

# El Diario Sin Nombre

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## The Taos ISD Office is Really "Cooking"



Denise Jeantete, a Taos ISD line supervisor, helps pass out food samples following a cooking demonstration.

Just giving families a food stamp EBT card and sending them on their merry way doesn't ensure that they will soon be eating better. This is why for the past ten years the department has supported funding USDA's Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) Programs here in New Mexico.

About \$5 million in state-federal funds are spent each year in FSNE

programs that include the Kids Cook Program in Albuquerque, Cooking With Kids in Santa Fe and a similar school-based program in Las Cruces. Each program teaches school kids the value of home cooking, from both nutritional and economic standpoints. The adult FSNE program, called ICAN or Ideas for Cooking and Nutrition, includes cooking classes offered in community centers and Head Start facilities for food stamp-eligible people. To earn a certificate people must attend a series of cooking sessions.

"The traditional FSNE programs have been administered through New Mexico State University (NMSU)," said Mary Oleske, Bureau Chief for the ISD's Food and Nutrition Services. "This year we are funding two pilot programs through the Department of Health to explore innovative ways to increase client participation in nutrition education."

One drawback to the traditional FSNE cooking classes (that may affect participation) is that students only get to cook enough food to sample the fruits of their labors after they're done cooking. USDA, FSNE rules do not allow the programs to provide enough food in the classes for take home dinners, nor does it provide any of the raw ingredients for participants to take home with them to cook later.

Over the past year, Income Support Division (ISD) staff have worked with Patty Morris of the Department of Health to develop a more student-friendly approach to teaching cooking. What they came up with improves the FSNE program in two

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## The New Southwest Albuquerque ISD Office has Room to Grow

"Our new office location must be good because our caseload has increased noticeably since we moved here in December," said Rose Ortega-Garcia, ISD Line Manger. She works in the newest ISD office built in one of the oldest communities in the state:

Albuquerque's rural South Valley. It is also the largest HSD office in the city, stretching out to over 35,000 square feet.

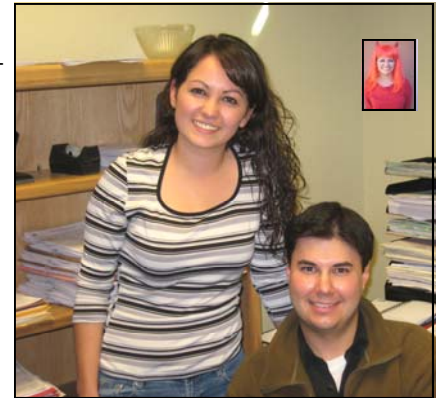
The new ISD office (located at 3280 Bridge Blvd., SW) is not only roomier but it's less of a commute for most of the 65 staff working there. "I like the fact that we're next to a public health office and a public library," said Ortega-Garcia. "The library can be an excellent resource center for our clients, especially during this time of year, when it's tax time."

The ISD new office was built way out in the sprawling West Mesa, south of Central Avenue. The old SW office, a state-owned building, for some reason was built under the shadow of a large bluff that soon became dotted with homes. When it rained hard flood waters would run down from the higher bluff right into the back doors of the old SW ISD office.

"I like it here much better because we all have our own office, no one has to work in the hallway, and we haven't had a flood causing us to relocate to other offices," said Amy Lopez who is a ISD Clerk.

Southwest ISD FAA Jerome Griego, who may have missed his calling as a novelist, agreed with the others, saying, "The color of the paint has a translucent effect that brings a spark of life to a government building."

Recently retired Belinda Perea, who grew up in the South Valley and worked in the Southwest ISD office most of her whole 25-year career, said, "When I was growing up the spot where this office now is was once my playground."



SW ISD FAA's Vanessa Ortiz and Jerome Griego believe their clients like the new office better than the old office.



**Patty Morris (left) would like to expand cooking demonstrations to other Income Support Division offices.**

(Continued from page 1) significant ways: Cooking demonstrations lasting about 15 minutes are offered in an ISD office where walk-in participants are welcome; and the students can consume a hearty portion and take home enough ingredients to cook their meal at home.

The cooking demonstration is being done at the Taos ISD office. Taos is widely known for its fine restaurants, so as an additional public service participants are invited to attend a series of free cooking classes taught by local volunteer chefs at the Taos County Economic Development Corporation.

The program's costs are minimal because the St. James Food Pantry and The Food Depot donate most of the food. "Our cooking program is going great," said Delfino Torres, Taos County ISD Director. "Not only are they showing clients how to prepare meals, they're actually giving them the recipes with the nutritional analysis and food bags with all the ingredients to take back home and prepare the same meal for themselves or their families."

When asked if was unusual for an ISD office to sponsor cooking classes for its clients, Torres said, "Our staff helps get clients from the waiting room to the cooking demonstration and all participating clients are given a hot meal for attending the class. Quite a few people said that it was the first hot meal they have had for quite a while."

Dept. of Health and local workers set up each cooking demonstration using a portable kitchen. "Patty Morris deserves a lot of credit for coming up with this idea," said Oleske. "We hope to expand demonstrations to other ISD offices and promote collaborations with local community kitchens and food pantries to work with our food stamp eligible populations."

"The response was better than expected," said Morris, after her first trial run at the Taos ISD office. "Almost all tried and liked the lentil sample, despite it being early in the morning. Nearly half attended the cooking demonstration. In addition to demonstrating how to cook the macaroni-lentil stew, we answered all kinds of questions from cooking atole [an Hispanic hot, sweet drink thickened with a powder made from corn dough and sometimes flavored with crushed fruit, sugar, or honey] to using rabbit bones for broth."

Oleske likes cooking herself, but she admits that she's never used rabbit bones in her dishes. "The reality is that the traditional homemaker is rare in society today," she said. "Our younger families are not learning how to cook. Let's hope that these classes will help keep the tradition and the benefits of cooking at home alive awhile longer."

## Coming Full Circle

Our new Southwest Albuquerque ISD County Director may very well end his long career with government in the same spot where he began it: at the Southwest (SW) ISD office. Twenty-eight-years ago, a bright-eyed David Otero got his first job as a caseworker in the old SW ISD office. He swiftly moved up the ranks of ISD, moving over to Quality Control (QC) and then QC supervisor.

With some work experience under his belt, Otero left the Human Services Department for greener pastures: first with the federal government and then with the NM Taxation and Revenue Department's Motor Vehicle's Division, where he worked for 12 years. Now he's back in the Income Support Division. "It is different here now than when I left in 1982," he said. "Of course in those days we didn't have a computer, so everything was done on paper and back then we had to do home visits. I remember it always being very busy here."

Otero noted the work in MVD offices has certain similarities as working in income support offices. "Both serve the public a lot – you can be two-years-old and get an ID card at MVD."

Perhaps these two customer-heavy working environments (MVD and ISD) have made Otero comfortable working directly with people. "I am a people person," he said. "Do I get involved with clients? Sure, if they call me I look into it and get back to them."

Otero was born in Taos, NM but he grew up in Española where he went to the same high school as ISD Director Fred Sandoval. "I was there a little before Fred," said Otero. That's probably a good thing because back then – maybe now too – seniors high school classmen routinely played tricks on their younger classmates and when the younger classmates grew up some didn't forget.

Otero does have the same customer service goals as the ISD Director. "We want to be the best possible office to serve our customers. If we can do this properly and accurately that would be my goal as county director," he said. Otero added that he has always been a big advocate for quality customer service. "I'm always preaching it," he said. "We should not only do this for our clients but for our other customers as well, whomever they may be."

The challenge is there for Otero and his staff because the Southwest ISD office for years – maybe even when Otero first worked there – has had the highest food stamp caseload of any ISD office in the state. Today they're at 7,228 cases.



**David Ortega is also an avid sports fan and holds hard-to-get Lobo Men's Basketball season tickets.**

## HSD Works With Secretary of State's Office to Launch Identity Protection Program

Victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking may now sign up for the Confidential Address Program (CAP) to keep their whereabouts secret from abusers. On Feb. 28, a spokesperson from the Secretary of State's office briefed child support enforcement staff on how CAP works and how CSED offices can help, "We gathered information about similar programs in other states and picked the best of the best to model here. Now we are creating public awareness of our program here."

Some of the program's highlights include a substitute mailing address, no jury duty requirement, enrollment as an absentee voter and an ID card for all family members. Participants will present the ID card to state or local government officials when requesting services. This will alert officials to the fact that the family is in the CAP and follow up mailings should go to the address listed on the ID card. "All participants' mailing addresses are the same P.O. Box," said the spokesperson. "The mail will be sent to the P.O. Box, and then our office will make sure it is forwarded to the confidential address."

"I thought the presentation they gave was very informative and will provide an important resource for our customers that are victims of domestic violence," said Leslie Conrad, the CSED Social and Community Services Coordinator for the North Albuquerque office.

Child support offices already have a non-disclosure program for clients requesting anonymity, so the CAP program adds teeth to it. "We are planning to become an approved registration site to help victims or potential victims sign up for CAP," said Conrad. "I have already posted information about the program in the lobby here. I am also going to prepare a display with CAP information to be used during our in-house hearings."

There are about 200 custodial parents using the Albuquerque North CSED office non-disclosure option for their child support case. So far 20 people have signed up for the new CAP, according to the Secretary of State's office, but thousands more are expected to take advantage of the program.

Sometimes however even the best-intentioned programs have unintended consequences. The Secretary of State spokesperson told CSED staff that in another state one parent used the program for the wrong purpose: The parent took her child from the legal custody of the other parent then immediately signed up for the confidential address program. To help avoid this type of problem here the Secretary of State's office will require some type of documentation to verify the existence of a domestic violence threat.



Albuquerque CSED Social Community Service Coordinators Leslie Conrad, left, and Carmelita Aragon listens to Confidential Address Program coordinators from the Sec. of State's office. Also pictured is CSLA Tony Lucero.

## *Valentine's Day Brings Hundreds of Roses and Smiles to HSD Offices*



These MAD ladies were all smiles on Valentine's Day. From left, Ilene Royal, Felicia Halford and Dina Lopez, top, Yvonne Montañó and Melisa Lopez. See page four for more HSD smiles.

## Others in HSD Who Received Valentine's Day Roses

From left, Sarah Roybal, ASD (she only wanted the flowers in the picture); Annette Montoya, OHR; Nena Morton, CSED; Brenda Trujillo, OIG; and Claire Romero, OOS . Tom Chepucavage, DOIT, didn't get flowers, but he was just as happy with an old-fashioned ice cream sundae for Valentine's



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March 17 is Saint Patrick's Day. Which HSD office will boast the best-tasting corned-beef and cabbage?

