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MEETING NOTICE:

The Advisory Council on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement will meet at 2 p.m., Thursday, February 16, 2022, at 614 Don Gaspar in Santa Fe, NM. See https://workerscomp.nm.gov/Advisory-Council for more information..



Director Doucette Marks One-Year Anniversary

By Aileen O'Catherine

Robert E. Doucette, Jr. began his directorship of the New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration (WCA) on December 6, 2021. In looking back at his first year's accomplishments as agency director, Doucette has executed a number of his key goals, and plans to build momentum in the coming year.

A top priority was to revisit the agency's administrative rules and provide updates where needed, as the rules had not been updated since 2017. An announcement within weeks of his appointment specified a timeline which included input from staff and stakeholders. Public meetings were scheduled over a period of months to solicit comments, suggestions and ideas. WCA General Counsel worked on the suggestions and drafted rules for feedback. Final rule determinations were announced in December 2022, and the rule changes became effective January 1, 2023.

Changes affected seven parts of the administrative rules governing the agency's work under Title II, Chapter 4 of the New Mexico Administrative Code. Changes were made in the general provisions, claims resolution, enforcement, judicial selection, payments for health care services, the Uninsured Employers' Fund and controlled insurance plans. Each area is integral to the workers' compensation system, and the rule updates will now help streamline the system.

"It's important to update rules and processes so the system works more effectively," Doucette said. "I am happy so many gave input on these important processes."

Another major goal was to ensure WCA staff were fairly compensated. An equitable compensation scheme would both attract workers to the agency and help retain current

staff. A WCA human resources specialist compared salary levels of internal staff with those in the same positions in other state agencies. Several staff members were provided compensation increases when it was found they were underpaid. "More competitive compensation should not only help the WCA attract the best candidates, but goes a long way in staff retention," said Doucette. The push to fully staff each of the agency's six field offices was also successful. For the first time in a long time, all the agency's field offices are fully staffed. The Albuquerque office has gone from 79.5% of positions filled to 87.7% of positions filled in the past year.

Doucette reviewed agency judge caseloads and found that an increase in cases in the southeastern area of the state warranted a new judge position. Las Cruces will now have a judge to handle cases there, with an appointment expected to be announced soon. The agency normally has five judges based in Albuquerque who travel to other parts of the state on occasion, in addition to administering teleconference hearings. The new position in Las Cruces is an exempt position, with an initial one-year review, with possible reappointment to a subsequent five-year term.

The agency's personnel structure was also reorganized. A new position, that of Court and Programs Administrator, oversees programs integral to operations that deal with the public. (see page 2). The new position eliminates the need for a second exempt (governor appointed) deputy director position. The new post will allow agency staff the opportunity to work toward obtaining a top management position without leaving the agency, which should help to maintain motivated staff.

Heather Jordan Appointed New Court and Programs Administrator

By Aileen O’Catherine

Heather Jordan stepped into her role as the WCA’s first Court and Programs Administrator on November 26, 2022. The position is a new one for the agency. Jordan will oversee several of the agency’s essential functions in the new position, and will manage the bureaus of medical cost containment, safety, employer compliance, mediation, ombudsman and clerk of the court.

“I am excited for this new opportunity and to work with senior leadership here at the WCA in improving processes and efficiencies,” Jordan said of the promotion.

Jordan had served since 2015 as

the WCA’s Clerk of the Court and custodian of records. Prior to her time at the agency, she worked for 20 years at the Bernalillo County Detention Center, overseeing inmate records, booking functions and visitations. Jordan earned a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice in 2014.

“Heather brings a lot of experience to this new position,” said Director Robert Doucette, Jr. “She also brings a strong and unique skill set to the table, and I am very confident that she will serve the agency well in her new capacity.”

The new Court and Programs Administrator position replaces to



Court and Programs Administrator Heather Jordan

a large extent the Executive Deputy Director of Operations, which was an exempt position. The Court and Programs Administrator is an agency staff position.

Employee of the Quarter Award

By Aileen O’Catherine

The WCA Employee of the Quarter for the fourth quarter of 2022 is Human Resource Specialist Stephanie Rice. Rice has been with the WCA for over three years, having worked at the agency from 2019 to 2021 and from February, 2022 to present.

NM Workers’ Comp. Adm. Quarterly Bulletin

Robert E. Doucette, Jr., Director
Diana Sandoval-Tapia, Public Information Officer
Aileen O’Catherine, Public Relations Specialist

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

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>.

Rice’s nominator praised her for her excellent work on the director’s task of making salary comparisons of WCA employees in relation to other state workers in similar positions. Several WCA employees have been awarded raises as a result of her work. Her nominator noted the process involved in the salary comparisons was challenging and painstaking.

“The WCA is lucky to have that expertise in house,” the nominator said. “Three cheers to Stephanie for her work on this director initiative.”

Rice’s supervisor Catherine Farrell notes Rice is an asset to human resources, and she excels at delivering professional service.

“Stephanie’s contribution to the day-to-day operations of the Human Resources Bureau has been essential in enabling us to efficiently and effectively meet the always-changing demands and priorities of the agency,” Farrell said. Farrell praised Rice for completing two-thirds of the parity audits for the agency so far. “Human resources and the agency are fortunate to have her back,” Farrell said.

Rice is grateful for both the nomination and for those who voted for her. “I am blessed to be a part of the WCA,” she said. “As the saying goes, ‘You’re only as good as your team.’”

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>.

Trey Flynt Promoted to Field Programs Manager

By Aileen O’Catherine

Trey Flynt has been promoted to Field Programs Manager, having served as Employer Compliance Bureau Chief at the agency since April, 2016. His first day in the position was October 22, 2022.

The position oversees the agency’s six field offices as well as facilities management at the Albuquerque location.

“I would like to congratulate Trey on his promotion,” said Director Robert Doucette, Jr. “He has significant experience with workers’ compensation programs, and first-hand understanding of the complex relationship between field office managers, staff, and the Albuquerque program managers.”

In addition to working as Employer

Compliance Bureau Chief at the agency, Flynt had spent time as a compliance officer in that bureau. He had worked at the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance for a year before becoming the compliance bureau chief. He was additionally a manager at UPS for several years.

“I’m really hoping to continue helping the field offices succeed and integrate them even more into our main office,” Flynt said. “I’m also working on a management training program for our internal employees to help them when they decide to pursue management opportunities.” He is happy to note that for the first time in a long time, all the agency’s field offices are fully staffed.



*Field Program Manager
Trey Flynt*

Flynt succeeds Peggy Tafoya, who retired at the end of September, 2022.

Lisa Romero Named Self-Insurance Bureau Chief

By Aileen O’Catherine

Lisa Romero has been promoted to Self Insurance and Regulatory Audit Bureau Chief, having stepped into the role October 1, 2022. Romero had been an auditor in the bureau since July, 2016.

Romero has extensive experience in finance, having spent 15 years as a financial auditor and four years as an operational bank examiner. She undertook financial training with the IRS and earned a degree in accounting from New Mexico State University.

“I’m excited to work with Lisa in this capacity, and know she and the Self-Insurance Bureau will

continue to do great things,” said Romero’s supervisor Executive Deputy Director Leigh Martinez in an email announcement to staff.

Romero has a great respect and passion for auditing, and hopes her staff see they deserve to give themselves the same respect and passion for the job they do.

“My goal is to work with each of the auditors on their assignments, and to assist each of them in attaining the goals they set out to achieve, so they not only exceed at their job, but also in other goals they may have set for themselves, Romero said.

Romero grew up in a large



*Self-Insurance and Regulatory Audit
Bureau Chief Lisa Romero*

family in Albuquerque, and spent summers and holidays near her mother’s family home near Mora in northern New Mexico.

Romero succeeds Clyde Romero, who retired.

Director Doucette (cont'd.)

“The new position streamlines agency directives and brings similar tasks under one leader,” Doucette said.

Another goal has been to help Spanish speakers and pro se (self-representing) workers access and understand the workers’ compensation system and its legal forms. To that end, the first phase of translation of legal forms has taken place. Spanish-language legal forms are available on the agency website. Research is also underway on translating the agency website to Spanish.

Modernizing the electronic data interchange system for the agency has

been important, with staff and contract experts now upgrading the electronic claims input system. The system will move from the Industrial Accident Boards and Commission’s Standard 1.0 to Standard 3.1. The change allows for a more streamlined system, so claims information can more easily be input and reported. Data extraction for compilation will then run more smoothly.

Updates to the Albuquerque building have also been a priority. One of the most visible changes are the doorways that now separate the public from agency workers on the second floor. Escorts through the building are now required

for non-public areas. The downstairs public bathroom now has a wheelchair push button to open the door, and the sink is motion activated for ease of use. In addition to updating the painting of lines in the parking areas, the gate has also been updated. The building’s exterior has been re-stuccoed.

Director Doucette also worked with the now former Superintendent of Insurance Russell Toal to ensure the WCA had a voice in setting workers’ compensation insurance rates, something with which the agency previously had little to no input.

Manager of the Quarter Award

By Aileen O’Catherine

Ombudsman Bureau Chief Samuel Castillo has been named the WCA Manager of the Quarter for the fourth quarter of 2022.

Castillo has been with the WCA since January 2022. Born and raised in southern New Mexico, he is bilingual in English and Spanish, and knows American Sign Language.

Castillo’s nomination notes he is always willing to help staff find the right answers to their questions. “Sam has integrity, respect, empathy and gratitude, all of which are great qualities in leadership,” his nominator said. The nomination noted Castillo never hesitates to stop what he’s doing and

switch his attention to important and immediate matters.

“Sam brings enthusiasm, passion and energy to the program,” said his supervisor, Court and Programs Administrator Heather Jordan, “He is very supportive and communicative with all our ombudsmen.”

Castillo believes his work is a team effort. “I couldn’t have learned everything I know now and continue to learn without the help of everyone in the WCA,” he said of his award.

Castillo believes strongly in a quote he once read:

“If you’re not willing to learn, no one can help you. If you’re determined to learn, no one can stop you.”



*Ombudsman Bureau Chief-
Samuel Castillo*

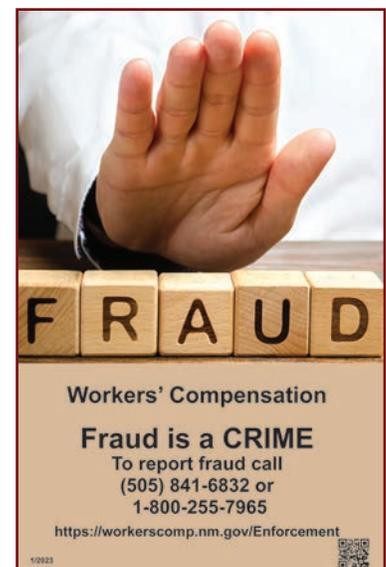
Fraud Calls Have a Direct Line to Enforcement

Reporting fraud to the Workers’ Compensation Administration is now easier than ever. The agency has a new dedicated phone line that channels calls directly to enforcement bureau staff. Anyone who wants to report fraud can do so at 505-841-6832, or to the toll-free number, 1-800-255-7965. Reports can also be made with a downloadable form from the agency website, which can be

emailed, faxed or mailed to the agency.

The report fraud poster has also been updated with a new look, and is enabled with a QR code.

“The QR code allows anyone with an app or phone reader to jump directly to fraud information on our website,” said Public Information Officer Diana Sandoval-Tapia. “We want necessary information to get to those who need it as quickly as possible.”



Abundance of Holiday Giving

By Aileen O’Catherine

The WCA held its fourth annual holiday fundraising drive, which in 2022 benefited the UNM Focus program in addition to a family from the MAS charter school, located near the agency’s Albuquerque office.

WCA staff and the workers’ compensation community provided coats and books for the Focus program, which donates to families with children three and under who are at risk of developmental disabilities. Funds raised helped purchase winter coats and books for 14 families in the program.

Fund raising efforts began in September at the agency’s annual

All Hands training event. Staff from all offices came to Albuquerque for training and participated in a cookie contest. Votes were purchased and all proceeds went to the upcoming holiday fundraiser.

Closer to the holidays, staff donated goods to a silent auction and put in bids, with all proceeds to benefit the fundraiser. The cookie contest and silent auction raised \$631 for the sponsored charter school family.

Staff also donated an additional \$495.

The MAS school family of two children and their mother was provided with stuffed stockings, \$300 worth of toys, a \$100 gift card to a favorite



Holiday Giving Tree

restaurant, and some gifts for Mom that included a blanket, slippers and chocolate. The family was selected through the school’s counselor.

REMINDER TO INSURERS: AER SUBMISSIONS DUE

Annual Expenditure Reports (AER) for 2022 data are due by February 15, 2023. Reports can be filed at <https://w3.wca.state.nm.us/aer/LogOn.aspx>. New users can register for an account. Call Charles Cordova at (505) 841-6896 or email him with questions at Charles.Cordova@wca.nm.gov.

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WCA Website:

<https://workerscomp.nm.gov>