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MEETING NOTICE:

The Advisory Council on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement will meet at **10 a.m., Thursday, December 7 at the WCA headquarters, 2410 Centre SE, Albuquerque, NM.** Download agenda at: <http://www.worker-scomp.state.nm.us/advisory.php> 72 hours prior to the meeting.

WCA Announces Employee and Bureau of the Year at Annual Event

By Aileen O'Catherine

The WCA held its annual "All Hands" staff development and employee recognition event at its Albuquerque headquarters on August 16-17, 2017.

WCA Director Darin Childers announced Leigh Martinez as the agency's Employee of the Year, noting some of the comments from the staff nominations received. One person said Martinez is "loyal, respectful and straightforward," and that she willingly extends her help to all agency bureaus. Martinez is an economist with the Economic Research & Policy Bureau, and has been with the agency for 21 years. She is considered by many as the "go-to" person in the agency for understanding some of the complex concepts in workers' compensation.

The award for Bureau of the Year went to the Clerk of the Court (CC). The CC staff



WCA Director Darin Childers with Employee of the Year Leigh Martinez



WCA Clerk of the Court (front row, l to r) Kathy Sours, Elizabeth Zon, Jenifer Gonzalez, Jeffrey Romero; (back row) Luz Elena Chacon, Heather Jordan, Anita Mayberry. Not pictured: Kyle Hernandez.

Tony Couture Named Newest WCA Judge

By Aileen O'Catherine



WCA Judge Tony Couture

Tony Couture assumed his new position as a Workers' Compensation Administration (WCA) judge on August 28, 2017. He is the 22nd full-time judge to serve in the Administration's 30-plus years as an agency.

"In the short time I have served as a workers' compensation judge, I have been impressed by the parties coming in front of me," said Couture of his first few weeks in the courtroom.

Couture was hired as a WCA

mediator in January of this year, after spending 10 years in private practice. His workers' compensation experience includes representing both employers/insurers and injured workers.

"Tony brings a unique and diverse background to the bench and I am confident that he will be an excellent and fair judge," said WCA Director Darin Childers.

Couture believes the strategies he used as a mediator are similar to those he uses as a judge. "As a judge, I strive to find the truth in the information presented," he said. "I examine the law and come to a conclusion. I don't dig into the issue itself."

Asked if he has legal heroes from the New Mexico workers' compensation courtroom, he acknowledges his debt to former WCA Judge Gregory Griego, who taught him workers' compensation law while in law school.

"If I could have Judge Griego's legal

rigor and Judge Kramer's ability to put people at ease, then I would consider myself the perfect judge," Couture said. (Judge Terry Kramer retired from the WCA in March, 2017).

Couture earned his law degree in 2007 from the University of New Mexico School of Law. Prior to his legal career, he worked as a registered nurse, in both emergency room and in-patient settings, and as a computer scientist. Originally from Sheboygan, Wis., Couture grew up along the shores of Lake Michigan, and served in the United States Coast Guard. He moved to New Mexico in 1982. Couture is recently married and has three children.

There are currently five workers' compensation judges in the WCA's Adjudication Bureau based out of Albuquerque. Workers' compensation judges hear and decide disputes over benefits due to injured workers throughout New Mexico.

NM Workers' Comp. Adm. Quarterly Bulletin

Darin A. Childers, Director
Diana Sandoval-Tapia, Public Information Officer
Aileen O'Catherine, Technical Writer

The Bulletin is 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 address and requests to receive the Bulletin to Diana Sandoval-Tapia in the Public Information Office, New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration, diana.sandoval@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 <http://workerscomp.nm.gov/NMWCA-publications>.

HOLIDAY CLOSURE

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

Veterans Day, Friday, November 10

Thanksgiving, Thursday and Friday, November 23-24

Christmas Day, Monday, December 25

New Year's Day, Monday, January 1, 2018



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 meets several times a year on an irregular schedule. Scheduled meetings of the Council are announced on the WCA website, <http://www.workerscomp.nm.gov/Advisory-Council>.

Shannon Driscoll is the WCA's Newest Mediator

By Aileen O'Catherine



WCA Mediator Shannon Driscoll

Given the many fields of law available in which to practice, Shannon Driscoll would choose mediation over all others, every time. Driscoll began as the WCA's newest mediator on October 23. After spending several years as statewide program manager for the Magistrate Court Mediation Program, she's happy to be

back doing what she enjoys most.

"I really like helping people to create their own solutions," she said. With her new position, she looks forward to mediating full time.

Prior to her work with the magistrate courts, Driscoll spent years in practice as a mediator. She got her undergraduate degree at the University of Dayton in Ohio, and her law degree in 2008 at the University of New Mexico.

Originally from Columbus, Ohio, she fell in love with New Mexico after arriving for law school. "I don't miss the Ohio winters," she laughed. Though she misses family in Ohio and Minnesota, she keeps busy with swing and blues dancing. She has even tried her foot at Renaissance and medieval dance. She has also been involved with the Society

for Creative Anachronism.

"Shannon knew she would be a mediator the first day of the first mediation class she took at UNM," said WCA Mediation Bureau Chief Bonnie Stepleton. "Several years later, Shannon is indeed a mediator, who comes to the WCA with a background in various mediation settings. She is a welcome addition to our mediation team, and we are very excited to have her join us."

There are currently four attorney mediators at the WCA, including Stepleton. Mediators hear disputes and attempt to bring the parties to a mutually agreeable resolution of their differences.

E-Filing Begins January 1, 2018

By Aileen O'Catherine

The WCA has successfully implemented an electronic calendar system that allows judges, attorneys and mediators to see relevant files and schedule cases. As part of the agency's upgrade to an all electronic system, e-filing will soon be required for all Clerk of the Court documents.

The new system was developed internally by the Information Management Bureau, led by Application Developer Gary Chavez. Internal development allowed for a customized system and provided the agency with a

substantial cost savings.

General rules regarding the new e-filing system were announced and posted, and comments were received through October 27.

All pleadings filed with the WCA shall be filed, served, and received by electronic means through the "My E-File" portal on the WCA website beginning January 1, 2018.

To help with the transition, the Clerk of the Court will provide trainings in November and December. Dates and times will be announced. Multiple dates will be available for greater opportunity

to participate. Beta testing of the e-filing system is currently underway with several attorneys providing feedback on improving the system.

Anyone registered with the WCA will have the option to begin e-filing once the system is operational. Both training and operational dates will be announced on the agency's website, and via electronic communication from the WCA.

For questions, contact Clerk of the Court Heather Jordan at Heather.Jordan@state.nm.us.

Ribbon Cutting at New Hobbs Office

By Aileen O'Catherine

After nearly 30 years of operating in Lovington, N.M., the Workers' Compensation Administration (WCA) has moved its far southeastern New Mexico field office to Hobbs. The WCA made the move on August 30, 2017, to better serve taxpayers in that region of the state. A ribbon cutting ceremony attended by representatives from the Hobbs WCA and the Hobbs Chamber of Commerce took place on October 11.

"We are so excited to finally be in the business hub of Lea County. We anticipate greater office activity," WCA Office Manager Sharron Johncox said about the new location.

The WCA's first field office opened in Lovington in 1988, with the help of then State Senator Bill McKibben.

Services at the Hobbs location will replicate those provided at the Lovington office. The office will have a safety consultant to help employers with safety programs, an ombudsman to answer questions about the workers' compensation system, and a compliance officer to ensure employers carry workers' compensation insurance if required to do so.



WCA staff are joined by Hobbs Chamber of Commerce ambassadors for the office ribbon cutting ceremony on October 11. Hobbs Office Manager Sharron Johncox cut the ribbon. Photo courtesy Hobbs News-Sun

The WCA has six field offices throughout the state so that workers, employers, and/or attorneys can visit a nearby office for assistance rather than travel to the main office in Albuquerque. Other field office locations include Farmington, Las Cruces, Las Vegas, Roswell and Santa Fe.

All Hands Awards (continued)

Continued from page 1

provide service to all parties who have disputes heard at the WCA. They assist with documents, filings and information. The agency recently implemented a new electronic case management system, which CC staff undertook with diligence and care. Executive Deputy Director Dana Chavez presented the award, noting that CC staff exhibited tremendous teamwork as they shifted to the new system, as well as through

preparations for the upcoming e-filing system. The CC staff serves both internal and external customers.

The agency also recognized staff members for their years of service to the agency. Award recipients include Charlene Roberts, 25 years; Cyrette Edmon, 20 years; Gary Chavez, Sarah Duran, Amme Hogan and Victor Martinez, 15 years; Leslie Torrez and Kiley Hernandez, 10 years; and Sabrina

Bludworth, Rinda Dewhirst, John Keck, Judge Shanon Riley, and Camille Sapienz, five years.

Other staff recognized for going "above and beyond" their daily responsibilities were Richard Bustamante, Sarah Karni, Aileen O'Catherine, Liz Peralta, Leslie Torrez and Victoria Wagner.

New WCA Safety Manager Brings Many Years of Experience to Position

By Aileen O'Catherine

Paul Martinez has been promoted to WCA safety program manager, starting August 26, 2017. He had served as a WCA safety consultant in the Albuquerque office for about seven months prior to the promotion.

Martinez has an extensive background in safety and risk management, having served as safety and warehouse manager for Southwestern Community College in San Diego for 15 years; safety and risk manager for Sandoval County for four years; loss prevention manager for four years with the City of Albuquerque's Solid Waste Department; and as safety manager with the County of San Diego in California.

Martinez has a degree in Business Administration and will finish his degree in Occupational Safety and Health in May, 2018, through San Juan Community College. His list of certifications is extensive, and includes certification as an OSHA trainer for general and construction industries, CPR, First Aid, AED instructor, defensive driving instructor, landfill and refuse operator, heavy equipment

operator, and more.

Since taking the position as safety manager, Martinez has implemented an enforcement referral program to ensure employers who fail to comply with annual safety inspection requirements are brought to the attention of the WCA Enforcement Program.

"The management team is great; the employees are great, and I look forward to working with the safety consultants," Martinez said of his new position.

Some of the other projects he plans to implement as soon as possible include updating the WCA website's safety page with resources that are timely and relevant for a variety of workers' compensation topics. He is also working with the WCA's Self-Insurance Audit Bureau to incorporate a standardized process for completing safety audits as an element of their financial audits.

"Goals, objectives, and strategies comprise management's direction and the future of our agency. As managers, we have a responsibility to combine resources to accomplish organizational goals and work with senior management and other peers for strategy development



*Safety Program Manager
Paul Martinez*

and execution planning. I look forward to improving and standardizing the Safety Bureau's Programs," Martinez said.

Field Programs Manager Peggy Tafoya looks forward to overseeing Martinez as he executes planned safety initiatives.

"Mr. Martinez brings 25 years of safety experience, which will be instrumental in the progression of the agency's statewide safety program," said Tafoya.

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