

C2 ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

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## Improved MVD Trying ... Really

**A** NEW AND IMPROVED MVD. A few weeks ago readers were let loose with gripes about the state Motor Vehicle Division. As it has in the past, it probably made everyone (except MVD employees) feel better — a good rest usually does.

But in the long run, the motorist usually left with little more than an anti-MVD hangover and a lingering anger at not having his or her concerns addressed.

MVD officials are here to stop the binges. Director Ken Ortiz says answers and help are a phone call, a mouse click or an office visit away. Really.

Stop binging. Because, Ortiz says, there have been real efforts to make MVD more responsive, more user-friendly, more caring.

Those efforts include:

- A toll-free call center, 800 MVD-INFO (800-663-4636), which drivers can call to take care of renewing vehicle registrations and plates; driver's licenses and ID cards; get answers on everything from vehicle titles and liens to benefits and ignition interlocks; pay citations; get a copy of their driving record; or find the nearest MVD office.

- Postcard alerts that it's time to renew your driver's license.
- Tracking software that allows staffers to check when renewal notices and stickers were processed and mailed.

- A proof-of-insurance database that requires insurance companies to electronically report policy updates to MVD. In 2003 New Mexico was worst in the nation for uninsured drivers at 43 percent; the national average is 14 percent. Ortiz says that as of March, we're now below that, at 10 percent.

For motorists who think they can get a policy, register and renew it, know that the state gets updates monthly; most insurance companies report weekly, and "quite a few" check it daily.

- A friendly competition in field offices that rewards employees for handling the most customers in the least amount of time. Ortiz says that back when he took office in 2003, the average wait time was 34 minutes. It's now 14.

Part of the solution was putting staffers at information counters to immediately go over a driver's paperwork, check them in and monitor their progress.

- Plans to revamp the Web site, www.state.nm.us/mvd, to make it more user-friendly. The site already includes a copy of the current Driver's License Manual, downloadable forms for everything from licenses and registrations to specialty plates and bills of sale, a link to the Motor



D'VAI WESTPHAL  
Of the Journal

Vehicle Code and answers to the 12 most commonly asked questions.

Several readers complained last month that they didn't get their renewal notices or tags. Ortiz says on the 19th of every month, MVD sends out an average of 120,000 renewal notices. The notices are timed to give drivers 45 days to get an emission test, if necessary, and for April 30, your notice was supposed to be in the batch that went out March 19.

But notices are mailed to the last address on file, so if you've moved, you'll miss it. Transportation Department spokesman David Harwell says that while problems with the "mail plagues us all," drivers have a "personal responsibility" to make sure their license and plates are current. That can be done via the mail, the toll-free number, the Web site, and at field offices via self-service kiosks or the traditional clerks. Even if you need a Bernalillo County emissions certificate.

FTI-Ortiz says MVD is still working on a 1976-era computer mainframe system that unfortunately doesn't hold information, so if you go in and update your address for your driver's license and plates for your pickup that don't include your motorcycle, that renewal notice won't make it to your mailbox. Make sure when you update, you update everything.

As for those who think Ortiz and his 375 employees in 90 offices are rolling around on a big pile of cash — "a common misperception" — "It's not doing this to make money — all revenue we collect goes into the general fund, and goes to cities, counties, municipalities, the road fund" or to support the treasury, Ortiz says.

Check the pie chart on the back of your renewal envelope for a breakdown.

For drivers such as those in last month's column, Ortiz says, "We're always open to suggestions."

And Harwell adds a plea to please contact MVD. "We want everyone to have the best experience possible," he says. And "to turn (a negative) experience around to a positive one."

Send us your editorial suggestions to [editor@albuquerquejournal.com](mailto:editor@albuquerquejournal.com).

## Watch Out for Utility Scam

### Woman Paid Bogus Plumber

By SIAN OLSON  
Journal Staff Writer

Be on the lookout for scammer pretending to work for the city-county water utility, officials said Thursday.

One elderly woman has been tricked out of \$707, according to state Attorney General's Office documents.

According to the documents, the 91-year-old woman was called by people pretending to be officials with the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority.

They told her the agency was conducting a survey in her neighborhood and found a water leak on her property. They then offered to send a private plumber to fix it.

The plumber showed up at her door, dug up a "thin slice" of grass around a sprinkler head and charged the woman for the work.

Attorney general spokesman Phil Simerone said this is the first such incident the office has heard of, but it will be included in the attorney general's monthly newsletter on consumer fraud.

Spokesman David Morris said water authority employees might notice a leak in someone's property if they are working in the area, but would never recommend a specific private plumber.

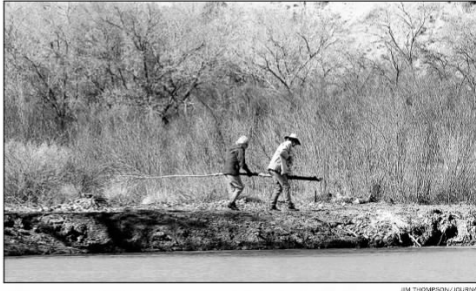
If workers do contact someone about a water leak, they should be carrying identification and would most likely have a car with the water authority's logo on it, he said.

"If (people) have any doubts at all, we encourage them to give us a call before letting anyone onto their property," Morris said.

Simerone said more information about cases is on the attorney general's Web site, [www.nm.gov](http://www.nm.gov).

He said his office also encourages people to report any scams they witness.

## FRIENDS HELP THE MINNOWS



Carolyn Benson, left, and Becky Davis carry a cottonwood that they planted along a minnow channel Friday near the Rio Grande Nature Center. Benson and Davis are with the Friends of the Rio Grande Nature Center.

## Ex-Youth Lockup Chief Sues County

### Man Claims He Was Singled Out

By VIC VELA  
Journal Staff Writer

SANTA FE — A former Santa Fe County youth lockup director Billy Merrifield said in a lawsuit filed recently in U.S. District Court that the pain

was sent on his own time and away from the workplace.

Merrifield worked at the county Youth Development Program Subsequent to his alleged multiple wrongdoings at the facility, including claims that supervisors and others participated in a "porn ritz" there.

Settlements reached since October against the county for sexual improprieties have cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Female employees at the jail said porn was on view on jail

computers during work hours and that some of them were subjected to unwanted sexual advances.

About half of the jail's 80 employees, including Merrifield, were either fired or resigned after county officials "cleaned houses" since October 2005 in wake of the investigations.

But the former program director claims he was "singled out, targeted for termination, and not treated like other similarly situated employees" in the process, according to the

lawsuit.

Named as defendants in Merrifield's lawsuit are Santa Fe County commissioners and county jail administrators.

Merrifield admits to sending a photographic image to his former supervisor, Robert Apodaca, but says the image was sent to Apodaca's private cell phone, according to the lawsuit. Apodaca "decided to share it with other employees, of which one employee was deeply offended by the inter-

## Group Wants Stronger Fix at Sandia Landfill

By SUE MAJOR HOLMES  
The Associated Press

An activist group that has battled for years to force Sandia National Laboratories to take another look at the issue in light of an agency decision on a landfill at another lab.

State Environment Secretary Rex Curry in May 2007 ordered Sandia to put an earth-bank cap on the landfill to prevent water from seeping in and carrying off contaminants and to do long-term monitoring.

The Citizen Action contends Curry denied the same kind of cap for a smaller landfill, Area

H, at Los Alamos National Laboratory. "The Environment Department has recommended Los Alamos encapsulate the waste at Area H in shafts with a technical design to protect drinking water and do stringent monitoring for solvents and tritium."

None of that is being done at Sandia's landfill, although a list releases of solvents and tritium to the subsurface, Citizen Action argued in an April 1 letter to James Beards, chief of the Environment Department's Hazardous Waste Bureau.

The environmental group wants the department to order remedies at Sandia that would be at least as stringent as those

for Los Alamos.

Beards said the two sites are very different physically, prompting the "highly conservative preferred remedy" at Los Alamos.

Groundwater at Sandia lies at a depth of 400 to 500 feet, and extensive monitoring over a decade has found no ground water contamination from the landfill, Beards said in an e-mail to The Associated Press issued through the Environment Department's spokeswoman.

On the other hand, he said, 1,000 feet, and the more complex geology offers ways for contaminants to reach the aquifer. In addition, he said,

Los Alamos has not established an effective groundwater monitoring network and has no way to detect any releases from the site.

Beards also said it doesn't make sense to compare remedies because although the agency has made a recommendation for Area H, it hasn't issued a final order pending more study and citizen comment.

Geologist Robert Gilman, who is involved in the battle against Sandia's landfill, said the two sites "are very different in terms of geology" on the issues of bar-and-barrier or soil-gas monitoring wells.

## AROUND THE METRO AREA

Journal Staff Reports

### Driver Was Shot, Autopsy Shows

A man found slumped over his steering wheel Monday died of multiple gunshot wounds, police said Friday, the same day the man's family buried him.

### Symposium Looks At Land Grants

Spanish and Mexican land grants in New Mexico, the subject of legal conflict since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, will be the focus of an all-day symposium today at the University of New Mexico School of Law.

The relationship between land grant holders and the U.S. Forest Service, and how and why some land grants have survived while others have not, are among topics at the event from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

The conference will focus on immigration, new regulatory efforts, bioterrorism, university and

admission, free to UMM law staff, faculty and students. Continuing legal education credits are available to attorneys.

The law school is at 1117 Stanford NE.

### Homeland Security Conference at UNM

Bonnie G. Thompson, the Mississippi congressman who set the Homeland Security Committee, will be the keynote speaker at a Homeland Security Conference today.

Sponsored by the New Mexico Black Political Action Committee, the one-day conference will begin at 11 a.m. at the University of New Mexico's Student Union Building ballroom. The cost is \$30.

"The conference will focus on immigration, new regulatory efforts, bioterrorism, university and

public school campus security, transportation and cybersecurity," said Sherry Williams Stephens, president of the NMSPAC.

Thompson will also attend a reception at the American Performing Arts Center, 600 San Pedro NE. The reception is at 6 p.m., and admission for that event is also \$30.

### 'Totes Pay City \$2 Million in Rent

Isotopes President Ken Young presented a check for more than \$2 million to city executives Friday afternoon.

The annual check is for rent to the city, which built and owns Isotopes Ballpark. The check includes a share of the revenue generated by the team.

This year's check — for \$2,042,429.09 — is the largest the team has paid the city since arriving before the 2003 season.

## 3rd Brother Convicted In Killing of Clovis Boy

The Associated Press

CLOVIS — Jurors on Friday convicted a 23-year-old man of first-degree murder in the shooting death of a 10-year-old Clovis boy.

The jury found Edward Salas guilty in the Sept. 15, 2005, death of Carlos Perez, the Clovis News Journal reported. Salas also was convicted of attempted murder, shooting into a dwelling, intimidation of a witness and conspiracy.

Salas — the third brother convicted in the shooting of the fifth-grader — faces life in prison.

The boy died when shots were fired through his bedroom window and struck him in the hand while he was sleeping. Police believe his older brother was the intended target.

Salas' younger brothers, Demetrico, 22, and Orlando, 18, already have been convicted in the case. Demetrico Salas was sentenced to life in prison plus 10 years in January for first-degree murder. Orlando Salas pleaded guilty to charges related to the shooting and is in the custody of the state Children, Youth and Families Department until he turns 21.

Two others were charged in the shooting: David Griego was convicted of second-degree murder in January and sentenced to 16 years in prison. Roe Torres remains at large.

The jury began deliberating just before noon Friday after nearly three hours of closing arguments.

District Attorney Matt Chandler reviewed testimony from witnesses who placed Edward Salas at the scene and who testified about events after the shooting.

Those involved were "surrounding the apartment like a pack of wolves about to attack their prey," Chandler said.

"This kid didn't have a chance — nine shots — the kid didn't have a chance," he told jurors.

Defense attorney Chris Christensen argued that there was a lack of physical evidence — DNA, fingerprints or footprints — tying his client to the scene.

He also questioned the credibility of the prosecution's witnesses.

"The death of a young boy is sad," Christensen said. "I have no way of explaining how that would affect the Perez family. It's also a tragedy for the Salases."