COWBOY COUNTRY

2025

VALENCIA COUNTY News-Bulletin

El Defensor Chieftain

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- RANCH SORTING
- SHARON GEORGE BARREL RACE

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COWGIRL COUNTRY

Riding high in the Western & English saddles

Mike Powers | News-Bulletin photos

Riders and horses warm up before barrel racing at Bosque Farms Rodeo Association Arena.

By Mike Powers

Valencia County News-Bulletin

An enduring charm of Valencia County is the rural lifestyle, with ranching and farming the heartbeat of the community. This agriculture landscape truly breeds cowboys, cowgirls and country.

Some youngsters are lucky enough to grow up on properties with horses, eventually getting a chance to saddle up and learn to ride. Many others look longingly over the fence at the ponies, dreaming that one day they too will find their feet in stirrups. Children seem to fit in one group or the other.

By happenstance, the family of Paisley Zastrow was driving by the Bosque Farms Rodeo Association Arena one night several years ago while heading to their home nearby.

"I saw the lights on in the arena and asked my mom if we could stop," recalled Zastrow. Soon, the now 12-year-old was watching roping practice, commenting to one cowboy, "I like your horse, mister."

The cowboy responded by offering Zastrow a ride on the horse he was ponying around the arena.

"Does she ever stop talking," he joked to Zastrow's family after a few laps.

With that, Zastrow was hooked, beginning a transition from English riding to the Western style seen on a ranch and at a rodeo.

"The adrenaline rush," is what Zastrow likes, "doing a hot lap around the arena during a barrel run," onboard her horse Luna. "I just found a love for it."

With wind and rain kicking up, an interview shifted inside a horse trailer, out of the elements. Eventually, Zastrow, her parents, a reporter and Luna were packed together inside, with Luna seemingly intrigued by the questions being asked.

Zastrow, who attends Hope Christian Middle School in Albuquerque, quickly took to the lifestyle around the rodeo arena, earning the title of BFRA Sweetheart twice and is currently the reigning Valencia County Princess. There are big goals for the future that include winning Miss Rodeo America and competing at the National Finals Rodeo.

Even to the casual observer, Western and English riding have obvious differences, including the type of saddles and how the rider sits. Zastrow believes the rodeo arena offers more freedom, including in the way the reigns are held and the number of events that are offered.

A short gallop away is Top Notch Farm, where Zastrow originally trained in English riding.

Laurie Mauderly has owned the facility since 2008, boarding and training horses and offering lessons for riders.

"A horse will be too frisky for its owner, too wild," said Mauderly, who teaches the horses to "jump mannerly so that its owner isn't terrified,

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so they're safe."

Mauderly says her clientele is evenly-split between adults and youth, mostly female. There are novice riders who train on the farm's calm "school horses" so they can "learn basic control; go, stop, left, right. How to sit on a horse. It goes from there."

At the other end of the spectrum is the serious rider, who wants to compete at Hunter/Jumper shows, judged on their performance over a preset course, navigating fences and other obstacles.

"I have some people who are very competitive, who take lessons three times a week," she said.

Watching intently outside the fence line was Mary Guelvenzoph, a Los Lunas High School graduate who now lives in Albuquerque. Of interest to Guelvenzoph was her 14-year-old granddaughter, Naura Sumruld, who was in the arena getting pointers from Mauderly over a

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Paisley Zastrow, of Bosque Farms, left, is a relative newcomer to rodeo competition, but finds the horse community a place where she "belongs."

Michelle Servantes, right, makes the trip to Top Notch Farm in Bosque Farms from Los Chavez, where she started riding almost a decade ago.

RANCHING LIFE

Miss B: The Ragtag Rancher Kid

By Ungelbah Dávila
El Defensor Chieftain

When you think cowgirl, think Beatrice Elaine Janetka Bell.

The self-described "ragtag ranch kid" has spent 73 years of life getting down and dirty in the New Mexico dirt, with decades of experience riding the range, raising cattle, and breaking barriers as one of the state's first certified female livestock inspectors.

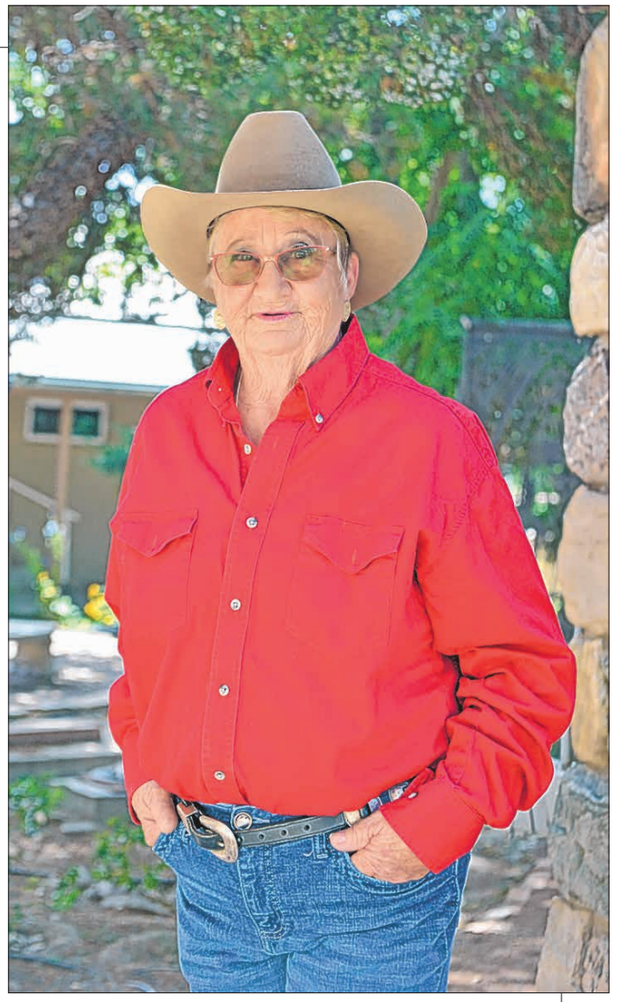
Today, Bell helps her cousin Gerald Janetka, 83, his wife Joanne, 79, her niece Gail White and her husband Scott run around 47 head of Angus on about 20 sections at Ladrón Ranch west of Socorro. She said the property is such a "rock pile" that despite the size they have to keep their herd small.

"We're the geriatric crew," Bell said, with a laugh, though she hopes everyday that her passion for cattle and agriculture trickles down to the next two generations.

Their ranch, she admits, isn't for getting rich. It continues to exist because of the love of the lifestyle, the love of the animals, helping the mamas' birth, watching the calves grow and knowing every critter by sight. It's a love, said Bell, that you have to grow up possessing or spend your life learning.

Either way, she said, it's an obsession — for the animals or the freedom they allow, we can only speculate.

Known affectionately by family and friends as Aunt B, Bell was born in Deming, N.M., and raised all over the state, including her father's cotton farm in the Mimbres Valley and her mother's home in the Sacramento Mountains near Cloudcroft, where her ancestors homesteaded the K Heart Ranch.



Jessica Carranza Pino | El Defensor Chieftain

Bea Bell, 73, still works cattle on LaDrone Peak Ranch. She retired as one of the first female livestock inspectors after 18 years.

"My grandparents raised me," she said. "My grandfather worked for the government, so we moved a lot."

Her grandfather's work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Army Corps of Engineers resulted in her placement as the only Anglo student in a Navajo residential school at Rock Point, Ariz., when she was 8.

Bell, who is of Cherokee ancestry, said that looking back at the time she spent as a child amongst Navajo, Hopi and Apache peers helped inform how she operated later in life as a cattlewoman and livestock inspector.

"I have to say that I think being exposed to the Native American cultures instilled in me more respect. I respect the land, livestock and nature," she said. "I think seeing their cultures in some of the most desolate areas — and hard, hard areas — it really instilled to me that it doesn't matter if you call him God, or you call him Spirit — there is a stronger being that created us, the Creator. I carry that with me in my everyday life; that awareness and thankfulness for everything."

Now semi-retired after decades of being a livestock inspector for 18 years and a USDA meat inspector prior to that, Bell humbly claims she is now just a weekend-cowboy who slips away every chance she gets to visit her cattle on the rugged, rocky terrain of Ladrón Peak Ranch.

"It's in my blood," she said. "You've got to love it. I get cow-sick if I don't see them. I've even driven around the West Mesa just to look at cows when I couldn't get out to the ranch."

Her bond with animals is evident in her devotion to Mr. Jack — her 36-year-old paint horse, a rescue she lovingly calls "Handsome Jack."

"He's arthritic, and I can't ride him much anymore, but I'm going to take care of him until his last breath," she said. "He knows when the cows are near.

He'll stand for hours watching them. He knows his purpose."

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Rancher

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Beyond ranching, Bell built an impressive career in public service. She started with the New Mexico Livestock Board in 1998 as a receptionist and became a meat inspector a year later. In 2000, she transitioned to brand inspecting, then made history in 2002 by becoming one of the few women to complete law enforcement training and serve as a certified livestock inspector.

"Back then, only four other women had made it through the academy," she said. "I was 50. That job was the best I ever had."

She covered a vast territory — Valencia, Socorro, Sandoval, Torrance and Sierra counties — investigating thefts, abuse cases and brand violations. While she often faced skepticism and protectiveness from ranchers unused to women in law enforcement, she won respect with humility, grit and knowledge.

"I'd been working cattle my whole life," she said. "It took time, but I proved myself."

Bell officially retired from the Livestock Board in 2013, but retirement didn't stick. She returned to work within a month — and even now, after leaving her most recent job as a code enforcement officer, she's looking forward to the next chapter.

"I'm not done," she said. "You don't retire from this life. It's who you are."

Submitted photo

Bea Bell stands by a rock wall at Ladrone Peak Ranch where she and her cousin run cattle.

4-H FAMILY

Chavez clan carries on tradition of farming

Julia M. Dendinger | News-Bulletin photos

Carrying on the farming tradition in Valencia County is the Chavez family of Los Lunas. They are, in front, from left, Mateo, 12, David, 9 and Uriah, 11. In back, from left, dad, Matthew, Sophia, 14, and mom, Leandra.

By Julia M. Dendinger
News-Bulletin Assistant Editor

It's a cool, wet morning at Chavez Farms in Los Lunas. The sun has been up for a couple hours and the four Chavez kids are up and about, tending to their 4-H animals.

Torrential rains the afternoon before have left behind puddles and soft ground, but that just means old shoes are needed to navigate the pens behind their house.

An array of chickens meander in their enclosure, while two kittens romp around with them. One manages to climb the wire fencing and get out, but the other needs to be rescued by Uriah, 11.

The kitten is placid and warm in his hands, willing to accept head scratches from anyone. The kittens and their mother keep pests in check in the Chavez's hay barn, as well as providing companionship.

The family — Matthew and Leandra, married for 15 years; and children Sophia, 14, Mateo, 12, Uriah, 11, and David, 9 — are carrying on the tradition of agriculture in Valencia County as sixth and seventh generation farmers, respectively.

Matthew, who says he learned everything he knows about farming from his dad, David Chavez, was born and raised in Los Lunas and continues to call the village home.

From Belen, Leandra says on an Instragram post for the farm — ChavezFarms505 — that she always wanted to "have a bunch of kids ... a hard working and God-loving husband," which she found in Matthew.

Together, the Chavez grow chile, alfalfa and other produce as well as raising grass-fed beef, which is dry aged and free of hormones. The produce they grow and sell is also free of pesticides.

"As a mom, I wanted my kids to always have the best," Leandra wrote on Instagram. "That's where the beef came into play and I wanted to give that back too other moms out in our community and to be able to have the best access to quality beef."

During the summer months, in addition to helping on the farm, the Chavez children are also responsible for feeding, caring for and working with the slew of animals they show as part of the local 4-H program — chickens, goats and pigs make up the roster now, but rabbits might be in the mix next year, they say.

A breeding pair of bunnies roam the hay barn,

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Left: Using gentle taps, Mateo Chavez, 12, puts his pig through its paces as the summer run up to the Valencia County Fair begins.

Right: Just a boy who loves chickens, Uriah Chavez, 11, holds one of the many chickens he raises to show for 4-H.

Below: In her six years of showing goats, Sophia Chavez, 14, has learned to use a firm but gentle hand to get the animals ready for fair time.

Family

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"having babies somewhere," as is the nature of farm life.

Being in 4-H helps the children develop a good work ethic, said Matthew, with Leandra adding in that it teaches them responsibility.

"Not a lot people get to experience this and they want to," Matthew said. "By seeing them with the animals, it gets people interested in agriculture. A lot of people's roots come from agriculture and farming and this brings them back in."

The farm is kind of hidden in plain sight, a short ways south of Main Street in Los Lunas and surrounded by mostly residential properties. With neighbors all around, Matthew said it's interesting when Mateo works with one of the pigs getting ready to show the animal a the fair.

"He's just walking down the road and people are staring in awe at the way he controls it," he said. "People sometimes think livestock is wild and just runs around. The way they handle them shows the time the spend with them."

That's seen as Uriah is able to easily pick up any of the chickens he's raised since they were hatchlings. He holds a mini Old English bantam, which is barely big enough to fill both of the 11-year-olds hands.

The tiny chicken, completely unruffled, is placid and calm as it is petted and stroked, much like the kitten.

"It shows the hard work they put into the animals," Leandra said. "They've been handling them since they were born."

All four children began showing animals when they were 8 years old, the earliest they can be a compete in 4-H. Sophia's first foray was a market goat that didn't make sale, so she was kept for breeding.

Selling the animals they raise to show each year is the goal for all four children. The ultimate goal is to continue the family tradition of farming and carry it on as the seventh generation, with all four agreeing the rural life is one they see in their future.

Last year, Mateo, won reserve champion novice chicken showmanship in 2024 at the Valencia County Fair with one of the mini chickens. With tiny chickens come tiny eggs, so it takes awhile to gather enough for a good breakfast scramble, but they are a favorite of Uriah.

Wearing a T-shirt that declares him to be "just a boy who loves chickens," Uriah is more than willing to demonstrate his love and knowledge of chickens.

With his arms draped over the wire fencing of the chicken pen he points out and names breeds with ease — Cochins with the feathered feet, Plymouth Rocks, Speckledys and more. Some lay black or blue eggs, which have a different taste than the typical brown and white ones, he says.

"The yolk is darker yellow, orange, because it has more nutrients," Uriah explained. "So they taste different."

Last spring, Uriah was asked to donate fertile eggs to Belen Consolidated Schools for ag in the classroom programs. He was able to share his knowledge and passion for chickens with his peers and hatch 50 eggs with local students.

Whether it's coaxing a recalcitrant goat into the proper stance or getting the pig to trot around a ring, all four agree they're having fun and enjoying their time with the animals and at the fairs.

"The fun part is showing at the fair," said Sophia.

"And the candy," added David.

FROM BRUSH TO BRIDLE

A passion for riding & painting

Ungelbah Dávila | El Defensor Chieftain photos

Jenny Blomquist bareback on her Arabian horse, Holi, at her home. He is the newest addition to her small herd.

By Ungelbah Dávila
El Defensor Chieftain

When Jenny Blomquist began riding horses, she was pregnant.

As a young woman, the idea of motherhood made her head spin, sometimes into dark places. However, since she was a small child her grandmother has encouraged her to paint and, in doing so, to learn how to listen to her inner voice.

Knowing she needed an outlet for the emotions and concerns she was carrying as her delivery date drew closer every day she decided to listen inward. The voice inside told her to learn more about the one thing she'd always yearned for — horses.

She spent her childhood in Magdalena with her grandmother, Dolores, who filled the walls with murals of roses and birds.

"I was 4 or 5 and she sat me down to paint," Blomquist said. "I remember it was a calendar picture of a white horse."

Despite not being around horses, the imagery of the animals never left Blomquist's mind. Even as she grew as a woman — mother and artist — horses never roamed far from her canvas.

"I've always been a painter," Jenny says. "Some of my foggiest, oldest memories are of my grandma sitting me down to paint. There was one moment, I must've been four or five, and I was painting a white horse from a calendar. That image has always stayed with me."

Just as Blomquist was preparing to pursue art school in Chicago, she found herself unexpectedly pregnant. Overwhelmed and depressed, she found solace in an unlikely place — horseback riding.

"I was in such a dark place," she recalls. "I needed something for myself — something I'd always wanted to do."

She came across fliers for trail rides near the tiny community of San Acacia and booked a ride with a fledgling business called Acacia

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Riding Adventures. It was there she met horse trainer Dacodah Herkenoff, who eventually offered her work at the stables. She began riding, learning, and immersing herself in the rhythm of horses.

"It made me feel like my life wasn't over. I was going to be a mom, but I was also still me," she said. "That's when the healing really started."

In the meantime, she never gave up painting. Her oil paintings are represented by Agora Gallery in New York City.

And while painting ponies has helped put food on the family's table, she has never let go of her equestrian journey. In fact, it became something more. With the popularity of horse therapy growing, other ways to find solace and healing around horses is also on the rise. The Hop Canyon (Socorro County) resident, and other organizations in the state shy away from the "therapy" label but are starting organizations that safely and therapeutically connect individuals with horses.

Last year, Blomquist began offering horse lessons that gently and thoughtfully help her clients build a relationship with her horses in order to build trust, eliminate fear, and teach the fundamentals of horsemanship — all skills that she learned from Herkenoff when she most needed that type of confidence the most.

"The first step is overcoming fear," she said. "Horses are big. Their presence is huge, and if someone's never been around them, it can be overwhelming. So I start with groundwork, helping students get comfortable just being near a horse. That's where the connection begins."

Last year, Blomquist began offering "horse lessons" — a term she uses intentionally. These aren't traditional riding lessons. Instead, her approach centers on building a relationship with the horse, from the ground up.

While she doesn't market herself as a therapist, the impact of her lessons often ventures into emotional territory. Her first student was a woman grieving the recent loss of her spouse to cancer. What began as a way to get out of the house evolved into something transformational.

"She took lessons with me for a year, and just a couple weeks ago, she completed a 50-mile endurance ride," Blomquist said. "She told me it was because of me. That felt amazing."

Jenny Blomquist, oil painter and horsewoman, in her home studio.

Blomquist currently keeps four horses and works with a small number of students one-on-one. The operation is intimate by design — focused more on meaningful connection than high volume. While her students eventually go out on trail rides, the emphasis is always on the relationship: horse and human, in tune.

"Horses pick up on everything," she said. Horses, she claims, know when you're afraid or when you're uncertain. That's why she said it's important to be present with them, and that in that space of presence and self awareness is where, for her clients, the healing is.

"I've noticed that people who come to me aren't just looking to learn how to ride. They're tuning in to something deeper. They're looking for connection, maybe even healing," Blomquist said.

To see her art work and find out more please visit visionscapesstudio.com or follow her on Instagram @ visionscapes_studio.

OLD MILL FARM & RANCH SUPPLY

Carrying on a family & community tradition

Kenn Rodriguez | News-Bulletin photos

Old Mill Farm and Ranch Supply was started by Corky Morrison, right, in 1982. His daughter, Amy Chavez, hopes to keep the tradition going now that Corky is semi-retired.

By Kenn Rodriguez
News-Bulletin Staff Writer

When you move through the front door of Old Mill Farm and Ranch Supply in Los Chavez, you're immediately enveloped in the smell of leather, and the feeling that you're home.

That's what Amy Chavez said of the early days when she and her younger sister, Stefanie, spent time while their dad, Corky Morrison, was running the shop. Sitting at a bench that might have been brought when the business opened in 1982, she said the Old Mill has always been part of her life.

"My sister and I, we started with wrapping presents here, 'cause we offer free gift wrapping at Christmas time,'" Amy reminisced. "That was kind of our first job, but it was also our babysitter. We came with my dad all the time … we'd ride on the dollies and swing on the rope, swing out at the hay.

"We just grew up here as kids, and then worked there. But both of us kind of got degrees and went in different directions. I got my degree in business, but then when I had kids, I decided to be a teacher, so me and (husband) David had the same schedules."

When Amy and her husband got married (he also worked for a few years at Old Mill), they decided retail was not for them.

"We were kind of just ready to walk away," she concluded.

Then, in 2022, everything changed. Amy got

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a call from Stefanie. Corky wanted to retire and had found a buyer for the store.

"My sister and I were visiting one day and we were just thinking about all the memories here," Amy recollected. "As we sat in the store, surrounded by leather boots and horse tack, we were like, we can't. We can't let it go. We've gotta make it work."

Amy, her husband David, Stefanie, and her husband, Rodee Walraven, talked about it and decided to buy the whole store — kit and caboodle.

"We called him up and we said, 'Can we talk to you?' And he was like, 'Of course,'" she said. "I mean, ultimately that's what he would have preferred to stay in the family. It was kind of a whirlwind, to be honest, and we just said, 'OK, let's do it.' I left my job teaching mid-school and came over here and went from there."

Corky Morrison enters the Old Mill for our "set down" and is immediately set upon by a long-time customer. The two disappear into the warehouse faster than you can say, "Good afternoon."

Right away, you can see what made Corky a success in Valencia County. He's friendly, with an easy smile that's infectious and open to talk to. Even though he's semi-retired now, he still acts like he works 60 hours a week.

Born in Albuquerque, Corky attended New Mexico State University and began working at Dan's Boots and Supplies after graduation. In 1982, he, his boss and two co-workers decided to invest in a small business off N.M. 314 in Los Chavez.

"We saw a need," he said. "This building was here. It was vacant. It had been a feed establishment, so we went in on it. At the very beginning, it was just feed and a little bit of animal health supplies. (The store) was probably that for about five years, and then every year we started adding something to the inventory and increasing the size of the building."

By year five, Corky said he bought his partners out and Old Mill became a family-owned business. Because of Corky's easy-going demeanor and involvement in the local community — starting, of course, with the Valencia County Fair — the business flourished, building strong ties to the community with customer service, and loyal employees who sell everything from feed to Western wear.

"Our plan all along was to expand," Corky said. "But we wanted to start with the bread and butter first and kind of just see how it went and kind of get our feet established."

Corky said a big part of getting established, and becoming part of the community was supporting younger generations.

"We've supported youth," he said. "We've supported the schools. We've supported the community just pretty much anyway. If anybody had a need, we wanted to be part of the community, but the biggest focus was the agriculture youth."

That carried on when those young farmers, ranchers and rodeo folk became adults.

"What's interesting now is we have some of the kids that we supported, bought their animals or were supported in any endeavor. Now, it's their kids coming in, so it's kind of neat to watch."

Terry Pino said she has worked at Old Mill for 30 years. A lot has changed since then — more inventory, going from hand-written receipts to computerized checkout, etc., but the one constant, she said, is the customers.

"We've still got kind of the same folks coming in — the farmers, ranchers, rodeo people," Pino said. "You know, it seems like our community is growing. We're seeing a lot more new people. People have driven by here and they'll say, 'I've driven by here for 10 years, 20 years, and just thought you were a feed store.''

"I feel like people are wanting to go more of a mom-and-pop store instead of the big-box stores. We're knowledgeable on the stuff we carry. I mean, like, look how many different bits we have. If someone asks, "Which will work on my horse?" we know. We're like a family to a lot of our customers."

Amy agreed, pointing out that one customer has his own coffee mug in the back of the store. Some days, he comes in, pours himself a cup and just chats with workers and customers alike, which makes Old Mill more than just a store.

"My dad has been kind of a presence in the community for a long time and we want to keep it that way, you know?" said Amy. "It's kind of funny because now the Western culture is kind of more mainstream and it's getting more popular, but it hasn't always been that."

At the end of the day, the Old Mill has become an institution of arts — something that is very rare in these times.

"I think my dad has started that legacy and I think that's why people, you know, appreciate he's an honest guy, always has been," Amy said. "That's hard to come in business. And we just want to keep that going."

Amy Chavez, her husband, David, and her sister, Stefanie, and husband, Rodee Walraven, took over Old Mill Farm and Ranch Supply in 2022.

Old Mill employee Jackeline Portillo shapes a cowboy hat with steam, one of the many singular services provided at the store, located on N.M. 314 in Los Chavez.

CONSISTENCY & TRUST

The life of a farrier and blacksmith

By Jessica Carranza Pino
El Defensor Chieftain

Tamsen Justice, a 26-year-old blacksmith and farrier, has returned to his passion, completing a full circle back to his roots in Magdalena, where he was born and raised.

Along with his girlfriend, Kennedi Wissink, who hails from Nebraska, the couple has combined their talents to embark on an entrepreneurial venture. Just four months ago, they launched their own farrier business dedicated to providing exceptional hoof care for horses.

Justice's precise craftsmanship as a farrier complements Wissinks nurturing and no-nonsense approach as a handler. This collaboration builds trust with the horses, and enhances each horse's behavior and comfort over time.

Working with horses doesn't come without real danger.

"You have to be damn sure careful, that's why she's so important, because she holds them for me. The horse handler is almost as important as the guy who shoes," Justice said, emphasizing the critical role of Wissink in their work.

Wissink has already noticed some of their client's horses are becoming more comfortable with them with each visit, highlighting the importance of consistency and trust. This growing comfort speaks volumes about their effective handling techniques.

"I can shut down a lot of movement from just the head. The head controls the feet, and especially with younger horses, I train them so that they know what they can't get away with," Wissink said.

She added their communication while working with a horse is essential for everyone's safety and a testament to their synchronized efforts.

"I really like going around with him, and I've learned quite a bit. He's packed a lot of information into my head," Wissink said. "I feel like we make a pretty good team."

This mutual respect and continuous learning underscore their successful partnership.

In addition to her work with horses,

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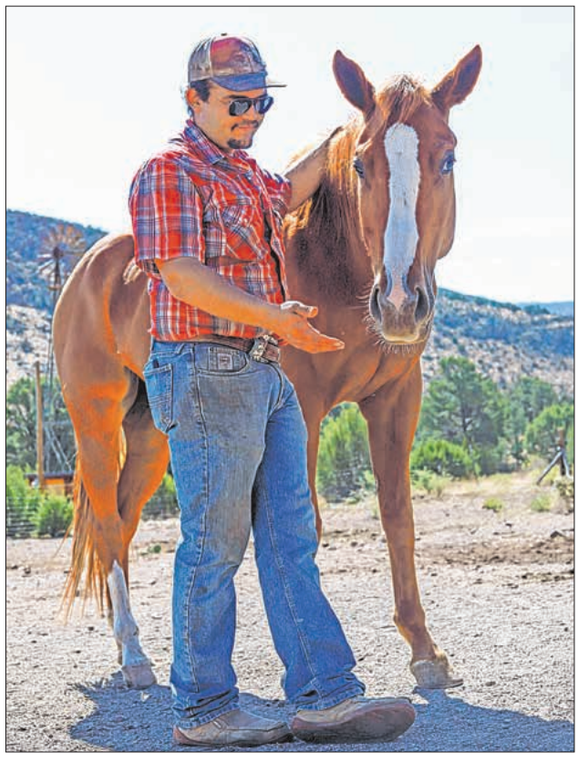
Jessica Carranza Pino | El Defensor Chieftain photos

Tamsen Justice works on his horse Cupcake's hooves with Kennedi Wissink holding her in place.



Farrier

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Wissink channels her creativity into making cinches, as well as handcrafted soaps and candles, adding a personal touch to their venture.

Justice's journey began with formal training in the Journeyman Farrier program at an Idaho horseshoeing trade school, where he honed his horseshoeing skills.

"I actually didn't grow up with horses. I only started being around them when I was about 16," Justice said. "A guy down the road, Mark Chavez, has sons who are like brothers to me. I grew up with them, and Mark works with a lot of cutting horses."

This early exposure to horses sparked a lifelong passion. He vividly remembers one day watching Chavez cut cows in his round pen.

"A little voice in the back of my head was like, 'Pay attention, because you're going to like to do this one day.' So I paid attention, and pretty quickly, he started bringing me with him. I was able to work with some horses. It just kind of happened," Justice said.

During his training, Justice contributed his expertise at the school for another six months, teaching aspiring farriers the intricacies of horseshoeing.

"That's why I was glad to stay and work at the school. They say the best way to learn something is by teaching it to someone else," Justice said.

However, a negative experience with the school's owner forced him to take a two-year hiatus from horseshoeing, redirecting his focus back to Magdalena where he found himself working on a ranch.

Yet the call of the forge was too strong to resist. Determined not to work under someone else's direction, Justice reignited his passion as a farrier and began his business, dedicated to providing the highest quality horseshoeing services. His determination speaks to his unwavering commitment to his craft and his desire for independence.

Justice understands the vital role of custom horseshoes tailored for various corrective needs. He revels in the craftsmanship involved in blacksmithing — each shoe meticulously forged with skill and physical effort. He said that he values the lessons learned from seasoned blacksmiths who mentored him and is devoted to refining his craft.

Notably, he participates in horseshoeing competitions, showcasing not only his technical prowess but also the artistry and dedication that define this noble trade.

But at the end of the day, for Justice, it's all about the horses.

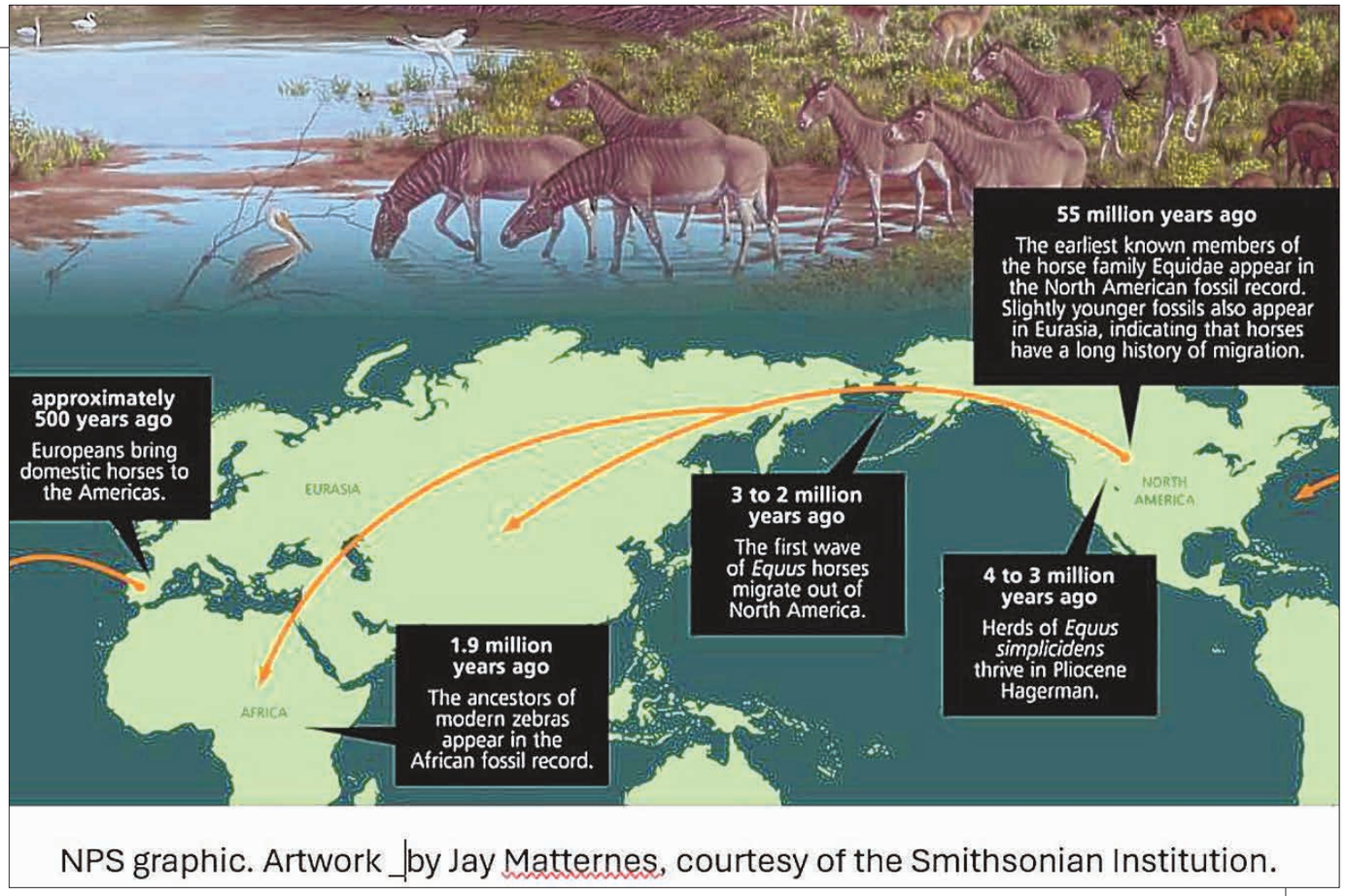
"I just like helping horses. I like watching them walk away happy. That's probably my favorite part about it," Justice said, expressing the profound satisfaction he derives from his work.

Justice and Wissink live in Hop Canyon and serve clients across a large territory, including Truth or Consequences, Carrizozo, Socorro, Albuquerque and other rural and remote areas of New Mexico.

Their willingness to travel reflects their commitment to serving a wide range of clients. They note there is a lack of farriers in some regions, and clients appreciate it when someone is willing to travel to these areas, filling a crucial need in under-served communities.

GEOLOGIC EVOLUTION OF HORSES

Common ancestry with tapirs and rhinoceroses



NPS graphic. Artwork _|by Jay Matternes, courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.

By Paul Parmentier

Special to the News-Bulletin

With many horse enthusiasts in Valencia County and rodeo season here, let us review the geologic record on horse evolution.

Only 10 million years after the demise of the dinosaurs, some rodent-size mammals had already evolved into a dog-size forest-dwelling primitive "horse" 55 million years ago.

Horses then evolved in North America with a common ancestry with tapirs and rhinoceroses, the members of which all share hooved feet and an odd number of toes on each foot, as well as mobile upper lips and a common tooth structure.

The horse further evolved into the genus Equus about four million years ago, adapted to steppes and spread to Asia two to three million years ago, reaching Africa as zebras about 1.9 million years ago.

Horse fossils dated at about 13,000 years B.C. have been found near Carlsbad and at the White Mesa mine near San Ysidro along with fossil camels and bisons. Before 10,000 years ago, Native Americans would have known horses only as wild game for food; however, horses disappeared from America 10,000 years ago along with saber tooth tigers, camels, mammoths and many other large animals. (The cause of the disappearance of the megafauna is not clearly understood).

In Central Asia, around 3,500 B.C., horses started to get domesticated, and that practice then spread widely across the Old World around 2,000 B.C.

Although horses are often associated with having a wild spirit, the only truly wild horse alive

See ***Horses***, Page 17

LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

4-H is designed for agriculture education

By Sierra Cain

Special to the News-Bulletin

4-H offers youth in New Mexico many opportunities for growth.

The Valencia County 4-H office offers several programs ranging from youth leadership opportunities, health and nutrition education, shooting sports, livestock and crafts. While our county livestock program is robust, we pride ourselves on the opportunities in and outside of raising animals, meaning, you do not have to show an animal to gain the benefits of our county 4-H program.

4-H began more than 100 years ago! In it's beginning, 4-H was designed to connect agricultural education and advancements to youth and adults. While we still thrive with our agriculture programs, leadership opportunities and "learn by doing" programs have complimented our initiatives for positive youth development.

The first clubs were named "The Tomato Club" and the "Corn Growing Club," and focused on after school agriculture education. The clover was formed with H's on each of the four leaves that stand for Head, Heart, Hands and Health.

4-H is housed under the Cooperative Extension Service that was developed through the Smith-Lever Act, which was passed in 1914. Extension services are tied to land-grant universities. In New Mexico, our land grant university is New Mexico State University. The NMSU Cooperative Extension Service is present in all the counties of New Mexico and serves our community through educational programs. 4-H is of course, one of these awesome programs.

I may be biased, but we have one of the best 4-H programs in New Mexico here in Valencia County. I truly believe in our 4-H motto "to make the best better." I have had the wonderful opportunity to witness youth improve themselves and chase their dreams. On many occasions, I have even seen them conquer them.

Sierra Cain is the Valencia County Agriculture agent and 4-H/Youth Development agent for the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service.

Our program consists of a county council and county council officer team. These youth serve the entire program and help run meetings, manage county funds, and guide our program through events and community service opportunities. We also have seven 4-H clubs that are located throughout the county.

Our 4-H clubs also have leadership teams that serve as club officers but focus on their club members and club initiatives. Our 4-H clubs are where children and families co-mingle and help decide what they would like to participate in. This environment is great for families to learn about the opportunities of the club and county 4-H programs and start their leadership journey.

The following are the specific age requirements per group:

Cloverbud: Ages 5 (and in kindergarten) to 8 years old.

Novice: Ages 9 to 11 or age 8 and in the third grade prior to Jan. 1 of the current 4-H year.

Junior: Ages 12 to 13. A 4-H member must have passed his/her 12th birthday or be 11 years old and in the sixth grade but not have passed his/her 14th birthday prior to Jan. 1 of the current 4-H program year.

Senior: Ages 14 to 19. A 4-H member must have passed his/her 14th birthday or be 13 years old and in the eight grade, but not have passed their 19th birthday prior to Jan. 1 of the current 4-H program year.

We had such a successful 4-H year through our county and state fairs and look forward to completing our 4-H record books, awards banquet, upcoming state events, and electing an officer team!

Please see program offerings through the Valencia County 4-H Program, Valencia County Extension Service, and ICAN program below.

If you want further information on our 4-H program, you can visit our website, follow our Facebook page (NMSU Valencia County 4-H) or call our office to speak with us at 505-565-3002.

COWBOY COUNTRY TERMS

Boot: A deep luggage carrier at the stagecoach's rear and under the driver's seat.

Box: The stage driver's seat.

Brother Whip: The stagecoach driver, also called simply "Whip."

Bull-Whacker: A driver of a freight wagon, usually with oxen.

Carry-all: A light, covered carriage that could hold several people.

Celerity Wagon: A stagecoach used in rough country, also referred to as a mud wagon.

Charlie: A stagecoach driver.

Concord Coach: A stagecoach made by Abbott, Downing Company, in Concord, N.H.

Conductor: The person who rode with the driver of a stagecoach and collected fares, took care of passengers, and was responsible for the mail.

Corduroy Road: A road created by logs laid across a swampy, low-lying area, placed together or "ribbed" like corduroy cloth.

Division: 250 miles of trail belonging to a superintendent on the Overland Route.

Drag: An object attached to the back of a stagecoach to slow it when going downhill.

Expressman: A messenger carrying express items.

Groom: A stableman, one who takes care of the horses

Hame: One of two curved bars fitted to a horse collar, holding the traces of a harness.

Hangers-on: A phrase used by the more "well-off" riding inside the stagecoach referring to those riding on top.

Home Station: A larger station where meals and lodging were provided to passengers.

Hostlers: Took care of the horses and mules at the stage stops, as well as changing the team.

Jehu: A stagecoach driver, taken from the Biblical character's name, who drove fast and furiously.

Johnnycake: A type of cornbread often provided to travelers at stage stops.

Leaders: The two front animals of the team. These would be the smallest, smartest, and most alert of the team.

Lines: Reins.

Near: Referred to the horses or mules on the left side of the team, furthest from the driver.

Off: Referred to the horses or mules on the team's right side, nearest the driver.

Overland: Across land rather than by water.

Postrider: A person who carried the post, or mail, on horseback.

Relay: A team of horses or mules kept in readiness at a way station to relieve the team of an approaching stagecoach.

Reaches: Bars that connect the rear axles with the forward part of the coach.

Reinsman: A stagecoach driver.

Ribbons: Reins.

Rig: Harness.

Road Agent: A stagecoach robber.

Run: The distance between stage stations.

Shotgun: A stagecoach guard.

Singletree: A horizontal crossbar to the ends of which the traces of a harness are attached.

Stagehorn: A horn or bugle blown by the conductor as the stage neared the station

Stageline: A stagecoach company.

Stagers: The men who ran or owned the stage business.

Staging: The business of carrying people and mail by stagecoach.

Station: The place at which a stagecoach stopped.

Station Keeper: The person in charge of the station stop.

Superintendent: The person in charge of 250 miles of road on the Overland Route, also called division agent.

Swing Station: A small stage station where the team was changed. Usually consisting of little more than a small cabin and barn or corral, it is usually manned by just a few stock-tenders. Stages stopped at Swing Stations for about 10 minutes before moving on.

Swingers: If a team had six animals, the two in the middle were called swingers and were easily controlled by the other two pairs as they did their work leading or stabilizing.

Team: The horses or mules pulling the stagecoach, usually consisting of four to six animals.

Thorough Brace: A leather strap of many layers that supports the body of the stagecoach.

Traces: The side straps by which a horse pulls the stagecoach.

Transcontinental: Across the United States

Turnpike: The main road on which travelers paid a toll or fee

Way Station: Same as a station.

Waybills: Stage line advertisements posted in towns and villages.

Wheelers: The two animals at the rear of the team. These would be the largest and strongest animals to provide stability nearest the coach.

Wheelwright: A person who makes or fixes wheels.

Whip: The stagecoach driver, also called "Brother Whip."

Whippletree: The horizontal bar at the front of the stagecoach to which single trees are attached.

(Source: legendsofamerica.com)

Horses

from **PAGE 16**

today is the Mongolian Horse (also called Przewalski's Horse). Other horses perceived to be "wild," such as the North American Mustang, Australian Brumby and the Namib Desert horse are actually just feral horses who descend from once-domesticated breeds.

Native to central Asia's steppes, the Mongolian horse was driven to extinction in the wild, with the last horse spotted in 1969. After conservation efforts in zoos and reserves, these horses have now found their way back into the wild, with about 500 horses in a National Park in Mongolia. These horse also occasionally are found at horse-trading facilities.

In particular, a Przewalski horse was sold in a horse-trading center in the western United States, where an unaware buyer bought the horse assuming it to be a mule, later to find out that this "mule" was untrainable. The horse was then resold until it was finally recognized as a rare Przewalksi's horse.

On the American continent, where no horses were known to the Native Americans before the arrival of the Europeans, horses were reintroduced when Hernan Cortez, in 1519, landed with horses from Spain. Native populations were at first very frightened at the sight of them.

The advantages of the horse for hauling cargo and in battles were quickly realized by the Native populations, who rapidly proved excellent at using horses. Although the common interpretation is that Native Americans started using horses after the 1680 Pueblo Revolt when the Spaniards were sent back to Mexico, evidence reported in the Smithsonian Magazine suggests that some horses were taken from Mexico very early on, and Native Americans had started using horses as soon as they could get them in early 1600s.

In Central New Mexico, the Pueblo populations became more vulnerable to horse-enabled raids from Comanche, Apache and Navajo tribes than before the arrival of the horse.

Some areas of present New Mexico, such as Placitas and Ruidoso, have an overpopulation of wild horses, creating overgrazing and dangerous situations to livestock, people and the horses themselves. A proposed law that would have resulted in the capture and relocation of wild horses was pocket-vetoed by the governor in early 2025.

Riding

from **PAGE 5**

speaker system.

"I gave her a choice between swimming lessons and horseback riding," Guelvenzoph said of the birthday present for her granddaughter.

With the selection of horseback riding, Sumruld started traditional lessons in the South Valley that, at times, included walking over little poles.

"One of her horses did a little bit of a jump and I think she liked the way it felt," Guelvenzoph recalled.

After that, the two started driving to Top Notch Farm for lessons four times a week.

"It's hard," Guelvenzoph said about the time commitment, but "It's important for Naura. She has learned a lot of responsibility and confidence. That was the biggest thing."

Michelle Servantes, 15, makes the trip to Top Notch Farm from Los Chavez, where she started riding almost a decade ago.

"My dad grew up with horses, so he wanted us to grow up with horses too," Servantes said. "If I fell off, he would put me back on and say, go again."

Mike Powers | News-Bulletin photo

Riders and horses use a variety of skills including jumping when traversing a course in English riding at Top Notch Farm in Bosque Farms.

The Belen High School student took a reverse trail from Paisley Zastrow, jumping from Western riding to English instead.

"I thought it was really cool," Cervantes said when she learned about English-style. "Wow, going over jumps? You can do that?"

Multi-tasking is a must for those who train on the compact course, according to Cervantes.

"Doing everything at once," is difficult, she says, making sure the horse has the correct lead and gait while monitoring distance, speed and the next jump.

No matter what style of riding these women prefer, there seems to be at least one common theme.

"I like the connection you make with the people around you — it's a blast," Cervantes said.

"It's kind of a community," is how Mauderly describes it. "The people like to hang out, watch each other ride, ride together. That's what's really neat about it."

For Zastrow, the horse fraternity gives off a special vibe.

"The feeling like you belong somewhere," Zastrow said. "It's your people, your community. There's something to love about that."

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