

# The Historic

Mesilla Valley



## Grounded and Beyond

**Glass in the Garden:**  
An Ode to Sustainability,  
Creativity and Community

**District Attorney Race Heats  
Up: Tenured Politicos and New  
Faces Battle It Out**

**Mija Coffee –  
It's All in the  
Details**



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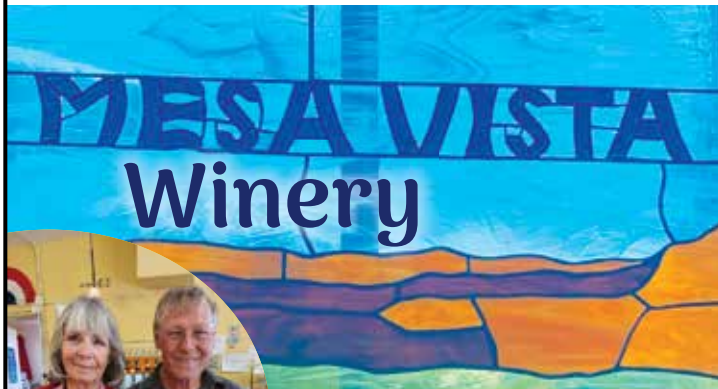


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## Advertising

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## Submissions

We welcome your letters and other queries for this magazine. If you would like to submit or respond to an opinion, send your submission of no more than 600 words to [editorial@thehistoricmagazine.com](mailto:editorial@thehistoricmagazine.com). The publisher reserves the right to edit, cut or publish any submissions.

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An advertisement for Enchanted Sun Realty. The background features a sunburst pattern in shades of yellow, orange, and blue. The headline 'Rent Due Again?' is written in a large, blue, cursive font. Below the headline is a QR code. At the bottom, the text reads 'SCAN. ADD YOUR RENT. OWN A HOME. your own home for the same amount or less'. The Enchanted Sun Realty logo is in the bottom left corner.

An advertisement for Collective Co. It features several photos of modern office spaces with large windows and contemporary furniture. A QR code is positioned in the center. To the right, there is a graphic of a cactus and the text 'BEAUTIFUL DOWNTOWN SPACE! SCAN FOR INFO'. Below the photos, the text reads 'Collective Co. Co-Working | Office | Events | More'. At the bottom right, the address '211 N Water St. Las Cruces &amp; Water St.' is listed.



## FROM THE

# publisher

It's May and the weather is warming up. That means live music on the patio is starting to return, cocktails on the veranda under the summer moon are here to stay with lots of ice, and our gardens are green or getting there. Take a deep breath and enjoy these moments before we're scorched to death by the late July and early August heat index. With any luck, we won't have a remake of last year's plant-killing, flesh-peeling, unfathomably hot summer.

A few community updates: Coyote Traders is having a big sale. Despite the construction on Fourth Street with limited parking, you can park a little further west of the business, or there may be some roadside parking on

Picacho Avenue. It's worth the slight difficulties and patience in obtaining a space to go and take advantage of this "construction sale" and check out Coyote Traders' beautiful new inventory. You should see those five-foot Katrinas on my list of wants.

The political season is in full swing this year as we have primaries currently for what seems like every seat, which is great news so get out and vote! We have published in the Community Calendar some of the upcoming forums so you can get acquainted with a few of the candidates. I do love politics and I can't really explain why – it's full of drama, corruption and double standards, but I suppose my affection for it is seated in those very items I seek to change. It's time now for people to stand up for what they seek as a

change and true progress in this country, for that matter in our own beloved state. It doesn't take any amount of money to educate yourself and vote, but it takes time which is truly all we have in this life. So, join me at some of the forums and enjoy the DA's piece and check my temperature as I'm following the races close.

Some other matters we are covering include the expansion of Enchanted Sun Realty and the Espiritu family's economic drivers with which they've enriched our downtown; a follow-up to the Glass in the Garden event; and a spotlight on Mija Coffee and its positive impact on the community.

Welcome friends of The Historic! Enjoy our May Issue and be sure to pop in and be spendy with our Community Partners. They need you and so do we!



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# Calendar of events

## Every Thursday



- Amador Standards Thursday Night Jazz. Hosted by Robert Ojinaga. No cover. 7 p.m. Amador Patio Bar Grill, 302 S. Main St., Suite B, Las Cruces.

## May 12

- Mother's Day concert. Community concert with the music of Al Hurricane Jr. Bring mom and the whole family for a night of music and dancing. Food trucks will be available. Free. 5 p.m. Plaza de Las Cruces, 213 N. Main St., Las Cruces.

- Mothers Day Brunch Buffet, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Hacienda de Mesilla, 1891 Avenida de Mesilla. Reservations required. Call 575-652-4953.

## May 15

- Wednesday Night Market: Special night Farmers and Crafts Market in Downtown Las Cruces. All goods sold by the vendors are local. Free. 5-9 p.m.

- Debate: District Attorney Office Election debate hosted by Southwest Organizing Project. Free. 6 p.m. The Blue Moon Bar and Grill, 13060 N. Valley Dr., Las Cruces.

## May 17

- Live Music Featuring Daniel Sanchez, 6:30-9:30 p.m., Hacienda de Mesilla, 1891 Avenida de Mesilla.

## May 17-18

- First Annual Lincoln Forest Renaissance Fair: Step into a medieval era in the heart of Ruidoso. Featuring jesters, minstrels, marketplace and food. Single day admission

\$25 per person and weekend pass is \$35 per person. 4-9 p.m. Wingfield Park, 300 Center St., Ruidoso, N.M.

## May 18

- High Tea: Hotel Paso Del Norte to host High Tea. Event will feature authentic and rich tea-drinking experience with an array of loose-leaf teas. All ages are welcome. Smart casual attire and fascinators are encouraged. \$35 per person, gratuity included. 2-4 p.m. Hotel Paso Del Norte, The Dome Bar, 10 Henry Trost Ct., El Paso.



## May 19

- Sunday Brunch featuring live music from Calista, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Hacienda de Mesilla, 1891 Avenida de Mesilla. Call 575-652-4953 for details.

## May 23

- Baila Las Cruces: Monthly event presented by Visit Las Cruces. Free dance lessons led by instructors from Sol Ballroom. No experience or partner needed. Dance styles include salsa, cumbia and more. Free. 7-8:30 p.m. Plaza de Las Cruces, 213 N. Main St., Las Cruces.

## May 24

- Live Music featuring Lush Life Jazz, 6:30-9:30 p.m., Hacienda de Mesilla, 1891 Avenida de Mesilla.

## May 25

- El Paso Water Lantern Festival: Family friendly event with food trucks. Ticket price comes with a floating lantern kit, commemorative drawstring bag and more. Admission \$35 (until 05/17), \$45 (until 05/24) or \$55 (on 05/25). Gates open at 5:30 p.m. Ascarate Park, 6900 Delta Dr., El Paso.

## May 26

- Sunday Brunch featuring live music from Rudy Saenz, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Hacienda de Mesilla, 1891 Avenida de Mesilla. Call 575-652-4953 for details.

## May 31

- Live Music featuring Lisa P., 6:30-9:30 p.m., Hacienda de Mesilla, 1891 Avenida de Mesilla.



## Mesquite Street Historic District and Original Townsite is celebrating 175 years

**JOIN US FOR THIS FREE EVENT**

**May 11th • 8:30am**  
**Walking Tour of Mesquite District**  
 meet at Klein Park Mesquite Street between Organ & Griggs

### MONTHLY NEXT EVENT JUNE 7TH

#### FIRST Fridays Horse Carriage Rides

Free • 5-8pm • From Mesquite Street Galleries and Amador Live • 302 S. Main Street, Las Cruces

### QUARTERLY NEXT EVENT JUNE 26TH

#### Camino de Los Artistas

5pm-8pm • Doors open at 5:30 • Mesquite Street Artists at The Amador  
 302 S. Main St., Las Cruces

### OCTOBER

Dangerbird Bike-Pack Summit  
 Klein Park • **October 25th**

Mesilla Valley Maze • Recognizing  
 Las Cruces' 175th Year Anniversary  
**Entire Month** • 3855W. Picacho

Dia de Los Muertos Altars Workshop  
 1 pm • **October 12th**  
 Alma d'Arte, 402 W. Court Ave.

### DECEMBER

Christmas on El Camino Real  
 Mesquite Street, Las Cruces  
 Luminarias, Santa and  
 Carriage Rides

### FEBRUARY

Xocola'tl on el Camino Real  
 1st Annual Chocolatiers Festival 2025 • **February 14th & 15th**

### NOVEMBER

Dia de los Muertos  
 Klein Park and Mesquite St. Neighborhood  
**November 1st & 2nd** • Tours/ Theater/Altars

Chalk Plot Map of Original Townsite  
**November 2nd**

Pachanga (Party) • **Mid-November**  
 Zoot Suit Contest, Car Show and Music  
 Klein Park & Downtown

Christmas Market • Amador Live • 302 S. Main Street

### JANUARY

Nacimientos (Nativities) - \$5 Donation  
 Display of 200 Nativities from private collection  
 12-4pm • **January 4th** • 706B South Mesquite St.



**Current Exhibit**

**SHE PAINTS WITH FIRE**  
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### June 2

- Booze Yoga: Beginner friendly yoga class on the first Sunday of each month. One-hour class with two beers or mimosas included. \$20/ person. 9:45-11 a.m. Las Cruces Little Toad Creek Brewery & Distillery, 119 N. Main St., Las Cruces.

### June 3

- First Friday: "Variations on a Theme- Life Lessons in Bird Art" by Richard Harris. 4-7 p.m. MAS Art Gallery, 144 Wyatt Dr., Las Cruces.

- First Friday at Trails End Gallery. 4-8 p.m. Trails End Gallery, 1732 N. Mesquite St., Las Cruces.



### June 7

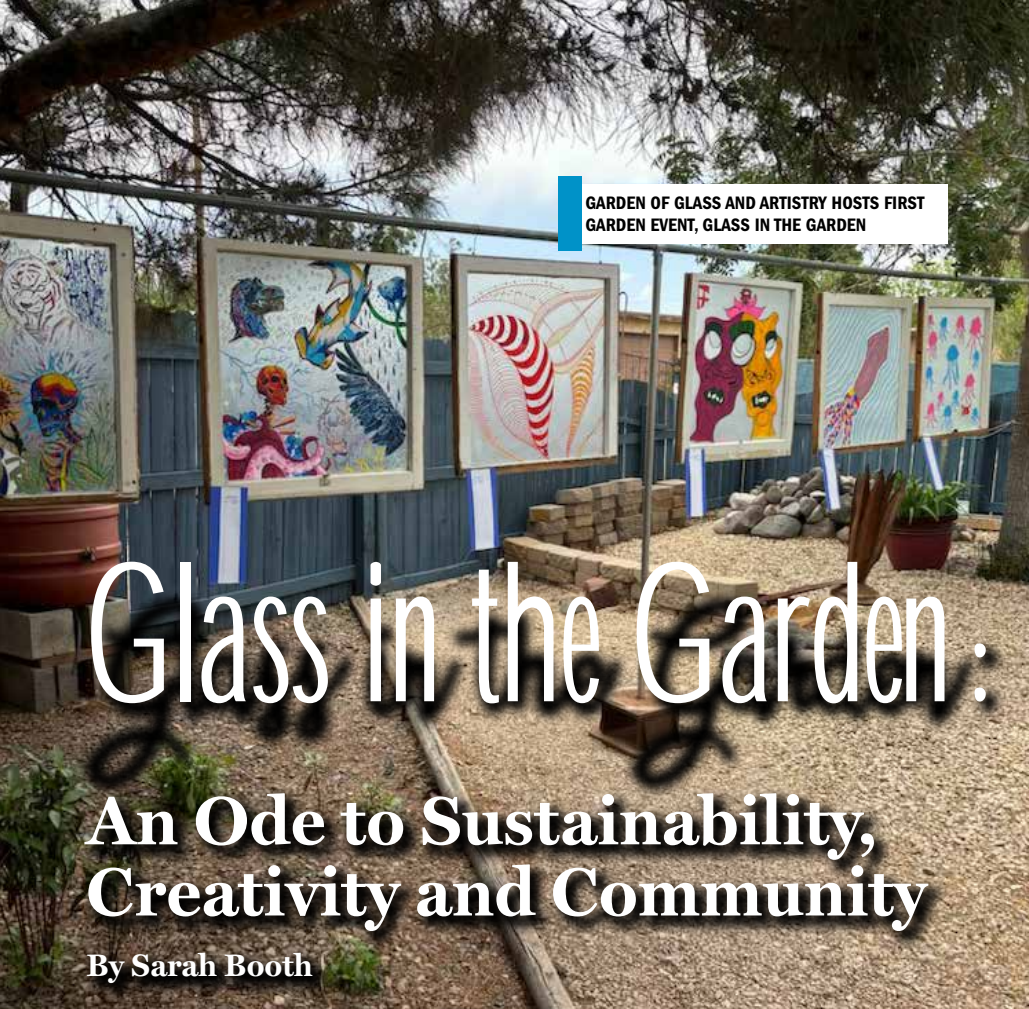
- Live Music featuring Chris Adams, 6:30-9:30 p.m., Hacienda de Mesilla, 1891 Avenida de Mesilla.

- Reception for artist Richard Harris, 4 p.m.-7 p.m., Mas Art Gallery, 144 Wyatt Dr. Las Cruces.

### June 8

- Fathers Day Whiskey and Cigars on the Rooftop, time TBA, Hacienda de Mesilla, 1891 Avenida de Mesilla. Call 575-652-4953 for time and ticket information.

- Live Music featuring Travis Manning, 6:30-9:30 p.m., Hacienda de Mesilla, 1891 Avenida de Mesilla.



GARDEN OF GLASS AND ARTISTRY HOSTS FIRST GARDEN EVENT, GLASS IN THE GARDEN

# Glass in the Garden:

## An Ode to Sustainability, Creativity and Community

By Sarah Booth

Nestled within the Historic Mesquite district in Las Cruces, New Mexico, lies a garden that will take your breath away. For more than two decades, Faith Hutson Verploegh and her husband, John Verploegh, have meticulously cultivated a haven where nature and artistry intertwine. What began as a humble yard and home has now blossomed into a sanctuary of wildflowers and salvaged treasures, all repurposed to breathe new life into the garden. As you enter, you are greeted by the gentle hum of bees providing a soundtrack to your surroundings, dancing amongst the native plant life. Each corner of the garden reveals a new surprise—a whimsical sculpture here, a hidden pathway there, inviting you to explore more.

Faith and John embarked on a journey to create a sustainable haven; they collected items that were discarded by friends, family and the community and repurposed them into beautiful works of art. More profoundly, they restored the value in items that people would consider trash without valuable and integrated

them into other natural elements in their garden. As you walk the path, it is like a treasure hunt for the eye; finding that each yard ornament is actually pieces of a broken coffee mug or the discarded stem to a wine glass. Each object has a unique story and been given a new life as a piece of artistic expression.

One piece in particular stood out and Faith chuckled and told her story. There is a beautiful flower that peaks its head



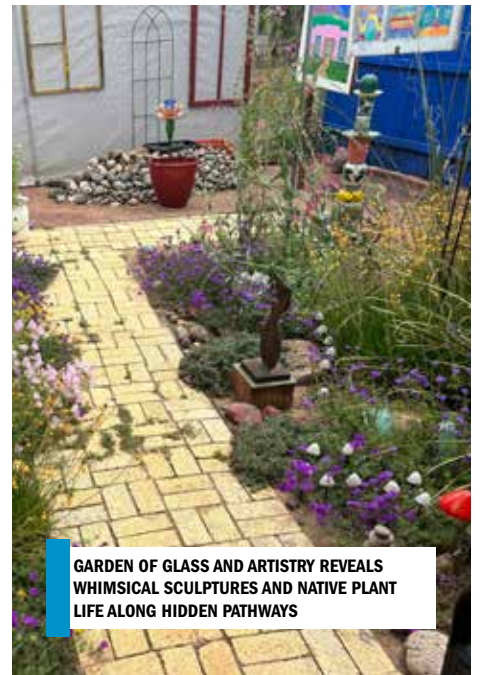
ART PIECE MADE OF RECLAIMED WINDOW, GLASS IN THE GARDEN

Faith and John embarked on a journey to create a sustainable haven

above a flower bed; the center of the flower was the piece in question. It is a melted piece of plastic melded to a fan array of metal that takes the shape of petals and the pistil. Faith attended a dinner party with friends and one of her friend's husband put a container in the oven; unbeknownst to him, the lid was made of plastic and melted into a heap. Faith saw the piece and asked her friend to take it home with her; he, in a desperate attempt to rid himself of the evidence, gladly relinquished what was seen as trash. Faith saw the value in the object and repurposed it to be the literal and metaphorical centerpiece of her artwork. Most of Faith's stories have a similar life to them.

Over the years, Faith and her husband have amassed a treasure trove of salvaged items, generously donated by friends, family, and kindred spirits from around town. From weathered window panes to broken pieces of dishware; each piece has a renewed purpose. However, it is the stained glass that was the star of the show at her first Garden Event this year, Glass in the Garden that took place on Saturday, April 27. Faith invited the community to walk through her garden and view her newest addition to the garden; art pieces made entirely of reclaimed windows.

Continued on Page 10 ►



GARDEN OF GLASS AND ARTISTRY REVEALS WHIMSICAL SCULPTURES AND NATIVE PLANT LIFE ALONG HIDDEN PATHWAYS



WE SHIP  
NATIONALLY



## CHILAQUILES VERDE

This dish (pronounced chill-ah-kee-les) offers a foundation of crispy corn tortilla chips simmering in a warm chile sauce. La Posta's Chilaquiles Verde (green) or Chilaquiles Rojas (red) can be served for breakfast (a favorite), lunch or dinner. Finish this simple dish with a variety of fresh garnishes such as avocado, Cotija cheese crumbles and fresh cilantro to elevate the experience. Serve with a side of refried beans, whole pinto beans, or black beans to complete this meal. (Serves 4)

### Directions

1. In a large skillet coated with cooking spray add La Posta Verde Tomatillo Salsa and heat, while stirring, over medium heat. Slowly add tortilla chips, coating & tossing well with salsa. Top with Monterey Jack cheese. Reduce heat, and simmer until chips are soft yet still a bit crispy around the edges, about 3-5 minutes. For crispier tortilla chips, simmer 1-2 minutes.
2. While tortilla chips are simmering, coat a small skillet with cooking spray or oil, and fry eggs "your way". Place fried eggs evenly distributed on top of chips.

### Ingredients

- 24 Crispy Corn Tortilla Chips
- 1½ 16 oz jars (3 cups) La Posta Verde Tomatillo Salsa
- ¾ cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- 4 eggs
- 2 green onions, mostly green part, minced
- 2 tbsp. minced cilantro
- 1 avocado, seeded, peeled and thinly sliced or diced

3. To serve, scoop servings of chips and egg onto individual plates. Garnish with onion, cilantro, and avocado. Serve with refried beans, seasoned black beans or your favorite Mexican side!

Notes: (1) For Chilaquiles Rojo (Red) - substitute the La Posta Verde Tomatillo Salsa with La Posta Sundried Red Chile Sauce and use cheddar cheese. (2) For Heartier, Meaty Chilaquiles: Follow Step 1. Add 2 cups cooked shredded chicken or beef (warmed) on top of chips. Add the cooked eggs if desired. (3) For Vegetarian Chilaquiles: Follow Step 1. Delete the eggs and add 2 cups of your favorite veggie, sweet potato cubes, pinto or black beans, or seasonal squash on top of the chips.



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## Branigan Cultural Center Exhibit Highlights



*Somos hijos de Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin; Los Manteles de mi Abuela*

*We Are Children of Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin; My Grandmother's Tablecloths*

Using decorative oilcloth tablecloths as his canvases, Roberto Salas paints *sahumerios* (incense burners) in ways that honor and evoke his Hispanic and Indigenous Mexican heritage.

April 5 - June 22, 2024

*Tlazoh Amoxochitl*

*FloreCIMIENTO del conocimiento preciosos*




*Flowering of Precious Knowledge*

K-5 students at Raices del Saber Xinachtli Community School created artwork that interprets pre-Hispanic cultural traditions of Mesoamerica surrounding corn, cocoa, and butterflies. The artwork was created in an after-school program lead by teacher Diana Ginez.

May 3 - June 22, 2024



Branigan Cultural Center  
501 North Main Street, Las Cruces, NM 88001  
575-541-2154 • [www.lascruces.gov/museums](http://www.lascruces.gov/museums)

   @LCMuseum

## ◀ Continued from Page 8

The artistry of stained glass is unique and profound; each pane meticulously handcrafted, every window tells a story—a testament to the beauty that can emerge from the most unlikely of materials. Glass in the Garden was more than just a display of artistic prowess; it is a celebration of sustainability, community and outreach. In a gesture of community, Faith and John extended an invitation to the community and to students from Alma de Arte Charter High School to partake in the creation of stained glass windows for the garden.

Faith and John spent upwards of 30 hours cleaning and reinforcing each window pane, the groups hand-painted them at Nopalitos Gallery. Each pane took between three to five hours to paint. The artists were given the opportunity to unleash their creativity and contribute to a cause greater than themselves. The result was a collection of breathtaking windows, each auctioned during the Glass in the Garden Event. Through an auction held to showcase the students' creations, a remarkable \$1,200 was raised to support the students and their program—a testament to the power of art to effect positive change in the community. For Faith, it was only one step in the greater plan to help inspire others and embrace their creativity to make a difference.



ART PIECE, GLASS IN THE GARDEN

Faith describes the Garden in a simple and profound way:

**ORGANIC:** Both because it is chemical free and developed in stages over time.

**DELIBERATE:** Materials are collected with intentional repurposing; plants are selected for their ability to live in our climate.

**INTOXICATING:** The heady scent of flowers, the sight of a hummingbird bathing in the fountain; the native pollinators visiting the flowers; the grackles at their antics.

**ALLURING:** The sight of flowers, plants and art makes one want to see what is around the corner.

For Faith, the garden is a labor of love—an ever-evolving canvas upon which she continues to weave her vision. Yet, it is also a testament to the transformative power of art and nature, reminding us of the beauty that lies within the ordinary and the potential for renewal that exists in every discarded object. The love transcends the garden into the community for a space to build connection.

Faith and John, along with other community members and a group they've formed called the Mesquite Street Amigos and plan to host various events in the future. Events include the rebirth of an existing idea, Community Garden Tours. They will also be hosting a community plant exchange and a celebration of the 175th birthday of Las Cruces while highlighting the Mesquite District as the most Historic original community in town. As the sun cascades on the Garden of Glass and Artistry, it also cascades on the hopes for a community to grow and embrace connection. Faith's vision has taken root, inspiring all who wander its paths to embrace the beauty of imperfection and the infinite possibilities that lie within the world around us.



GARDEN OF GLASS AND ARTISTRY HOSTS FIRST GARDEN EVENT, GLASS IN THE GARDEN





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# Grounded and beyond

By Sylvia Quintanilla

Every so often, goals and ideas we pick up along the way come together. Sandra Espiritu, co-owner of Grounded Lounge, 300 N. Main St., described her family’s vision and desire for a coffee shop as, “a plan years in the making.” Sandra, her husband, Tony, and their three children, Kaitlin, Kendra and Garret, would travel often for sports when the children were younger. Sandra explained that while they were on the road, one of their constant stops was local coffee shops.

“We’re like, let’s go try a coffee shop. And it was always a place where we could put our phones down, have some coffee and just have some bonding with the kids and the family. We always felt like it was such a great place for community,” Espiritu described.

As Kaitlin and Kendra got older, they began having conversations about their own ideas for a coffee shop in their hometown of Las Cruces. They began taking notes about what they liked at different coffee shops, what they would do differently and how they could implement it all for their dream coffee shop in the future.

In 2022, the opportunity presented itself. Espiritu said her oldest daughter had just graduated from New Mexico State University and her husband had recently retired from the fire department. Her family asked themselves what was

next and they decided it was time to open the coffee shop they always talked about.

Espiritu knew the previous building owner since she was nine years old. Once he saw the vision her family had for the space, unexpected ideas went into motion.

“He’s like a grandpa to me. He’s just amazing, so it was the perfect timing. I had no idea that he wanted to sell and I don’t think he shared that with anybody. When we came here and we started doing this, he loved the concept and he’s like, ‘this is the life that this building needed.’ He was super excited about it. He’s like, ‘you know, I would sell it to you guys if you did something wonderful with it,’” she said.

Grounded Lounge strives for customer service and creates a friendly environment where everyone feels invited and welcome. Inside the shop, there are several large rooms to enjoy your coffee or tea. If you are feeling hungry, there is a menu with pizzas, salads, acai bowls and more. If you are looking for a place to study, there are tables of various sizes to spread out or couches to relax on while you work.

“Just a local feel and along with the friendliness and vibe is so nice. We attract people from all different walks of life,” Espiritu began. “You get families with little kids, people who are retired, and travelers who are coming in through

town. We attract a lot of people and I think that’s what makes us different. We’re not trying to target a certain age group or a certain market. We want Grounded Lounge to feel like a place for everybody. I think it’s really cool, because I think we’ve done it.”

The plaza Grounded Lounge is located in is called La Esquina which means, the corner, in English. Once Espiritu took over as owner, she tried using the empty suites as office spaces for the community. Later, they turned to retail spaces. Currently, there are several shops in La Esquina including Mew + Company Boutique, Mew + Company Children, Stolen Rose Tattoo, XCLUSIVE Studio which is a barber shop, Kandel Karma, Permanent Legacy who does permanent jewelry, a flower shop called Petal and Pink, THC/CBD shop called The Kitchen, and more.

“It’s so nice to put all of these amazing local businesses together and this is what they needed to thrive. It’s kind of like one business brings in a lot of business for the whole plaza,” Espiritu explained.

If business professionals are looking for office space, Espiritu also owns Collective Co., 211 N. Water St. which is a modern day co-working space in Downtown Las Cruces. She explained anyone can rent space there, from students to professionals and businesses. Memberships include hourly, daily,



monthly and yearly packages. Collective Co. has been open for about 18 months.

“We also host events there. We’ve had different events like reunions, training, workshops,” Espiritu began. “Anybody from Virgin Galactic to a high school reunion to a holiday corporate event. We also have tenants like nonprofit organizations renting space there. It’s a great space to just inspire. It brings inspiration and creativity so it’s been really great. The community has loved it.”

Helping the community realize and fulfill dreams of having a place to call their own isn’t new to Espiritu. Since 2005, she has been a real estate agent and opened up Enchanted Sun Realty, 1424 E. Lohman Ave., in 2008. Enchanted Sun was named Small Business of the Year in 2019.

“We’ve been doing really well. It’s

*I love inspiring other women and I feel like there’s enough for everybody you know to go around.*

been a blessing, I think, because we focus more on not necessarily the production. It’s more for us, how many families can we help each and every year? We love working with first-time homebuyers and kind of walking people through that process. It’s been so fulfilling to be a big part of that. We’ve been rated one of the top real estate companies in Las Cruces for many years. We probably help about over 200 families every year,” she reflected.

At Enchanted Sun Realty, their team enjoys working with heroes from the military, fire and police department and

new residents relocating to Las Cruces. With relocations, they assist in not just selling a house, but letting their clients know all that Las Cruces has to offer and how it will fit into their lifestyle.

Enchanted Sun recently merged with Real Broker. This opportunity provided more growth for Espiritu and her team while allowing them to stay local with their name and grassroots values.

With her years of experience in business and real estate, Espiritu said that mentorship is one way she is giving back to the community.

“I love inspiring other women and I feel like there’s enough for everybody you know to go around. I probably could have quit a thousand times in the last 19 years, but every single time there was a challenge, I was like, no, there’s gotta be a way,” she proclaimed.

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# Mija Coffee

## - it's all in the details

By Sylvia Quintanilla

{ Family is deeply  
rooted in the business. }

Jovanna Payan had a dream to be a baker. When she was younger, she traveled to Chicago and fell in love with the city. She drew inspiration from the coffee shops and bakeries and told herself that she would do that someday.

Just a few months ago in January, Payan opened Mija Coffee and her dream came true. The mobile coffee shop is in the parking lot of Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, 200 E. Picacho Ave.

“Since – I can’t even remember – I was always inspired by small coffee shops in big cities and small towns,” Payan explained. “My favorite thing about it is I get to interact with so many different people. I get to interact with older people, with younger people, with everybody from all walks of life and that was one of my favorite things,” Payan beamed.

Mija Coffee is woman-owned and operated. Family is deeply rooted in the business. Payan said her grandmother called her mija and to honor her, Payan used the nickname for the name of her business. Payan is the baker and barista and her daughter assists on the truck. Her daughter is home schooled and it is important to Payan to instill a good work ethic in her daughter as her parents did for her. She went on to say she wants her daughter to know how to work with people, how to work hard, be detailed and just set her goals.

“We laugh, we joke, we mess around with each other. We have a good

time together. We have a really good relationship. I’m very thankful for that,” Payan said. “I am still mom, I have to teach her and I have to show her the correct way to be respectful and have manners and then we have fun.”

Payan had experience as a baker and in coffee shops before, but when the opportunity for the truck came into her life, she couldn’t pass it up.

Payan makes the muffins from scratch. She also bakes cinnamon rolls and croissants daily. Other food items include apple strudel, Lox and bagel and chocolate chip cookies. As for drinks, Mija Coffee

has Chai Latte, drip coffee, Americano, Matcha, Aztec Mocha and hot chocolate. The coffee beans are Intelligentsia, which Payan brings in from Chicago and grinds the coffee beans herself.

Two of their popular items include the Lavender Latte and the Mazapan Latte. Their Lavender Latte has a very strong taste of lavender, but somehow doesn’t over power the creamy drink. The Mazapan Latte has a lot of peanut taste to it that can fool you into thinking they melted the Mexican candy into the drink.

Most drinks can be ordered hot or iced. Iced drinks come with a pink heart straw and hot drinks come with a handmade coffee sleeve. Payan said the sleeve that simply reads “Mija” is from a handmade stamp, but other sleeves she orders locally.

One message on the sleeves that resonates with Payan is “You are Beautiful.” Payan recalled while in Chicago in her early 20s, she was going through a phase where she felt bad about herself and had low self-esteem.

“I remember I was in Chicago and I was at this hip hop show and I saw these posters,” Payan explained. “I saw these stickers that kept saying ‘You are Beautiful.’ It was something that I felt like in that time of my life, I saw that I was like, oh my gosh, like it was just much needed. That was something that I felt like, you know, who doesn’t want to hear that?”

Mija Coffee is very active on their social media accounts and often feature customers proudly posting their drinks. Payan said she takes a lot of pride that people say Mija Coffee is the best and she strives each day to continue to get that feedback from the city.

Mija Coffee is open Tuesday-Friday from 7 a.m.-2 p.m. Follow Payan on Facebook at Instagram at Mija Coffee.



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FIRST POLITICAL FORUM AT THE HISTORIC BAR AND BALLROOM OF PALACIO IN OLD MESILLA HOSTED BY SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING PROJECT

OPINION

# DISTRICT ATTORNEY RACE HEATS UP: Tenured Politicos and New Faces Battle It Out

By Gordon Buck

Five candidates take their seats at the historic bar and ballroom of Palacio in Old Mesilla as they battle for the chance to be the next Dona Ana County District Attorney. Is this the court room or the ballroom?

Surrounding us are well over 100 attendees each wanting to hear what the five candidates will do to ensure a 3,000 backlogged case load is addressed and repeat offenders aren't released back into our community. Beside me are a plethora of politically engaged citizens, from lobbyists to senators, and even campaign managers. Everyone is vying to hear what the first forum hosted by Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) will bring. Our candidates are composed of four democrats and one republican, one of which happens to be the incumbent.

Candidates Opening Statements:

**Fernando Macias (D):** Is running in Dona Ana County to reduce the overall crime rate. It is stated that he has an understanding of the details of the criminal justice system and its complexities. He's committed to an administration which can wrap its arms around a 3,000-case backlog, regardless of party. Fernando has a long history in management and administration which is an asset to the recruitment and retention of Assistant District Attorneys that would make an impactful office for the community.

Not Actively Practicing  
Website: [www.macias4da.com](http://www.macias4da.com)

**Shaharazad Booth (D):** Sherry has been in our community for 29 years and has a child who attends school in the Las Cruces Public Schools district. She

is also involved with the schools as a volunteer and liaison teaching mock trials to youth. She wants to have an open-door office that is led with compassion and competency to recruit and maintain Assistant District Attorneys. Booth feels that the Third Judicial District Attorney office is facing a serious crisis in staff and leadership and that the community is being left to suffer for this failure. She said she's committed to upholding the values of equality, community safety, and criminal justice in our district. She has done some of the leg work as the future District Attorney by opening her rolodex and starting a recruitment process, all of which have committed to her, should she win. January 1, 2025, she says she'll be ready to get to work and make an impactful change.

Actively Practicing  
Website: [www.boothforda.com](http://www.boothforda.com)

Candidates are composed of four democrats and one republican

**Gerald Byers (D):** Gerald has 26 years of prosecutions under his belt working in both New Mexico and Texas. His experience includes cartels in Del Rio, felonies in Amarillo, and gangs in Albuquerque. In Las Cruces, he was the prosecutor for the murder of the Hatch Officer Jose Chavez. In his office, he exclaimed a team of experts who have been bringing that varied experience to the forefront of the county. Infrastructure and partnerships are key to keep moving forward into the future, not just the present.



SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING PROJECT HOSTED FIRST POLITICAL FORUM FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY RACE

Actively Practicing  
Website: Gerald: [www.geraldbyersda.com](http://www.geraldbyersda.com)

**Ramona Martinez (D):** Ramona is from Tierra Amarilla, is the daughter of a union welder and a schoolteacher. She was instilled from a young age not to forget those who helped you along the way. She is a practicing criminal defense attorney. As stated, she is running for the following reasons: To bring the community back to the office, to make sure the office is fully staffed and cases aren't dismissed, and to ensure that repeat violent offenders are fully prosecuted.

Actively Practicing  
Website: [www.ramonafornm.com](http://www.ramonafornm.com)

**Michael Cain (R):** Michael is from North Carolina and has been a resident in our community for 24 years. He met his wife while departing his career in the army and stationed at Fort Bliss. He has a daughter who teaches at LCPS and also has grandchildren. He's been in private practice for 20 years. He has personal experience with District Attorneys, as his father was an attorney in North Carolina and was murdered by a neighbor. The man who killed him served only eight

Continued on Page 18 ►



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◀ Continued from Page 16

months. A family friend at the time was the District Attorney and fumbled the case, only able to secure a charge of manslaughter. Michael helped clean up the crime scene and prepare his father for the burial at the time of the murder and trial. As stated, he has the skill set and ability to execute the tasks of the district attorney and engage the community. Actively Practicing

Website: Campaign website Unknown

You can visit each candidate's website, where available, to learn more about them and reach out for additional clarity in regard to their stances on issues in our community. Actively and Not Actively Practicing refers to their current status as a lawyer day to day. Keep this key factor in mind when voting: An important role for the District Attorney is the understanding of current issues affecting the legal system and administrative duties.

Moderators included Shirley Baca (D) a former state representative and lawyer as well as Kelly O'Connell (R) a lawyer. Questions included topics on how the candidates plan to address the volume of backlog cases, recruitment and retention, as well as address the rise in youth related crimes, in total 3,500 last year having gone through the legal system. Questions involving unconscious racial bias were raised in reference to prosecution. In some areas where there is a higher population of minorities, the crime rates associated with those minorities are higher due to the demographics. Everyone in attendance expressed that crime should be punished and that all people should be treated fairly and equally. "Crime is crime," was the resounding voice in the ballroom. If you commit it you should be

charged, exceptions can't be made based on skin color.

Other questions included the catch and release or bail reform that has made a revolving door for violent and repeat offenders. Criminals know they will be released, go uncharged, and can commit more crimes, sometimes in the same day. A public mention was made to Senator Joseph Cervantes (D) who was in attendance and Daniel Ivey-Soto (D) who introduced Senate Bill 271 Titled: Repeat Felony Offender No Bond Hold during the 2024 thirty day 56th Legislative Session.

Our Sheriff, one County Commissioner, and the County Clerk were in attendance all sitting together in the front row; what a grim sight. Who will be the DA who wrangles in the pitfalls in communication between DASO and the commission?

We need a District Attorney who will lead our community into a safer position. The failure of the commission and DASO to maintain an open dialogue has played a large part in our rise in crime. There was mention of using the Dona Ana Crisis Triage Center as a critical piece of rehabilitation services for those facing mental illness and other underlying issues which may have caused them to commit such acts. The candidate needs to educate themselves on the current status of that arm of the county services and dig deep into the archives as to the commissioners and officials responsible for not being able to keep the center open.

To learn more about SWOP please visit swop.net. They're dedicated to improving voter turnout and to making sure our community North and South within the county is able to stay informed and meet the candidates.



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## KENTUCKY DERBY MINT JULEP: The Crown Jewel of the Derby

By **Melissa Serrano,**  
Mixologist

### INGREDIENTS:

2 oz. Woodford Reserve  
8 mint leaves, plus some for  
garnishing  
½ oz. simple syrup  
crushed ice

### DIRECTIONS:

In a mint julep cup or double  
rocks glass, lightly muddle eight  
mint leaves. Add to the glass the  
Woodford Reserve and simple  
syrup. Then place crushed ice

into the mixture. Stir with a  
swizzle stick or spoon until the  
outside of your cup or glass  
is cold (30-45 seconds). Top  
with more crushed ice to form  
an ice dome and garnish with  
additional mint leaves.

### SUBSTITUTES:

Use ½ oz. agave instead of  
simple syrup for a healthier  
option.

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## Indulgent Spinach Artichoke Dip

By **Gordon Buck**

### INGREDIENTS

1 box (10 oz.) frozen chopped spinach,  
thawed and squeezed dry

1 container (16 oz.) cottage cheese

¾-1 cup mayonnaise or veganise

1 tbsp. assorted herbs (i.e. herbs de  
provence, parsley, rosemary, and/or  
thyme)

1 tsp. spoon garlic salt plus a dash if  
needed

1 tsp. pepper or as needed

a touch of La Posta Red Chile Seasoning  
(optional)

1 can (8 oz.) water chestnuts, drained and  
chopped (optional)

2 small shallots, chopped (optional)

1 ½ cups, ½ reserved parmesan

and/or Asiago cheese

1 can (14 oz.) artichoke hearts, drained  
and chopped

2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

smoked paprika for the top after its baked  
for additional flavor and added element  
for service

### DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°.

2. Combine spinach, cottage cheese,  
mayonnaise, herbs and seasonings, 1 cup  
cheese, artichoke hearts, water chestnuts  
and garlic. Spoon into a 2-quart casserole,  
then top with ½ cup of cheese.

3. Bake for 35 minutes or until dip is hot.

4. Add remaining ½ cup of cheese over top  
during last ten minutes and broil or bake  
until brown.

### NOTES:

I always butter the casserole dish for no  
sticking and the butter adds an additional  
element to the dish. I use vegan butter- it  
works well but regular is fine also. If you  
want to make this dish into a fun seafood  
infusion, adding precooked shrimp and  
canned oysters works very well. To tame  
the flavor, adding Tabasco or a similar  
sauce is very lovely.

### SERVING SUGGESTIONS:

Baguette or crusty sourdough, carrots,  
cucumbers, tomatoes, and radishes served  
alongside green apple make for a delicious  
pairing.

This dish makes a great main course or  
adding a salad and bread adds to the meal.  
If serving with salad but not wanting  
bread, carrots cut bâtonnet style or rustic  
work well.

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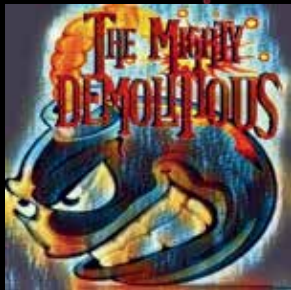
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