



What's Inside:

- WCA Welcomes New Judge 2
- WCA Job Openings 2
- UEF Attorney 3
- Manager of Quarter 3
- RTW Champions 4
- Employee of Quarter 5
- Rep. Herndon Visits Council 7
- WCA Contact Information 7

MEETING NOTICE:

The Advisory Council on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement will meet to appoint members to the Independent Medical Examiners panel at 2 p.m. on Tuesday, October 3, at 2410 Centre SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. See <https://workerscomp.nm.gov/Advisory-Council> for more information..

Mural Honors Agency Staff

By Aileen O’Catherine

Workers’ Compensation Administration (WCA) Director Robert E. Doucette, Jr. wanted to create a mural at the agency to honor staff. His requirements were simple. Staff who worked at the agency a total of 20 years or more, and those who died while working at the agency would have their names painted somewhere in the mural. The agency’s mission statement should be included, and the theme should be related to New Mexico. Hot air balloons could have tags hanging from them which could include employee names.

The director sees the project as a way to thank those who have given so much to both shape the agency and maintain its mission. “They have had an impact, and I think we’re at a point where if we don’t start remembering the past, we’re going to forget it,” he said. “I think it’s important to remember the people who helped create the agency from the ground up, and also the employees who have passed away while working at the agency.”

The stairwell was chosen because it is a public area. “More importantly, it’s OUR area, where a lot of our employees go up and down the stairs,” Doucette said. “Hopefully, when they walk down and see it, they say, ‘Oh, I remember this person.’”

The search began for an artist who could create a New Mexico-themed mural featuring



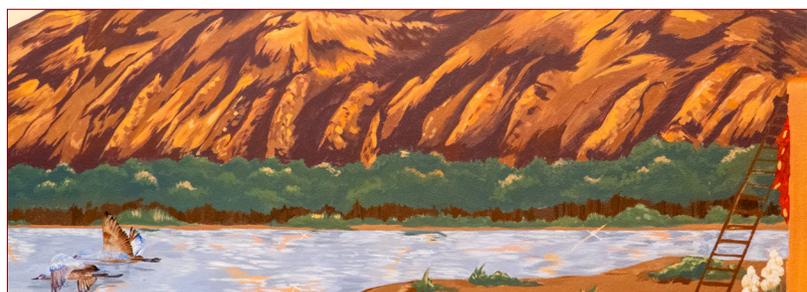
Muralist Mariana Jimenez

hot air balloons. Doucette’s executive secretary, Nicole Bazzano, contacted the University of New Mexico (UNM) Fine Arts Department in search of a possible artist who could paint the director’s ideas into something real.

Muralist Mariana Jimenez describes herself as an emerging artist. Born and raised in Bogota, Colombia, she came to New Mexico to study as an international student at UNM, majoring in art studio and minoring in Latin American studies.

“My journey in painting murals started in Lima, Peru, and I have enjoyed it ever

Continued on page 6



Sonya Carrasco-Trujillo Appointed Workers' Compensation Judge

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has appointed Sonya Carrasco-Trujillo as a Workers' Compensation Administration (WCA) judge. Carrasco-Trujillo began on June 10, 2023, and was sworn in as a judge by WCA Director Robert E. Doucette, Jr. on Friday, June 23 at a ceremony at the WCA's Albuquerque location. The swearing-in took place at a WCA open house, with workers' compensation stakeholders in attendance.

Carrasco-Trujillo has had a long career in public service. She was public policy advisor and deputy chief of staff for former Lt. Gov. Diane Denish and deputy director of legislative affairs for former Gov. Bill Richardson. She served as assistant general counsel for the New Mexico Department of Public Safety and was the first attorney to be appointed interim municipal court judge

for the City of Santa Fe in 2005.

More recently, Carrasco-Trujillo was general counsel for the New Mexico Department of Military Affairs. She is also a major in the New Mexico Army National Guard and serves as the brigade judge advocate for the 111th Sustainment Brigade in Rio Rancho.

Carrasco-Trujillo is a Santa Fe native and graduated from St. Michael's High School. She is the daughter of Dr. Frank Carrasco and Mrs. Maria Trujillo. She graduated from Georgetown University with a bachelor's degree in government and sociology and earned her Juris Doctor degree from the University of New Mexico School of Law.

Carrasco-Trujillo is married to retired New Mexico State Police Chief Robert Shilling. They are licensed resource parents living in Santa Fe with their daughters Sophia and Isabel.



Judge Sonya Carrasco-Trujillo

WCA judges hear and decide disputes over benefits due to injured workers. There are currently five workers' compensation judge positions in the WCA's adjudication bureau based in Albuquerque, and a newly created judge position in the WCA's Las Cruces field office. By law, workers' compensation judges are appointed for an initial one-year term and may be subsequently re-appointed to a five-year term.

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>.

NMWCA Job Openings

The NMWCA provides postings for job openings on its agency webpage. Current postings include:

- Safety Specialist (Santa Fe)
- Office Clerk
- IT Technology Officer

To learn more about these jobs, visit <https://workerscomp.nm.gov/WCA-Jobs>.

Applications must be made through the New Mexico State Personnel Office at <https://careers.share.state.nm.us/>.

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>.

Attorney Craig Kling Joins Uninsured Employers' Fund (UEF)

By Aileen O'Catherine

Craig Kling began work as an attorney with the Uninsured Employers' Fund (UEF) on May 1, 2023. Kling brings with him many years of experience in the area of workers' compensation, having served as the agency's assistant general counsel from February, 2016 until August 2021.

Prior to his work at the WCA, Kling spent a decade in San Diego practicing appellate criminal law in California and New Mexico. He has also worked as a public defender in Clovis and in Albuquerque, as well as with the New Mexico Court of Appeals and the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department in Santa Fe.

After leaving the WCA in 2021, Kling worked as an attorney for the New Mexico Department of Transportation and the New Mexico Public Education Department. He's happy, however, to have returned to the WCA.

"I enjoy the work, which will be challenging," he said of his new position. "It's nice to be back, and I enjoy working with the staff."

Kling earned an undergraduate degree in political science from Clemson University in South Carolina in 1991 and obtained his law degree at Indiana University in 1995. Kling is still a die-hard Clemson Tigers fan, as evidenced by the orange and regalia-colored banner and Clemson tiger mascot in his office.

"The UEF is happy to have Craig join our team, and have him back at the WCA," said UEF Administrator Priscilla Padilla. "He brings many years of experience to our department, and I look forward to the growth of the UEF in the next year."

Kling is a devoted father to his two children, Timothy, who is entering the ninth grade in the fall, and Maddy, who



UEF Attorney Craig Kling

will start her freshman year at California State in Monterey Bay. When not traveling to San Diego to see his children, he travels with them to favorite destinations such as Munich, Germany, though an upcoming destination with his son may be a visit to Copenhagen, and later this summer, he and Maddy will enjoy relaxing in Hawaii.

Agustin Diaz Named Manager of the Quarter

Las Cruces Field Office Manager Agustin "Augie" Diaz has been named the WCA Manager of the Quarter for the second quarter of 2023.

Diaz began with the WCA in June, 2022, having come from New Mexico State University, where he held the positions of Investigator, Director of Student Affairs and Associate Director, Human Resources.

Diaz was nominated by members of his staff.

"He appreciates his team and the work they produce," his nomination read. "He always has the "we" and not the "me" mindset, and thinks of himself as part of the team and not just the supervisor."

Diaz was cited for his commitment to caring and for his honest and trustworthy attitude toward others.

"He makes us all feel comfortable and takes the time to answer any questions and concerns," his nomination continued.

Diaz said it was an honor to be nominated and selected as manager of the quarter. "The Las Cruces field office team is remarkable," he said. "They are responsive and very knowledgeable of their respective areas. The collaboration within the team is amazing. A big thank you to them for all they do for the field office and the WCA," Diaz said.

Field Programs Manager Trey Flynt said that Diaz has worked hard since he began last year.



Las Cruces Field Office Manager Agustin Diaz

"His demeanor and way of handling things is very professional, and he is a pleasure to work with," said Flynt. "He is very deserving of this recognition and I thank him for all that he has done to keep the office heading straight ahead."

WCA Return-to-Work Initiative Champions

By Marietta Valdez

Coming out of the Covid 19 pandemic, the New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration (WCA) continued its work with employers to return recovering injured employees back to the job as quickly and safely as possible. Our Early Return to Work Initiative (RTW) team conducted outreach during the pandemic and answered questions during that time. In 2023, once the Covid restrictions lifted, we were able to promote the RTW Champion program through various venues throughout the state. Through these outreach efforts, the RTW team was able to recognize three employers in southern New Mexico as RTW Champions. We are proud of these employers and their commitment to provide a safe work environment to their employees.

New Mexico Department of Workforce Connection, Deming/Silver City

As the new area manager in 2021, Kerena Barron immediately reached out to the WCA for training so that she and her staff could better understand New Mexico workers' compensation and obtain resources for employers and job seekers. After partnering with the WCA at various events, Barron expressed interest in a RTW one-on-one consultation. As a fairly new state employee and supervisor, Barron wanted to ensure that her employees were able to report timely and that she had the tools necessary to make the workers' compensation process more straightforward for staff in Deming and Silver City. Barron recommends other employers go through the RTW consultation. It is important to have the Grab N' Go Kits because now, she said she knows exactly what to do when an accident occurs." When asked if she had any tips to improve the communication component of RTW she said, "educate leaders in order for them to help and support employees in reporting injuries,

to know about their rights under the workers compensation law, and who to contact when they have questions. Barron said she's learned that there are a lot of misconceptions and myths about workers compensation. She wants employers to be able to provide helpful information to staff. Barron said that going through the one-on-one consult taught her how important it is that her staff knows to report injuries immediately. She knew it was important to educate herself so she could support her staff in the injury process.

Lucky Safety Family of Excellence

Perla Mojica is human resources manager at Lucky Family of Excellence, which includes Lucky Services, Inc.; Lucky Rental Tool, Lucky Health & Safety and TRM, LLC. with a total of 158 employees in eastern New Mexico and Texas. Mojica stresses the importance of team involvement and buy-in from everyone in the organization. She also stresses the importance of conducting an immediate investigation into any workplace accident, including what happened, how it happened, who was present and what equipment was involved. Once the safety team has gathered details and interviewed employees, they complete the accident report immediately. Importantly, Lucky Safety performs safety stand downs at all business locations. These meetings occur the day after the accident to share the lessons learned and to prevent future injuries. This allows upper management, supervisors, and the dedicated safety team to communicate with all employees. One way that Lucky Safety encourages employees to buy in to a return-to-work culture is to get feedback from the employees, including ideas for what they would have done differently. It seeks out feedback from new employees, as they have a fresh set of eyes.

TRDI

Steven Valdez, safety coordinator at TRDI, believes it is important to provide "due diligence, dedication and follow-through" when assisting the recovering injured worker. As the safety coordinator, he ensures the TRDI team meets workers' compensation requirements across eight states. Valdez believes that to ensure a successful RTW program, the employer must provide "constant communication with the workers compensation coordinator, claims adjuster, and nurse case manager to manage the claim and get the recovering worker back to work." Valdez also believes it is TRDI's "sympathy, empathy and caring" that helps employees recover. Also, providing needed accommodations saves on the overall workers' compensation claim costs and reduces the incidence of lost time for the employee. When he started creating the RTW program in December of 2022, Valdez had two cases of individuals who had been on workers' compensation long term. He began reviewing the tools available on the WCA RTW website, and used 12 RTW best practices to create a strong return-to-work policy. Once outlined, Valdez utilized the WCA's transitional employment offer letter and communicated with the site supervisor to find ways to accommodate the claimants' medical restrictions.

"As a result of TRDI and the WCA working together to create the RTW Program, TRDI was able to bring those two claimants back to work full time," Valdez said.

The Early RTW Initiative

The WCA's Early Return-to-Work Initiative is a topic of growing interest for New Mexico employers, as evidenced by the number of visits to the RTW page of the agency's website. In 2022, there were 1,842 visits to the RTW

WCA Return-to-Work Initiative (Cont'd.)

Continued from page 4

page, and to date in 2023, 1,250 visits.

Outreach has been the main method for reaching employers. In 2022, the WCA's Early RTW Initiative team was able to conduct 407 outreach meetings. We contacted over 4,300 individuals, to include agricultural workers, high school students, employers, job seeker and health care providers. In Hobbs, we worked with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to provide information at workshops held at the New Mexico Junior College. The Las Cruces Southwestern Area Workforce Development Board, Las Cruces Workforce Connection and the City of Las Cruces have also provided our team with opportunities to conduct outreach and speak to employers in that region of the state. The New Mexico SHRM and NMPSIA/NMPSA and New Mexico Counties in the Albuquerque and Farmington areas have also provided us with avenues to make presentations and answer questions to all workers'

compensation stakeholders.

Safety is a top priority for employers throughout the state, and it is our program's goal to be a resource, answer questions and to recognize employers who have made the commitment to keeping their employees safe.

We have always lauded employers' efforts to support their recovering workers. Overall, this will save time and money. By not having to hire and train a new employee to fill that position, the employer will get some production and your recovering worker will stay connected to the workforce. The employer will be spending more money on direct and indirect costs by not accommodating the recovering worker in a temporary, light, or modified duty position.

There is no one right blueprint for each employer's safety program, just like there is no right one blueprint to return your recovering worker back to the job. When looking at your safety and

recovering worker programs, do you already have a set of communication points (policies) to discuss with the injured worker at the time of injury (and throughout the life of the claim)? Do you need help designing your RTW Program to meet the 12 Best Practices? Contact me to set up a one-on-one consultation so we can review your return-to-work policies and recognize YOUR ORGANIZATION as a NM Workers' Compensation Administration RTW Champion. Join the list of New Mexico employers who have made the commitment to protect their employees by maintaining a strong RTW program.

To find out more about the RTW Initiative or to schedule a consultation, contact Marietta Valdez at Marietta.Valdez@wca.nm.gov, or call 575-524-6034.

Marietta Valdez is the WCA's Return-to-Work Program Specialist.

Rebecca Lucero Named Employee of the Quarter

Rebecca Lucero has been named WCA Employee of the Quarter for the second quarter of 2023. Lucero has been with the WCA since April 22, 2019, starting as a business operations specialist (BOS) in the Field Programs Bureau. She is now a BOS with the Court and Programs Administration Division.

Lucero's nominator was grateful for the way that Lucero always steps up to help with tasks outside her normal job duties, and that she has picked up court monitoring duties even on short notice.

"She has volunteered to travel to field offices to monitor when no one else is available and is always willing to jump in and assist when needed," her nominator wrote.

"Her positive attitude and experience with the monitoring has made it an easy solution in short time frames and when coverage is needed," the nominator continued. "She is dependable and capable and I really appreciate the assistance she's given."

"What a complete surprise and an honor to be nominated as employee of



*Business Operations Specialist
Rebecca Lucero*

the quarter," Lucero said. "I am deeply committed to the WCA and it's always a pleasure and privilege to be able to serve the citizens of New Mexico in such a wonderful organization."

WCA Mural (Cont'd.)

Continued from page 1

since,” she said. When the UNM Art Department sent an email out to students about the project, Jimenez eagerly offered to do the task. She talked about the design with Bazzano, gathered materials and got to work.

“The mural represents the attachment I have to the symbols of New Mexico,” Jimenez said of the New Mexico scenes on the stairwell walls. “I fell in love with New Mexico when I got here,” Jimenez said. “The more I’m here, the more I love it.”

Walking down the stairwell, the mesas on one wall meet the Sandia mountains stretched across the center wall, with the Rio Grande below.

Puebloan style buildings in warm browns travel down the stairs on a third wall before nearing the exit.

Hot air balloons hover overhead, and hanging tags note those who worked multiple decades with the agency. The names of those who died while working at the agency can be found in the mural’s clouds.

The mural symbolizes gratitude toward those who have served at the WCA, but it carries meaning for the muralist as well. “The mural is about me expressing gratitude for what UNM and New Mexico have given me,” Jimenez said.

The director plans for the mural to have additional names painted in as staff reach the 20-year mark.

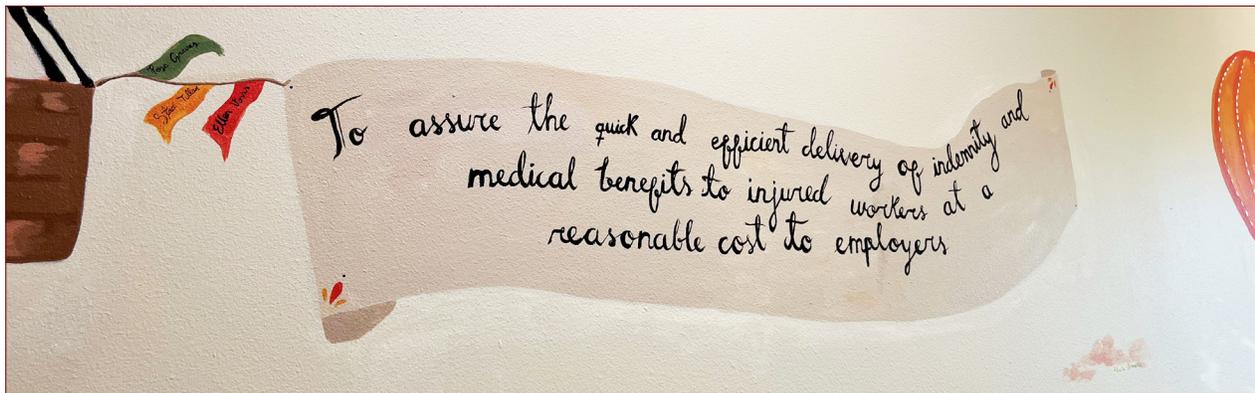
“They have left an impact,” he said. “The past is important to me, and so are the people.”



Day One



Final Day



WCA Mission Statement

Photos by Nicole Bazzano

Representative Pamela Herndon Attends Advisory Council Meeting

By Aileen O’Catherine

New Mexico Representative Pamela Herndon (D), Bernalillo County, attended the May 2, 2023 meeting of the Advisory Council on Workers’ Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement meeting to discuss legislation to discuss HM 83, which passed in the 2023 session.

Herndon is Vice Chair of the House Health & Human Services Committee and a member of the House Appropriations & Finance Committee.

In addition to a number of other bills, Rep. Herndon sponsored two legislative pieces in 2023 concerned with workers’ compensation—HB 455, Workers’ Compensation Changes, and HM 83, the Workers’ Compensation Attorney Fees Task Force.

HM 83 passed, and Rep. Herndon spoke about the memorial to the council. HM 83 requests the WCA to convene a task force to study the impact and effect of attorney fees and attorney fee caps on the workers’ compensation system

in New Mexico.

The task force was required to convene by May 1, 2023, to gather information related to attorney fees and to identify any issues that might arise from fee changes. Recommendations to resolve any problems would be identified.

The task force members, appointed by the WCA director, would consist of a director’s designee as well as four attorneys practicing workers’ compensation law in the state—two employer representatives and two worker representatives. There would also be two labor union representatives and two workers who filed workers’ compensation claims that had been resolved. A report of the findings and recommendations will be made to the Advisory Council by April 30, 2024.

Director’s designee Michael Holt, WCA General Counsel, provided an interim report on the task force’s work to the Advisory Council at their meeting on July 18, 2023.



New Mexico Representative Pamela Herndon speaks to Advisory Council



HOLIDAY CLOSURE

The Workers’ Compensation offices in Albuquerque and all its field offices will be closed on the following upcoming holidays:
Labor Day, Monday, September 4
Indigenous Peoples’ Day, Monday, October 9

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

Phone Numbers:

Phone: (505) 841-6000
In state toll-free phone:
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
2120 North Alto, Unit 3
Hobbs, NM 88240
Phone: (575) 397-3425
In state toll-free phone:
1-800-934-2450

Las Cruces:

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
Phone: (505) 476-7381
Fax: (505) 476-7390

WCA Helpline-Hotline: (toll free in New Mexico)

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

WCA Website:

<https://workerscomp.nm.gov>