld is NOT hell.)

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): I hope that working hard on togetherness will be a fun project for you in the coming months. To do it well, you must outgrow some habitual ways of doing friendship and intimacy. You will have to be imaginative and ingenious. Are you willing to believe that you do not yet know all there is to know about being a fantastic ally and partner? Are you ready to approach the arts of collaboration and cooperation as if enhancing your skills is the most important thing you can do? For the sake of your best selfish goals, be a brilliant teammate in 2024.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Each of us is a complex, kaleidoscopic work of art, whether or not we consciously approach our destiny in that spirit. Every day, we our destiny in that spirit. Every day, we use our creative imagination to craft new elements of the masterpiece known as the story of our life. Leos come by this fun project naturally, but you Sagittarians also have great potential to embrace it with glee and panache. I trust you will be especially keen on enjoying this sacred work in 2024. And right now, today and in the coming weeks, will be an excellent time to ramp up the scintillating drama.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): "I am against sex education in schools because sex is more fun when it's dirty and sinful." So said Capricorn author Florence King. I reject and rebel against that perverse declaration—and encourage you to disavow it, too, in 2024. In my astrological opinion, the coming months will be a favorable time to learn everything about sex and eros that you don't already know. I hope you will dive deep as you gather a rich array of teachings about how to enjoy the art of making love more than ever before. (Consider consulting tantric manuals like Margo Anand's The Art of Sexual Magic: Cultivating Sexual Energy to Transform Your Life.)

AQUARIUS (Jon. 20-Feb. 18): Singer-songwriter Tori Amos says she's sure she was burned for being a witch in a previous lifetime. I suspect most of us had past incarnations in which we were punished simply for being our beautiful selves. I bring this up, Aquarius, because I think 2024 will be a favorable time to get some healing from any ancient hurt like that. You will have a series of experiences that could help you recover from the illusion that being faithful to your truth is somehow wrong. Life will conspire with you to help you Life will conspire with you to help you reclaim more of the full audacity to be your gorgeous, genuine self.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): I believe 2024 will be one of the best years ever for your education. Your willingness and eagerness to learn will be at a peak. Your knack for attracting inspirational teachers will be excellent. It's likely you will be exceptionally curious and open to good influences. My advice is to be alert for lessons not just from obvious sources of lessons not just from obvious sources of wisdom and revelation, but also from unexpected founts. Don't be too sure you know where revelations and illumination might come from.

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The Weekly Crossword

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by Margie E. Burke

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"SHE SAVED MY LIFE"

Albuquerque resident Dawn R. had been experiencing the painful side effects of Peripheral Neuropathy. **"My feet and legs were extremely painful and my doctor told me there was nothing they could do. That I would have to take Gabapentin for the rest of my life."** Then she met Albuquerque's very own Dr. Andrea Brogdon

Peripheral Neuropathy is the pain, discomfort and numbness caused by nerve damage of the peripheral nervous system. Dawn explained that daily tasks like opening doors and using the bathroom were overwhelmingly painful. "How can you live for the next 30 years when you don't even want to get out of bed to do simple things?"

She was experiencing the burning, numbness, tingling and sharp pains that those suffering with neuropathy often describe. "The way that I would describe it, it's equivalent to walking on glass." Dawn hadn't worn socks in five years and was wearing shoes two sizes too big so that nothing would 'touch' her feet.

Unfortunately Dawn's story is all too familiar for over 3 million people in the U.S. suffering from Peripheral Neuropathy.

If you're unfortunate enough to be facing the same disheartening prognosis you're not sleeping at night because of the burning in your feet. You have difficulty walking, shopping or doing any activity for more than 30 minutes because of the pain. You're struggling with balance and living in fear that you might fall. Your doctor told you to 'just live with the pain' and you're taking medications that aren't working or have uncomfortable side effects.

Fortunately, four months ago Dawn

PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY? Call (505) 355-1984 to schedule a consultation!

read an article about Dr. Andrea Brogdon and the work she was doing to treat those suffering from Peripheral Neuropathy, without invasive surgeries or medications.

Dr. Brogdon, founder of AAIM | Albuquerque Acupuncture & Integrative Medicine, is using the tested science of acupuncture and a technology originally developed by NASA that assists in increasing blood flow and expediting recovery and healing to treat this debilitating disease.

"Now when I go to bed at night I don't have those shooting pains. I don't have that burning sensation. I don't have pain coming up my legs," Dawn enthusiastically describes life after receiving Dr. Brogdon's treatments. "I can wear socks and shoes!"

Dawn and her sister now operate a successful dog walking business, sometimes covering up to 5 miles a day.

"It's life altering. As far as I'm concerned Dr. Brogdon saved my life!"

Dr. Brogdon is helping the senior community using the most cutting edge and innovative integrative medicine. Specializing in chronic pain cases, specifically those that have been deemed 'hopeless' or 'untreatable', she consistently generates unparalleled results.

10400 Academy Rd NE Suite 210 Albuquerque, NM 87111 WWW.AAIM-ABQ.COM What was once a missing link in senior healthcare is now easily accessible to the residents of Albuquerque.

If you've missed too many tee times because of pain or you've passed on dancing because you're afraid of falling, it's time to call Dr. Brogdon and the staff at AAIM.

It's time you let your golden years BE GOLDEN!

Dr. Brogdon is now accepting new patients but only for a limited time. In an effort to protect her patients, both current and future, she has made the difficult decision to limit the number of patients seen in her clinic. Only 10 new neuropathy patients will be accepted before the end of December so call (505) 355-1984 now to schedule a consultation.



ALBUQUERQUE'S INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY NEWS