

January 2024

A Legacy Local Monthly Publication

The Historic

Mesilla Valley



Med Spas

promote empowerment,
health and beauty

New Life in Mas Art

Taylor-Mesilla Historic
Site is a local treasure

Tips from a Socialite

Contents

Featured on the Cover:
B-Well
Regenerative
Medicine and
Wellness Clinic,
Owners and Staff



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A NOTE FROM THE *publisher*



Happy New Year friends of The Historic, and a special thank you to our local businesses which have hopefully experienced the riches of a busy holiday season.

The holidays are behind us, and winter has truly begun with snow sports in full swing and summer gear stashed away. Kicking

off 2024, we have a short series on women-owned businesses being spotlighted through January and February, each varying in growth and structure.

We're showcasing history in January with three pieces that focus on preservation and the many faces it wears and truly what it means for our community and the significant impact change and investment can have. A new gallery has joined us along the El Camino Real. Duende

Gallery is owned by Linda Sanchez and is located on North Mesquite Street next door to the 925 Gallery, so come on out and enjoy history while curating some great pieces for your home.

While we all continue to analyze what our new goals in the new year will look like, let's remember to focus on growth and improvement. There seems to be so much pressure around a resolution when, in fact, one may benefit more from a looser take on these established traditions.

Now, turn the page and enjoy the hand-picked features for this month as we explore our community.

Mesilla Valley Chorale Rehearsals Begin January 15 –

SINGERS WELCOME

By Ray Scroggin

The Mesilla Valley Chorale will begin rehearsals on Monday, January 15, for its Spring concert, slated for Sunday, May 5, at the Rio Grande Theatre 211 N. Main St. The first rehearsal will begin in the choir room of St. Paul's United Methodist Church at 6:30 p.m., for registration and music distribution. All



following rehearsals will be on Monday evenings from 7:00-9:00 p.m. The Chorale is under the direction of Carol Nike and is accompanied by Jeonai Batista. Judy Bethmann is assistant director; and Asa Cleveland, who also sings with the Chorale, is assistant accompanist.

The Chorale is a mixed-voice, eight-part (SS/AA/TT/BB) diverse group of singers

who share a passion for performing choral music. Rehearsals are held in St. Paul's choir room, located at the southeast corner of Alameda and Briggs. Enter via the choir room door on Alameda. Interested singers wishing to join should visit the Chorale's website for more information at mesillavalleychorale.org.



Snowflake MARTINI

By: Melissa Serrano, Mixologist

INGREDIENTS

- 1 oz. raspberry liqueur
- 1/2 oz. Blue Curacao
- 1/2 oz. simple syrup
- 1/4 oz. fresh lemon Juice
- 2 dashes of Lemon Bitters

DIRECTIONS

Shake well, then strain into a chilled martini glass.

GARNISH

Add a lemon twist.

Calendar of events

January-March

– Museum Exhibit “The Desert Was Red & Red the Dust Was Raised,” 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Museum of Art, 411 N. Main St. Call 575-522-3120 for details.

– Exhibit “Connection : : Conjunto,” 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Branigan Cultural Center, 411 N. Main St. Call 575-522-3120 for details.

Jan. 12

– C.L. Smith. Custom mixed material, rock, rockabilly, blues, country, and surf, 8-11 p.m., Little Toad Brewery & Distillery, 119 N. Main Street, Las Cruces.

Jan. 13

– Meet the Artist: David D. Ybáñez, 1-4 p.m., Mas Art Gallery, 144 Wyatt Dr.

–BJ Ramirez. An evening of music with BJ Ramirez at The Boneyard Cantina on the downtown plaza beginning at 6 p.m., 39 N. Main St., Las Cruces.

–The Retroz Rock Duo. This acoustic duet from El Paso will be playing classic hits from the 60s, 70s, 80s, Latin, and some country, 7-11 p.m., Pecan Grill & Brewery, 500 S. Telshor Blvd., Las Cruces.

–WWE: Supershow. World Wrestling Entertainment is an American professional wrestling promotion; 10-ticket limit for this event and prices are subject to change, 7:30-9:30 p.m., Pan American Center, 1810 E. University, Las Cruces.

Jan. 16

– 2024 Her Impact Conference: Unstoppable. Celebrating unstoppable women making their mark and empowering each other. General admission: \$49; 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum, 4100 Dripping Springs Road, Las Cruces.

Jan. 19-28

– Musical: Once Blank Conversations Theatre Company. Rio Grande Theatre and City of Las Cruces presenting this emotionally captivating show, the only one to have music winning an Academy Award, a Grammy Award, an Olivier Award, and a Tony Award. General admission: \$25; student discounted rate: \$10 at the door; Rio Grande Theatre 211 N Main St., Las Cruces.

Call 575-541-2290 for showing times. Advance tickets available at www.riograndetheatre.org.

Jan. 20

– Kids DIY-U Workshop: My First DIY Toolbox. This workshop will have your little helper eager to tag along on your next home improvement project. A 10-ticket limit for this event and prices are subject to change; 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Lowe's Home Improvement Center, 3200 N. Main St., Las Cruces. Tickets available at <https://allevents.in/las%20cruces/kids-diy-u-workshop-my-first-diy-toolbox/200025860076832>

Jan. 27-29

– Las Cruces Day in Santa Fe. Annual event provides Las Cruces an opportunity to advocate to legislators on the issues impacting Las Cruces and Dona Ana County; From 4 p.m. Jan. 27-4 p.m. Jan. 29, La Fonda on the Plaza, 100 East San Francisco St., Santa Fe, NM. Call 575-524-1968, or online at <http://cca.lascruces.org/EvtListing.aspx?class=B> for more information.

Feb. 2

– Reception for artist Beverley Pirtle, 4-7 p.m. First Friday Night Ramble, Mas Art Gallery, 144 Wyatt Dr.

Feb 2-28

– For the Love of Art, Animals and More, 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m. M-F, 10:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Sat., Mas Art Gallery, 144 Wyatt Dr.

Feb. 10

– Reception for artist Beverley Pirtle, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Mas Art Gallery, 144 Wyatt Dr.



A Legacy Local Monthly Publication

The Historic

Mesilla Valley

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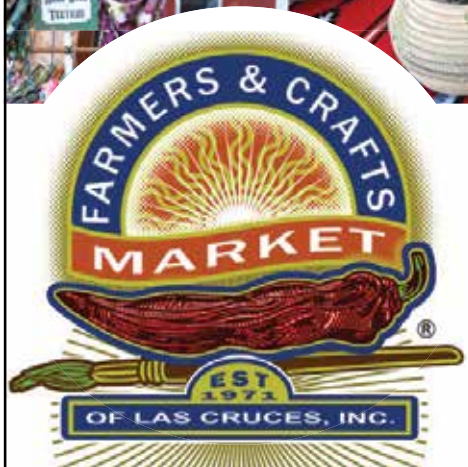
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The Historic Mesilla Valley Magazine

CHRISTMAS ON THE EL CAMINO REAL

Friday, December 1, 2023 • Residents enjoyed free trolley rides, luminarias lit along Mesquite St. and San Pedro St., the Duende Gallery grand opening and a visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus.







new life in MAS ART

By Sylvia Quintanilla

Tiffany and Curtis Bristol are celebrating one year as the new owners of MAS Art. In the last twelve months, they have given new life to the store and they provided a gallery space for local artists to display their work and talent. MAS Art was established 11 years ago in the Downtown Mall. They were there for about five years before moving their current location of 144 Wyatt Dr. six years ago.

Though MAS Art is co-owned, the shop is a woman owned business. Tiffany noted it does take both of them to make the business work. The Bristols have a true partnership that keeps MAS Art thriving. Tiffany is currently an office manager outside of MAS Art.

“Working with my husband of many years has been a great journey, honestly. Being a woman in business has its struggles. You work hard. Having a great partner makes a huge difference in

making the business succeed,” she said.

Curtis Bristol said they have 24 artists on display on consignment in the store. “These are all amazing pieces of art, these people had these sitting in their houses doing nothing because they didn’t have any place to hang them,” he said.

An artist’s work is featured monthly, displayed at the center of gallery. Currently, the space is booked through October of 2024 for their Feature Gallery Artist.

*{ I believe there is an
artist in everyone }*

In January, David D. Ybáñez, an artist of the abstract and surreal will be on display. The first Friday of the month is reserved for an opening for the artist. For



TIFFANY AND CURTIS BRISTOL

Ybáñez, his opening will be on January 5 from 4-7 p.m.

There will be another opportunity to meet him on January 13 from 1-4 p.m.

Previously, MAS Art had a gallery next-door, but the Bristols made the change to open up their store space to add a gallery space. The artwork on the walls is mesmerizing. Seeing the different mediums from watercolor, oils and acrylics is eye catching. Guests can easily spend hours admiring the artwork alone.

MAS Art offers several services including custom framing, art supplies and art for sale. The back wall of the main floor has the different options for framing. Colors ranging from teal, pink, black, charcoal, and gold. Curtis noted that a lot can be done with custom framing and they do display many nice options, but keep their prices affordable.

UPCOMING EXHIBITS



For the LOVE of Art, Animals, and More

February 2–28, 2024

Mas Art Gallery
masartllc.com

144 Wyatt Dr, Las Cruces
9am to 5:30pm, M – F
10am to 3pm, Sat



Beverley Pirtle

Two Receptions
First Friday Night Ramble, February 2, 4-7pm
Second Saturday, February 10, 11am-3pm

Watercolor & Mixed Media



DAVID D. YBÁÑEZ
Artist of the Abstract and Surreal

MAS ART GALLERY
144 WYATT DRIVE
LAS CRUCES, NM

Featured Gallery Artist
of January 2024

Meet the Artist:
January 5, 4 - 7 p.m.
January 13, 1 - 4 p.m.



He noted he can frame anything and welcomes customers to inquire.

Curtis has been an artist most of his life. He said he was a tattoo artist for more than 20 years and also worked part-time at another custom framing store for 11

years. His experience in framing helped in the decision for the purchase of MAS Art. He said learning how to frame could take more than a year. He expressed the purchase was the right transition for him at this point in his life.

“This was perfect. It allows me to remain in the creative side of art and we really like the fact that we are able to support local artists and have place for them to show their stuff and get their work out there,” he said.


Right away, walking into MAS Art, you notice the openness of the floorplan. Art supplies are adorned along the space and artists from beginners to master level have the opportunity to hold the supplies in their hands to find the right fit from tools to paper.

Learning about different mediums for art was a bit of a learning curve for Curtis and Tiffany. He said they have both learned a lot about art supplies and wanted to make sure they were educated to have an intelligent conversation with their customers. In the process of learning about oil paints, Curtis picked up oil painting himself. Other mediums that he works in are watercolor, acrylic, pencil and pen. Tiffany is a photographer and like Curtis, has photos on display.

“I believe there is an artist in everyone,” Tiffany began. “We started doing oil paints together and it’s from listening and being around art. It’s just picking up and finding that form. I would always tell people I can’t draw a stick figure, but I

figured out I can push paint.”


Input from the community has been positive. “The art community is really happy we kept this place open,” Curtis said. “They come in and tell me that they are and how important a store like this is for this community, and I see that as well.”



CUSTOM FRAMES


BY CURTIS

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Med Spas promote EMPOWERMENT, HEALTH and BEAUTY

By Sylvia Quintanilla

The year 2023 was a massive one for women in pop culture, from movies to concerts; women have been breaking records all around. Locally, there has been a growth in women-owned businesses and medical health spas. In Las Cruces, two new med spas have hit the ground running and are displaying their talents to empower and benefit other women in the community. In Mesilla, one med spa has been an industry leader whose business has been evolving in the last four years.

B-Well Regenerative Medicine and Wellness Clinic, located in Mesilla on 2470 Calle De Guadalupe Suite C, is more than a clinic. Co-owners Sheila Bardwell, Doctorate of Nurse Practitioner, and Chelsie Carter, Registered Nurse, explained it is a sanctuary for holistic wellness and empowerment, especially tailored to women.

“At B-Well, we pride ourselves on our comprehensive approach to health, which includes everything from hormone testing, weight loss, and sexual education to advanced aesthetics like Botox and fillers, laser treatments, IV therapy, and an array of other healing modalities. Our focus is not only on enhancing beauty, but also on

unraveling the root causes of diseases and disorders,” Bardwell said.

Having a shared vision, the co-founders came together and brought their combined expertise to offer a well-balanced business to treat an individual as a whole. Recently, B-Well invested in a state-of-the-art laser machine that offers cutting-edge treatments such as non-invasive body contouring, skin tightening, vaginal rejuvenation, and advanced skin rejuvenation therapies. Their team has also expanded with new staff members that bring with them fresh expertise in functional medicine practices.

{ B-Well is a sanctuary for holistic wellness and empowerment }

“Being counted among the growing number of women-owned health and med spas is an incredibly empowering experience,” Carter reflected. “It’s a testament to the strength, resilience, and innovation that women bring to the healthcare industry. As a woman-led business in this sector, it feels immensely



B-WELL REGENERATIVE MEDICINE AND WELLNESS CLINIC, OWNERS

gratifying to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with other female entrepreneurs who are not only carving out spaces for themselves, but also redefining wellness and beauty standards.”

All Natural Aesthetics, located on 2000 E. Lohman Ave., Suite B, is celebrating its one-year anniversary this month. Brooke Craig who is a Registered Nurse, Master Injector and owner, said they are excited for the celebration. They plan to have a



B-WELL REGENERATIVE MEDICINE AND WELLNESS CLINIC, OWNERS AND STAFF



B-WELL REGENERATIVE MEDICINE AND WELLNESS CLINIC, OWNERS AND STAFF



ALL NATURAL AESTHETICS, STAFF



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ALL NATURAL AESTHETICS

party in February to thank their clients who have been with them.

I always say less is more. I am very conservative on how I treat my clients

This business has two licensed estheticians with a combined three years of experience. Facials and lashes are their most requested services. As for the medical side, Craig said her most requested services is Botox. They also have a Medical Director, Dr. Don Marketto, who has worked with Craig for years.

“I always say less is more. I am very

conservative on how I treat my clients,” said Craig, who is known as a natural injector. Services offered include fillers, sculptra, acne treatment, Emsculpt NEO, chemical peel and microneedling and more. The newest technology is the BBL Laser.

Before All Natural Aesthetics was established, Craig worked as a registered nurse in ICU and Labor and Delivery. After the birth of her daughter, she realized she wanted a schedule that allowed her not only have a career, but also be a present mother.

“That’s what opening this business has really done for me. I can control my schedule,” Craig proclaimed.

Training and safety are two very important values to Craig. Throughout the

year, she has been able to travel and attend trainings and host a few at the med spa.

“I am friends with a lot of the injectors in town. I think it’s great we can support each other, help each other grow, there are enough clients to go around,” Craig began. “We just talk and come together and figure out how to do everything the safest way for our clients. It’s nice to have each other in our back pocket if we ever need anything.”



Downtown Las Cruces, **Dermaesthetics and Simply Sauvage, 104 S. Water St.**, opened its doors in August 2023. Run by Leslie Kozloski and Dr. Chantal Sauvage, who are best friends. The duo always talked about doing something in the future.

Continued on Page 16 ►

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Ingredients

- 1 jar (16 oz.) La Posta Hatch Green Chile Peach Salsa
- 2 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 tbsp. horseradish
- 3 to 4 dashes of La Posta Hatch Red Chile Hot Sauce (optional)

Directions

In a small bowl combine La Posta Hatch Green Chile Peach Salsa, lemon juice and horseradish. Blend well. Add La Posta Hatch Red Chile Hot Sauce for extra flavor & heat. Place in an airtight container and chill for 30 minutes or up to 2 days.

Note: For a classic shrimp cocktail to impress, simply layer a stemmed cocktail glass with specialty micro greens, 2 tbsp. of La Posta's Peach Cocktail Sauce, and hang 4-6 cooked, chilled, and tail on shrimp along the side of the glass. Garnish with a lemon wedge.



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DERMAESTHETICS STAFF



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◀ Continued from Page 13

“It’s a great partnership, we work well together. I couldn’t ask for a better person to be with,” Kozloski explained.

Kozloski brings 12 years of experience to Dermaesthetics. She was a nail tech and decided she needed more growth. She expanded her knowledge in the esthetics field and opened her own med spa. With education in mind, Kozloski added that each staff member is knowledgeable in each service offered.

Sauvage was an army medic for about 12 years, commissioned as an army nurse four

years ago. She then got her doctorate and began to practice family medicine before joining the med spa.

With cold and flu season among us, the Tri-Immune Booster (a triple defense immunity formula) and IV fusions are the most requested services. Botox filer and Hydro filler are also in demand.

In 2024, Sauvage noted they want to focus on fitness, making fitness goals, recovery, proper nutrition and a more holistic approach.

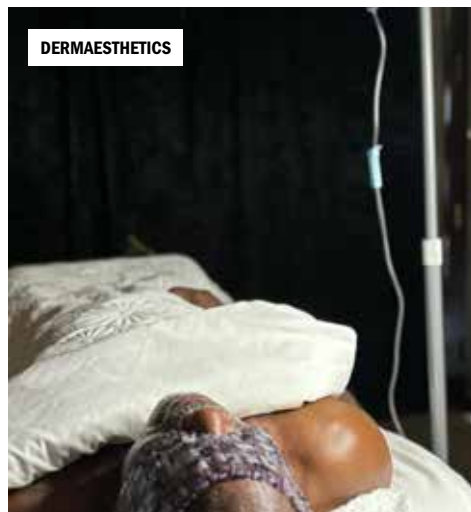
Empowering women and building friendships with clients is important to the spa.

Empowering women and building friendships with clients is important to Dermaesthetics

“I think it’s very important. Especially in this particular demographic,” Sauvage explained. “Giving them an opportunity to express themselves, be happy, healthy and follow their dreams and happiness. That sorta of thing is huge. I feel it only increases out cliental and other women in the community.”



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Taylor-Mesilla HISTORIC SITE is a local treasure

By Desiree Bustamantes

J. Paul and Mary Daniels lived in their home situated on the west side of the historic Old Mesilla Plaza since 1953. Mary was an award-winning writer, photographer, and researcher. J. Paul worked for many years as an educator, legislator, community leader, and patron of the arts. Over the years, he made many altruistic contributions on behalf of the people of the Land of Enchantment.

Alexandra McKinney is the Instructional Coordinator Supervisor and Historian at the Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site and shares, “In 2003, J. Paul and Mary Daniels Taylor – along with their seven children – made the decision to donate their home. The family desired to leave the home and collection as a place where the people of New Mexico could learn about the history of Mesilla, New Mexico, and the Borderlands region.”

A donation agreement between J. Paul and Mary Daniels Taylor and the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs was signed in September 2003. In 2004, the property was set aside for public use and declared a state monument to be known as the Taylor-Barela-Reynolds-Mesilla State Monument. The official dedication of the monument took place in September 2006. Currently, the New Mexico Historic Sites is working with the Taylor family to prepare the house for public use under the terms of the donation agreement.

The residence is now on the National Register of Historic Places and is known as the Taylor-Mesilla Historic Property. It was originally constructed in the 1850s with two adjoining storefronts and a large



residence in the rear. Much of the original architecture, furnishings, and overall décor have been preserved to represent the family’s values and lifestyle coupled with their active participation in the community in terms of politics, education, religion, history, and the arts.

{ We are a foundation
which values historic
preservation }

The state’s Department of Cultural Affairs highlights the collection of Spanish colonial, Mexican, and New Mexican art and textiles. Also featured is an incredible collection of WPA art, paintings, Puebloan and Mexican pottery, photographs, and religious art forms such as santos. Perhaps most notably, is a stunning collection of more than 200 international Nativity scenes, in Spanish known as, “Nacimientos.” They are often made of materials such as wood, pottery, clay, everlasting flowers, fruits, basketry, glass, wax, and tinsplate.

Heather Pollard is the president of the Friends of the Taylor-Mesilla, a not-for-profit organization which serves the goals of the Historic Site. “We are a foundation which values historic preservation in the Mesilla Valley and want to see this home become a museum and educational resource for New Mexicans as well as visitors to our state,” Pollard says. You can become a Taylor friend and lend support at <https://jpt100th.com/taylorfriends/>.

Before his passing in February 2023, J.

Paul shared, “A Friends Group was always part of the vision Mary and I shared for the Historic Site. I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to the group in one way or another. The Friends have been invaluable in helping continue the tradition of sharing our home with school children and other visitors. We couldn’t do it without you. ¡Muchísimas Gracias!”

As we look to the future, Wendi Laws, the site’s regional manager explained, “In the next year, staff at the Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site will be working diligently to prepare the family home, collection, and public spaces in the site for eventual opening. It is an honor to have this amazing collection housed right in Mesilla and to be able to preserve it for current as well as future generations of New Mexicans, as well as being able to share it with visitors from all over the world.”

Anyone interested in following this work are encouraged to join the Taylor-Mesilla Historic Property Facebook Community to see behind-the-scenes of the work that is being done, view photos, join the email list, and learn about programs that will be hosted.

Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site
<https://nmhistoricsites.org/taylor-mesilla>
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The Specter of Urban Renewal Still Haunts *the Mesquite Street Original Townsite Historic District*

By Faith Hutson

Across Spanish America and some of the American Southwest towns were carefully laid out as grids arranged around a central plaza. The Mesquite Street Original Townsite Historic District is one such example. Lt. Sackett, at the behest of Don Pablo Melendrez*, surveyed the square and rectangular parcels into 84 blocks. One block each was reserved for a church and a plaza.

The church plaza in Las Cruces was visible in the center of the survey plat filed in 1853. The built environment plays a crucial role in shaping the collective identity, cultural values, beliefs and history of groups of people. For Las Cruces, St. Genevieve Church was at the heart of the residential and business communities.

A tremendous infusion of federal dollars after the end of World War II led to a population explosion and Las Cruces began to experience many dramatic changes. The construction of new homes and shopping centers drew people in their new automobiles away from the heart of town. By the 1950s and 1960s business dramatically declined in the original townsite and central business district.

During Urban Renewal officials tried to convince residents of the benefits of building a modern downtown area that generations of citizens could enjoy. Instead of embracing the cultural and historic heritage of downtown Las Cruces, the city decided to expunge the traditional cityscape. As the civic spaces of the church and plaza were demolished, Las Cruces

lost its soul. Once the misguided intentions of modernity failed, revitalization occurred when we recaptured and valued the historic spaces.

Well-meaning City officials can still exhibit damaging attitudes concerning the Mesquite Street Original Townsite and the historic districts. It is as if two different entities preside. Prominent service is paid to historic preservation City rhetoric, and in written policy and plans. However, indeed, our remaining historic built environment is devalued and disrespected when decisions are made that defy these stated intentions and established ordinances.

The 2016 Downtown Master Plan recognizes that the “downtown businesses, cultural institutions and residential neighborhoods are crucial to the social, economic, and environmental vitality of Las Cruces.”

Two residential neighborhoods flank the Downtown Central Business District – the Alameda-Depot Historic District and the Mesquite Street Original Townsite Historic District. The Master Plan views the Alameda-Depot and the Mesquite Historic Districts very differently. Alameda recognized as valuable.

“Homes here combine indigenous vernacular adobe with the styles enabled by the new rail deliveries, including Mission Revival, Spanish Pueblo Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, Gothic, Italianate, Queen Anne, Georgian, Colonial Revival, Neo-Classical Revival, Prairie Style, Western Stick Style, and

Shingle Style. Of the over 300 structures in the district, 192 are considered historically significant.” (pg. 16). And because the Alameda District is on the National Register of Historic Places, 1985, it is viewed as a real asset. “This historic district is a big part of the national draw of Downtown Las Cruces today, thanks to its depth of history and careful preservation of its beloved character” (pg. 17).

In contrast, the Mesquite District is described in more negative terms and its value is not recognized. “The demolition of much of the city center proved a hard blow to Mesquite, which struggled with neglect and gang violence in the aftermath of Urban Renewal” (pg. 14). The Original Townsite had many of the ornate architectural styles found in the Alameda, but they have been demolished. The Master Plan describes the adobe houses “boxes”! “In contrast to Downtown, the streets here are narrow with few parking lots, lined by modest one-room-wide adobe boxes with portales, small shop fronts, and garden walls” (pg. 14). Of the 700 buildings surveyed in 2004 Historic Properties Survey, 225 (32 percent) are contributed to the national or state historic districts (or both) and 197 (28 percent) were worthy of further study. None of this is mentioned in the Master Plan.

City officials, through various ordinances and plans, consider that preservation of historic buildings is important. The Master Plan states that “buildings constructed in the Mesquite Historic District, Downtown Central

TIPS FROM A
SOCIALITE
by G. Buck

How to give a fabulous Open House

When entertaining either at the holidays or any time of the year, make sure the guest list is as eclectic as individual style. It's always great to make sure 40 percent of the guests have never met or are newly acquainted. New guests make for a great shift in conversation and ensure friends don't clump together. When it comes to food and

drinks, try to separate these areas in two different sections of the room with food being presented on a table or buffet and a small bar laid out upon a large end table or an existing sideboard fit for serving. If each area is separated, the guests don't have to wait in line all at once and can mix and mingle while moving about the room.



Business District, and Alameda-Depot Neighborhood prior to January 1, 1970, shall be considered buildings of historic value to the City of Las Cruces. These buildings shall qualify for all exceptions and preservation protocols established by this Chapter” (pg. 74). And yet in the last 2 years, the Mesquite Historic District has been unable to save several buildings from City bulldozing. Dozing that occurred without review from the Historic Preservation Commission.

Chapter 40: Historic Preservation Ordinance states “strengthening of the City’s economy through heritage tourism and real estate for the benefit of residents and tourists through promotion and use of historic buildings and cultural sites”

(Section 40-02, pg. 7). City officials should market Mesquite street since it is both part of the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro and part of the U.S. National Park Service Trail System. This historic trail from Mexico City to just north of Santa Fe was used to transport goods and people during the Spanish Colonial days although it was used extensively by indigenous peoples prior to the Entrada.

Focal points are important for districts; it can be a fountain, or a square, or a building. It is a landmark, like St. Genevieve once was and now the Downtown Plaza currently is. “If it is surprising and delightful, a whole district will get a magic spillover. All the truly great downtown focal points carry

a surprise that does not stale” (Quintana-Eddins, Savannah. Impacts of Urban Renewal on Community Identity and Sense of Place in Las Cruces, New Mexico (2023). After the loss of St. Genevieve, the focal point of the Mesquite District became Klein Park, where the first settlers cast lots for the newly surveyed properties of the original townsite. Unfortunately, the City has systematically eliminated the park’s significance by withdrawing its support. There is no more Music in the Park, the City stopped supporting Winter Fest in 2017, and they have put so many conditions on the Pachanga that it has moved to Young Park.

It seems too often that prejudicial attitudes remain. This must change if real progress is made to save and revitalize the Mesquite Historic District. Please support efforts you see occurring at the grassroots level by residents, property and business owners, and Neighborhood and Community organizations.

** Publisher’s Note: Lt. Delos B. Sackett of the First U.S. Dragoons; Don Pablo Melendrez, a local leader at the time and the first justice of the peace in Dona Ana County.*

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The Main Street Folly: Or How Las Cruces tried to Create a Shoppers' Paradise But Ended Up With a Hell of a Mess

By Sandra Marshall

In the years after WWII the population of Las Cruces exploded, thanks to the growth of nearby White Sands Proving Grounds. The new people needed homes and convenient shopping and, for the first time, nearly everyone owned a car. The suburbs, with their accompanying shopping malls, began spreading like a fungus out from the edges of the city.

Suburbs provided low risk and high profits for investors and, at least initially, for the city. Large tracts of land were annexed, creating a new tax base that offset the cost of city services. The side effect of this rapid outward growth was to draw commerce away from the city center.

As commerce on Main Street declined, some stores moved to the more profitable shopping centers and to the new indoor malls that were becoming social hubs as well as shopping destinations. Downtown property values fell, empty buildings became more common, exteriors were not maintained, visitation fell, and crime increased. Sadly, city government failed to address real factors leading to city center decline.

By the late 1960s, after several studies, the Las Cruces Urban Renewal Agency (LCURA) determined that downtown needed to eliminate everything that appeared shabby and create a sleek, modern city center. The first casualty was St. Genevieve Catholic Church, the architectural focal point of the city and the spiritual and community center for many residents. By then the building and grounds were in disrepair, and the building was condemned in 1965. The property was sold to the Merchants and Farmers Bank, which paid for the land only—the building was considered worthless. Even if the church building was lost, the grounds, spacious, with its many mature trees, would have made a city park that was the envy of other small cities.

Once St. Genevieve was gone, wholesale “slum clearance,” as LCURA termed it, began. Removal of the “blighted core”

would save the city. Using federal funding, 94 acres – 33 city blocks – were bought up and historic buildings began to come down. Residents and shop owners were displaced, sometimes under duress. Soon downtown resembled Hiroshima after the bomb. And to the dismay of LCURA, the expected offices and magnet department stores that were supposed to flood in showed no interest. Even the bank that bought the St. Genevieve property was never built.

What now? Another committee, the City

Between the curves were concrete planters, water features, benches, and statuary. At the north end an imitation Spanish-style entrance, a faux adobe wall with arched doorways and imitation clay shingles replaced the genuine architecture.

By 1975 there were ten vacant lots and 21 vacant buildings. Except on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, when the Farmers and Crafters Market, established in 1971, set up its booths, the Mall was virtually empty. A rich architectural and cultural heritage had been largely lost and bitter

resentment about this is still present in the hearts of citizens who remember how it was and how ruthlessly it was taken away.

Las Cruces was not the only city to try this. Around 100 cities had tried to make their downtown a shopping mall, but by the 1980s most had seen it fail. By this time heritage tourism was proving to be a viable option for towns and cities who retained their historic character. But, as a Las Cruces Sun News editorial stated at the time, “We have destroyed a part of the old charm of Las Cruces for a possible new ugliness.”

In 2002 renovations began again. The canopies were removed and the street opened again to two-way traffic* with on-street parking. This took several years and millions of dollars more, but eventually small specialty stores, bars, restaurants, and other venues of modest ambition began attracting residents, tourists, and college students. The street, although changed, is viable again. But, oh, what it could have been! And, although too much of the real Las Cruces has been lost on Main Street, on either side, in the Mesquite and Alameda-Depot Historic Districts, the heart still beats.

* *Publisher's Note: In 2017, the City began construction to return Church and Water streets to two-way traffic.*

i E. M. Kirkman, “Private Opinion,” Las Cruces Sun News (New Mexico), September 16, 1970.



DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES AFTER MASS DEMOLITION FOR URBAN RENEWAL. NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, 04780004, LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO.

Advisory Committee to Urban Studies (CACTUS, of course) suggested creating a pedestrian shopping mall just like the ones doing so well in the suburbs. Seven blocks of Main Street were closed to traffic. The empty lots behind the remaining buildings became parking lots. The streets on either side were reconfigured into a one-way roundabout nicknamed “the racetrack”. Roofing the whole thing was impractical, so the semblance of a roof was constructed; supports resembling airplane tailfins, holding up metal canopies, were set at intervals along either side.

The Downtown Mall opened in 1972. A winding yellow brick pathway snaked down the middle of the former Main Street. (No flying monkeys were reported.)

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