



## WCA's Risk Reduction Program helps Businesses Improve Employee Safety

By Diana Sandoval-Tapia

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### MEETING NOTICE:

The Advisory Council on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement will meet 2:30 p.m., Thursday, May 2, at 2410 Centre SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. See <https://workerscomp.nm.gov/Advisory-Council> for more information..

### HOLIDAY CLOSURE

The Workers' Compensation offices in Albuquerque and all its field offices will be closed on the following upcoming holidays:

**Memorial Day,  
Monday, May 27**  
**Juneteenth,  
Wednesday, June 19**

The New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration (WCA) recently renewed its focus on its Risk Reduction Program (RRP), referred to in Section 52-1-6.2 of the Workers' Compensation Act as the "extra hazardous" program. Businesses are identified through a variety of tools as "extra hazardous" if they have reported an unusually large number of work-place injuries. Companies' experience modification rates, known commonly as "e-mods," are used by their insurers to assess that company's risk for work-place accidents or injuries, and can ultimately affect the cost of the company's workers' compensation insurance premiums. In the workers' compensation industry, an e-mod rate of 1.0 is considered average. When a company's e-mod rate begins to creep above 1.0, it might indicate unsafe working conditions, or be due to a spike in on-the-job injuries. The WCA's safety consultants use reported e-mod rates as a gauge of whether they may need to step in and provide some assistance.

Nine businesses were enrolled in the WCA's RRP in 2023, with three successfully completing the process. And so far in 2024, one more business was enrolled and one more successfully completed the program.

"The Safety Bureau's Risk Reduction Program was rejuvenated by establishing a comprehensive risk assessment process to identify employers with a high accident frequency, experience modifier, or severity of injuries caused by accidents. This new risk assessment process helps identify those employers that would benefit by being placed on our Risk Reduction Program," explained Safety Bureau Chief Paul Martinez. "The program's objective is to assist em-



*Sergio Bermudez, owner of El Mezquite Market (left) and WCA Safety Consultant Joel Mejia*

ployers with injury and illness prevention, hazard identification, mitigation strategies, implementation of hazards and control measures to reduce work injuries and illnesses in the workplace. Although employers use various strategies and approaches to deal with risk, some eliminate them, and others can only minimize or reduce risk in the workplace."

If a business has been identified as having an increased risk or high frequency of injuries or their e-mod rate has escalated above the average for that particular industry, the business is notified of enrollment in the WCA's RRP. The company must receive a safety consultation and inspection within 30 days of notification. Inspections can be done by WCA safety consultants, the company's insurer, or another third party safety professional consultant. Businesses in the RRP cannot conduct their own safety evaluations while enrolled in the program. Following the consultation and walkthrough inspection, a report detailing all risks and hazards is issued and the company then has 30 days to develop an action plan to address issues identified at inspection. Six months from the approval

# CNM Hosts Third Annual Women in Trades Summit



*Attendees and exhibitor booths at the third annual Women in Trades Summit (left and above), at CNM March 22, 2024.*

*Event Keynote Speaker Angie Simon, first ever female president of SMACNA (below)*

By Diana Sandoval-Tapia

An idea that grew out of a need for skilled labor during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic – the “Women in Trades Summit” – recently held its third event at Central New Mexico (CNM) Community College March 22, 2024. The event has grown steadily from the first year, 2022, during which organizers capped attendance at 150, with 17 employers. This year, there were 500 registrants and 50 industry partners, boasted Sharon Gordon-Moffit, interim dean of CNM’s School of Skilled Trades and Arts.

The idea was originally the brainchild of New Mexico Rep. Pamela Herndon (D-Albuquerque), learning of the shortage of skilled workers in various trades, “women are the answer,” she said.

According to Gordon-Moffit at CNM, enrollment of women in the various disciplines of the School of Skilled Trades and Arts has grown by about 14 percent in the last decade. “CNM is committed to training a skilled workforce of the future to create a pipeline of women in trades,” she said. Herself a nurse of 22 years, Gordon-Moffit attended the former Technical-Vocational Institute (now CNM) welding program because she wanted to build a go-cart for her young son; and today is now the interim dean.

This year’s keynote speaker was Angie Simon, the first ever female national president of Sheet Metal and Air Conditioners National Association (SMACNA) an international trade association representing 3,500 signatory contracting firms with more than 100 chapters throughout the United States,



Canada, Australia and Brazil. Simon has been a leader in the California Bay Area construction industry for many years, becoming the president/CEO of Western Allied Mechanical, a multi-million dollar mechanical contracting firm. Simon is also the co-founder of the Heavy Metal Summer Experience, a summer camp that brings in underserved high school students and teaches them about opportunities that sheet metal and piping industries offer. The program is entering its fourth year and has grown from two contractors and 28 students to nearly 50 locations across the US and Canada, with about 700 students.

## **NM Workers’ Comp. Adm. Quarterly Bulletin**

Robert E. Doucette, Jr., Director  
Diana Sandoval-Tapia, Public Information Officer

The Bulletin is electronically published in January, April, July and October by the Public Information Office of the New Mexico Workers’ Compensation Administration. The Bulletin is available free of charge. Send changes of e-mail address and requests to receive the Bulletin to Diana Sandoval-Tapia in the Public Information Office, New Workers’ Compensation Administration, [WCA-PIO@state.nm.us](mailto:WCA-PIO@state.nm.us). Suggestions for articles are welcome. Call Diana Sandoval-Tapia at (505) 841-6052. Recent issues of the Quarterly Bulletin can be viewed on the Internet at <https://workerscomp.nm.gov/NMWCA-Publications>.

## **What is the Advisory Council?**

The Advisory Council on Workers’ Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement is a task force created by statute, comprised of six members, three representing workers and three representing employers. The primary role of the Council is to advise the governor and legislature on the status of the workers’ compensation system in New Mexico. The Advisory Council is required to meet at least twice annually. Scheduled meetings of the Council are announced on the WCA website, <https://www.workerscomp.nm.gov/Advisory-Council>.

## Manager of the Quarter Leigh Martinez to Retire After 28-year Career at the WCA

Leigh Martinez was a newlywed, married just a year, when she came to work at the New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration (WCA) in 1996. She left her job as the financial manager at Sandia Casino to become a financial auditor in the WCA's Self Insurance and Audit Bureau, where she audited self-insurance groups, pools and administered the Guarantee Fund.

In 2013, Martinez moved over to the WCA's Economic Research & Policy Bureau, becoming an economist, where she says she was able to flex her wings a bit doing more analytical and policy work. And in 2018, with a change of administration in the Governor's office, Martinez decided to submit her resume for consideration for an exempt position, for which she was selected in December 2019, becoming executive deputy director. "I always saw a path forward for myself here and thought that it was a good time to get back into management," Martinez said.

Three months into her new managerial role, the global COVID-19 pandemic hit and management at the WCA and all state government agencies had to navigate uncharted waters,

trying to figure out how to continue to provide the services of the agency while sending employees to work from home. "Luckily, we didn't have any new programs to administer, but rather long-established, consistent work policies in place both for staff and customers," she said. "I saw my role as one to help provide stability."

After the pandemic became more manageable and staff were brought back to the office, Martinez even had a four-month stint serving as acting director. And for the past year, while the WCA director has been overseeing two agencies, it's been Martinez at the WCA who has continued to provide the daily consistency appreciated by staff, who nominated her as "manager of the quarter," for what it turns out will be her last quarter at the WCA. Martinez plans to retire at the end of April with nearly 28 years of service.

"After 28 years, it's time to give someone else a chance to grow and share their ideas," Martinez said. "Stability is great, but new thoughts and ideas are good too."

While she made her career at the WCA, Martinez, along with her husband



*Executive Deputy Director Leigh Martinez*

of 29 years, Thomas, had and raised two boys, Kyle and Jared, who are now 25 and 21, respectively. Kyle works in cybersecurity at Sandia National Laboratory; and Jared is studying mechanical engineering at New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology in Socorro, N.M., aiming to eventually become a rocket scientist.

"It's been a great career," Martinez said. "I've had a variety of things to do, never boring, never a lot of down time. I had great work-life balance while my boys were little. And now it's just time."

## WCA Enforcement Officer Erik Tanner Named Employee of the Quarter

When the WCA's Enforcement Bureau had a member of its team out on medical leave, Enforcement Officer Erik Tanner filled in for her and helped with creating files and preparing all the paperwork for filing and for hearings. "Erik additionally took a course which is as difficult to pass as a section on the Multistate Bar Exam that lawyers have to pass in order to become attorneys," said Tanner's supervisor, Kelly Villanueva, Enforcement bureau chief. On each day of a recent week, Tanner went to a testing center and tested on one section of the Certified Fraud Examiner test, and on April 4, 2024, he successfully completed the last part of the four-section test and

passed each section with the required score of 80 percent or more, making him a certified fraud examiner. Tanner has sorted out all kinds of difficult cases even before he became a CFE. He obtains complicated evidence, sifts through that evidence, and produces an analysis after he has processed all the information. "In addition, Erik has talent for getting along with all his coworkers, maintains respectful relationships with outside customers, and provides great service to the WCA as a whole," Villanueva continued.

Of his recent recognition, Tanner said, "I can only say how honored I am to be selected as employee of the quarter. I have touched base with almost every



*Enforcement Officer Erik Tanner*

department within the WCA and am well aware of how many dedicated and deserving individuals there are."

Tanner came to the WCA in February 2022, from the New Mexico Corrections Department. He was previously the director of Valencia County Animal Control.

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of the action plan, a final follow-up inspection is performed by the WCA safety consultant to ensure businesses in the RRP successfully mitigated all findings and implemented any required safety measures. Once companies are no longer in the RRP and no longer identified as "extra hazardous," they may begin to conduct their own safety inspections. The WCA's Safety Bureau issues businesses who have successfully completed the RRP a letter notifying the company's insurance company as well as a certificate of completion signed by the WCA's director.

One business owner that recently completed the RRP, Sergio Bermudez of El Mezquite Market, LLC, was thankful for the assistance of the WCA's RRP and Safety Consultant Joel Mejia. Bermudez, who now owns and operates four Albuquerque locations, opened his first store in 1998 in Albuquerque's South Valley. Today, he boasts 209 employees, "and growing." But in May of last year,

the WCA's Safety team noticed some concerning safety trends at the grocery stores, specifically an increase in hand injuries occurring in the stores' butcher shops. When Mejia reached out to Bermudez about the alarming frequency of these injuries, many of which were reported in 2020, Bermudez explained that those injuries occurred during the thick of the COVID-19 global pandemic when dine-restaurants were closed and there were limits to numbers of individuals allowed to enter grocery stores at any given time. Bermudez said many of his employees were working 60-plus hours per week to keep up with the unusual demand and were fatigued.

After El Mezquite Market was enrolled in the RRP, Mejia worked with Bermudez and his workers' compensation insurer, HUB International, to implement better safety measures, to include written training manuals on everything from machinery operations to chemicals handling, provided in both English and Spanish for the market's

many bilingual employees. Additionally, Bermudez centralized the meat processor at his store located at Central and San Pedro, installed a partition and separated the functions of counter ordering and meat processing so that employees who are cutting and packaging meat are no longer distracted by also having to take orders at the counter.

Bermudez said that while he was initially reluctant about his business being enrolled in the RRP, he soon found it was "more helpful than anything else," and that he greatly appreciated the information and resources that came his way via participation in the program. "Joel helped us to keep track of things, like postings, and showed us how to do trainings," Bermudez said of the WCA's Mejia. With the changes Bermudez has implemented, like lowering hours worked and separating functions to eliminate distractions, there has not been one injury in his meat market, and he's thankful for that; "the program is amazing," he said.

## New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration Offices:

### MAIN OFFICE

#### Location & Main Mail Address:

2410 Centre Ave. SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87106-4190

#### Alternate Mailing Address:

PO Box 27198  
Albuquerque, NM 87125-7198

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Phone: (505) 841-6000  
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1-800-255-7965  
Fax Clerk of the Court:  
(505) 841-6060  
Director's Fax: (505) 841-6009

### Regional Offices

#### Farmington:

2700 Farmington Ave., Bldg.  
E, Ste.2  
Farmington, NM 87401  
Phone: (505) 599-9746  
In state toll-free phone:  
1-800-568-7310  
Fax: (505) 599-9753

#### Hobbs:

James M. Murray Building  
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1-800-934-2450

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2407 W. Picacho, Ste. D  
Las Cruces, NM 88007  
Phone: (575) 524-6246  
In state toll-free phone:  
1-800-870-6826  
Fax: (575) 524-6249

#### Las Vegas:

32 NM 65  
Las Vegas, NM 87701  
Phone: (505) 454-9251  
In state toll-free phone:  
1-800-281-7889  
Fax: (505) 454-9248

#### Roswell:

Penn Plaza Building  
400 N. Pennsylvania Ave., Ste. 425  
Roswell, NM 88201  
Phone: (575) 623-3781  
In state toll-free phone:  
1-866-311-8587  
Fax: (575) 623-0078

#### Santa Fe:

Aspen Plaza  
1596 Pacheco, St. #202  
Santa Fe, NM 87505  
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**WCA Helpline-Hotline: (toll free in New Mexico)**

1-866-WORKOMP 1-866-967-5667

**WCA Website:**

<https://workerscomp.nm.gov>