BernCo Economic Development

The Edge

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Bernalillo County....Open for Business

Commissioner
Debbie O'Malley
District 1

There are moments in life—professional or personal—that validate good intentions, hard work and commitment. One such moment for *Celina Aldaz-Grife* of Celina's Biscochitos happened at the Rio Grande Arts Festival last year. A gentleman tasted one of her biscochitos and his eyes welled up. Celina and her mother, Mona Morris, both of whom were working in the booth at the time, then learned why he became so emotional. His mother had passed away recently and he thought that he would never again taste the biscochito that he had known all his life. Celina's biscochito gave him back that memory.

This is what brings the greatest joy to Celina and fuels her passion—sharing the personal experience with her customers. Celina, who uses her paternal grandmother's recipe, which is authentic in that it still includes brandy and lard, likes connecting the dots between families and heritage. "We make our biscochitos to honor and reflect our tradition. Our cookies are hand-rolled and cut by hand. It does cost us more time and money to do it this way," Celina concedes, "but the result is worth it and our customers appreciate our efforts."

ONE COOKIE LED TO ANOTHER AND ANOTHER

Celina started her business the way many people in food do—making biscochitos for family and friends for the holidays. Then family and friends began sharing her biscochitos with their families and friends and suddenly, a business opportunity presented. It started as a seasonal operation in 2010 and so it continued for a few years while her customer base expanded. Then, in 2013, there was a noticeable shift: The phone began to ring with orders for throughout the year, not just during the holidays. So in early 2014 when her real estate license renewal came in the mail, Celina realized that it was time to truly decide which way her bakery endeavor was going. She chose the biscochito over 15 years in home sales. She hasn't looked back.

Celina Aldaz-Grife
and mother, Mona Morris,
at Celina's Biscochitos

Today Celina's Biscochitos has both baking space and a store front in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque.The operation moved there the summer of 2014 after spending its first few years at the Mixing Bowl, the shared community commercial kitchen located in the South Valley Economic Development Center. The change was necessary so that the company could expand its production with the ability to bake whenever and as often as needed. Making that move was a defining moment for the company and the results prove that it was the right move—the company is in the black.

While Celina uses her grandmother's recipe, she isn't tentative about adding new flavors and flare to her biscochitos. There is always the traditional offering complemented by many more, including red chile, green chile and pecan, lemon, chocolate chip and apple walnut. In addition, Celina's biscochitos can come in different shapes to celebrate special events. These New Mexico cookies have been cut into footballs, baby feet, hearts and even dogs! The biscochitos are well received across the customer base, which includes individuals, corporate accounts, wholesale contracts with local groceries and restaurants, and Internet sales. Celina also private labels and has plans to further develop relationships with large accounts going forward.

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UNDERSTANDING THE NUANCES OF BUSINESS AND PALATE

Business though is not always as easy as pie. Celina doesn't shy away from the hard questions regarding the competitiveness of the cookie business or the challenges of protecting a brand. "There are many, many bakers of biscochitos in New Mexico. The recipes vary," Celina explains, "and so do the tastes. We make a very traditional cookie. Some people have attempted to duplicate our product, but it's not that easy to do, nor should it be," she asserts.

"There are lots of steps and details that create the final product—ours is achieved by staying true to our recipe and our production. We don't have a high profit margin, which does affect our ability to market to caterers and some retailers," Celina acknowledges. "But we hold our lines because we like the authenticity of the cookie and loyalty to our brand wins out much of the time," she says.

While remaining dedicated to the recipe and the actual making of the cookie, Celina also recognizes that her biscochito is not for everyone. "People have preferences and dietary observances or restrictions," she acknowledges, "and we respect that. That's why I have a small network of other bakers to whom I can refer those people when they call me. I want people to enjoy biscochitos however they can. If my cookie isn't for them, then I help them find a baker whose cookie is. We all succeed when people work together," she explains.

To savor a Celina's biscochito is easily accomplished. You can go to the bakery, order online, or find the cookies at Kellers, Vigil's Beef Jerky or Frontier Mart in Corrales, to name a few. In addition, Celina's is a constant presence at local festivals. Look for Celina's at Coffee and Chocolate, the local wine festivals, in Santa Fe at the Plaza during Spanish Market and Indian Market, and more. A full listing is on the website: ***www.celinasbiscochitos.com.***

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

Celina's Biscochitos is a family tradition in terms of the recipe and the business team. David Grife, Celina's husband, oversees the financial and logistical part of the business while Celina is in charge of day-to-day operations, marketing, sales and long-range planning. Celina's mother, Mona, gets her hands dirty with the baking, working with the baking staff, and is in charge of making sure that the bakery is immaculate. The bakery joke that Celina shares is that the entire bakery has to be "Mona clean."

When asked *what's next*?, Celina laughs and says "everything. We're considering so many ideas and business collaborations right now, my head spins." That said, she is quick to point out that the business will continue to do what has brought it to today—staying true to a proven recipe for success while honoring family and heritage.

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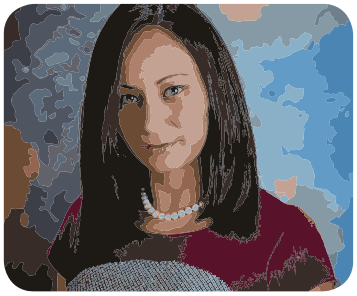
Perspective



If you don't drive your business, you will be driven out of business.

B. C. Forbes

We are often asked, "How can you help our company?" There are many ways in which we can help small businesses and while one size does not fit all, here are some of the offerings.

Bernalillo County can act as a business advocate by providing financial incentives, programming and other opportunities. A few examples include **IRBs** (Industrial Revenue bonds), a tax abatement tool, **PABs** (Private Activity bonds) that enable privately-owned public purpose projects to take advantage of tax-exempt financing, and **LEDA** (Local Economic Development Act) that can be used to support infrastructure improvement that results in economic development-based jobs. All of these vehicles have their own particular set of criteria and we are happy to sit down with you and define the fine print.

The State of New Mexico Economic Development Department also has **JTIP** (Job Training Incentive Program), one of the most generous training incentive programs in the country. Funding both classroom and on-the-job training for newly-created jobs in expanding or relocating businesses for up to six months, its reimbursement allowance is between 50-75 percent of employee wages. Also, customized training at a New Mexico public educational institution may qualify for reimbursement.

Another program to help businesses is the (Work Opportunity Tax Credit) **WOTC**. Administered by the Department of Workforce Solutions, businesses participating in this federal tax credit program may earn $2,400 up to $9,000 per qualified employee. The employees eligible for this program are from the nine population groups identified as in need of funding and retaining. Also, there are small business loans through the (Small Business Administration) **SBA** and abundance of free business education programming available throughout the county and state.

There are many possibilities and opportunities; it's just a matter of carefully examining your needs and determining qualifying factors. Please contact us to schedule a meeting to explore what could be best for you and your company.

Sincerely,

Mayling Armijo, Director
Economic Development Department

BERNALILLO COUNTY
WE'RE MORE THAN YOU THINK

Around the County

s

Commissioner Debbie O'Malley, District 1, listens attentively to **Lumnije Ajdini**, general manager of Alliance of Kosovar Business during discussions with the Kosovo Women's Delegation that visited here in May. This meeting, coordinated by the American Chamber of Commerce, was an opportunity to share American practices and efforts with business women and educators from the Republic of Kosovo. Members of the BernCo Economic Development team attended the meeting as well. Left of Commissioner O'Malley are **Mayling Armijo,** *Economic Development director* and **Marcos Gonzales**, *Economic Development section manager.*

Commissioner Art De La Cruz, District 2, pictured here is being interviewed at the *Building The Bridge to Your Future Job Expo* job fair held in March at the Five Points Events Center. More than 200 people attended the event that featured more than 35 area companies. The event was two days: First day was job prep, held at the Albuquerque Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. It offered interview workshops and resume writing. The second day was the job fair portion.

Commissioner Maggie Hart Stebbins, District 3, stands with artist, Sherri Burr, in front of one of the offerings from her exhibit, **"Alaska to Albuquerque."** This exhibit, the 35th in a series that highlights the talent and creativity of District 3 artists, was on display through June in the county's offices on the 10th floor of the Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Government Center. These exhibits share the talent and demonstrate the creative economy of Bernalillo County with the public.

Commissioner Lonnie Talbert, District 4, speaks with Shelley Carney, of Streaming New Mexico during an interview at Exhib-it's 8th Annual B2B Expo Albuquerque networking event. It was held at the Manuel Lujan Building at the state fair grounds in June.

Commissioner Wayne A. Johnson, District 5, speaks to attendees at the Grant Writing for Nonprofits Workshop, which he sponsored. More than 170 people attended this free event, which was designed to share best practices. Tsiporah Nephesh, program coordinator for the Center for Nonprofit Excellence United Way of Central New Mexico , was the featured speaker. The four-hour workshop was held at the Keshet Idea and Innovation Center and included a networking and funders' fair.

Film Corner

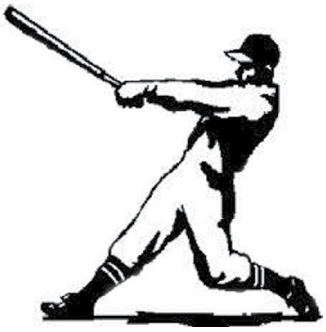
by Amanda Colburn, Special Events Coordinator

The film industry is completing its transition from winter to summer productions. Bernalillo County worked with two significant productions and wrapped up permitting through early summer 2015. Scouting for fall filming has just started. Productions that have wrapped include the TV series, *Night Shift* and movie, *War on Everyone*.

Night Shift is an American medical drama series starring Jill Flint and Eoin Macken.

Working to Hit Home Runs

by Marcos Gonzales, Section Manager



Our job is to help Bernalillo County businesses score all possible runs in terms of starting, maintaining and/or expanding business. We provide assistance through executing commissioner-sponsored business summits and one-on-one business conversations with business owners (new or existing). Here are the stats for the second quarter:

36 Business Conversations

Commissioner Wayne Johnson, District 5
Grant Writing for Nonprofits Workshop, May 29, 2015; 178 participants

Overview

by Daniel J. Beaman, Special Projects Coordinator

UNM Economic Development Forum: Economic Development staff attended a special meeting of the Economic Development Forum (EDF) held at the UNM Science & Technology Park auditorium. A presentation was given by David Green of **Perkins+Will** regarding the Innovate ABQ Development Framework which was approved by the UNM Board of Regents at its March 9, 2015 meeting.

Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan: Economic Development staff attended a special focus group for a project to update the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan and to integrate and simplify the city's zoning and subdivision regulations to implement that plan.

Salt Missions Trail Scenic Byway: Salt Missions Trail Scenic Byway signs have been made and will be delivered to the state Department of Transportation for installation.

Urban Waters Federal Partnership / Middle Rio Grande Watershed: Middle Rio Grande Urban Waters Full Partnership: Economic Development staff participated in a reconvening of federal, state, tribal, local and stakeholder entities involved in this partnership. The agenda included updating partners on the status of existing projects, discussion on future collaboration opportunities for the three partnership themes (water, economic development, and environmental education).

Flagship Food Group Hard Hat Tour: Economic Development staff joined State, County and City officials in meeting with the Flagship Food Group, which hosted a Hard Hat Tour. Flagship Food Group shared real-time updates on the progress of its new plant and detailed information about its new partnership with the State tourism office to promote the New Mexico True campaign.

Greater Albuquerque Housing Partnership: Economic Development staff met with the new **Executive Director of the Greater Albuquerque Housing Partnership (GAHP), Felipe Rael.** The GAHP is dedicated to the revitalization of Albuquerque's urban neighborhoods through developing quality affordable and market-rate housing opportunities, and providing a full range of programs and services that encourage and support individuals and families.

Innovation Central Website: Economic Development staff attended a *Sneak Peek Presentation* to see the downtown innovation district represented digitally. It is the latest initiative to increase opportunities for success, resulting in a self-sustaining ecosystem that fosters job creation and economic mobility.

Innovate ABQ MOU: Economic Development staff presented a motion to the Board of County Commissioners to approve a Memorandum of Understanding with INNOVATE ABQ, INC.

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