



Students Learn
Early About
Job Politics.

RIO GRANDE SUN



NEWS FROM THE HEART OF THE PUEBLO COUNTRY

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Española Cop Arrested in Duke City

Armando Romero denies charge he tried to buy sex in Albuquerque

By Laura Onstot
SUN Staff Writer

Española Police officer in training Armando Romero, 21, was arrested June 14 on a charge of patronizing a prostitute in Al-

buquerque.

Romero said he is not guilty of the charge.

"I just wish I would've never picked her up," Romero said.

The situation began when Romero saw a woman named Elizabeth Hurley walking along 100 Mesilla Northeast around 6 p.m. the night of the arrest. According to court records, Hurley, 23, also goes by the name Elizabeth Gallegos. According to a police report filed by Albu-

querque officer Russ Landavazo, she is a known prostitute.

Romero stopped his white Chevy pick up and Hurley got in. Landavazo, working undercover, watched the encounter unfold.

Romero and Hurley gave differing accounts of what followed and why Hurley got into Romero's car.

The report states that Romero told police Hurley offered him sex for \$40. Romero told police he offered to get her a hotel

room.

Romero said in a later interview that he picked her up when she appeared to be crying and said she needed a ride.

According to Romero, he was in Albuquerque with

a friend and had plans to go bowling later that night. He said the friend had left for an appointment with a realtor so he had gone to a mall, then went looking for an auto shop.

Romero said that while he was looking for the shop, he saw Hurley, pulled over and asked if she needed a ride.

Romero said that as they pulled away from the curb, Hur-

SUN INVESTIGATION

Next week, the SUN will publish the first of a four-part series exploring the city of Española's Housing Authority under long-time politico Leroy Salazar. A three-year investigation of the federally funded housing program turned up years of questionable activity.

See 'Cop' on page A2

RIDE THE VALLEY



(SUNfoto by Paul Mendoza)

Bicycle riders enter Chama as part of the 20th Annual Ride the Rockies Colorado Bicycle Tour. Chama played host to the 419-mile tour for the first time in the event's history.

By Paul Mendoza
SUN Staff Writer

Over 2,000 bicycle riders arrived in Chama Tuesday on the third leg of a 419-mile tour of the Rocky Mountains.

Ride the Rockies, a bicycle touring group from Colorado, made its way into Chama via Pagosa Springs. Chama was the first destination outside of Colorado in the event's history.

As riders entered Chama,

people lined the streets to welcome the riders with shouts of encouragement.

Kathy Lawrence, waiting with her daughter Katie, sat curbside to catch a glimpse of her husband making the 50-mile trip from

Pagosa Springs.

"It's a good time. We get to come to towns that we normally wouldn't come to," said Lawrence.

See 'Bikers' on page A4

State Education Department Throws Out Española Tests

San Juan Elementary tests invalidated

By Sarah Welsh
SUN Staff Writer

As San Juan Elementary struggles to pull itself out of state academic sanctions, a teacher's poor planning has struck a blow to the school's chances.

Following this year's state assessment tests, scores for one sixth-grade mathematics session were invalidated by the state Education Department because a teacher allowed students to break for lunch in the middle of the

test, Department Assistant Secretary Don Watson said. The session was one of three math testing portions.

"Those items will not be scored," Watson said. "It's equivalent to losing a third of the potential score."

The students' lunch break fell during the middle of a testing session because their teacher changed the test scheduling, Watson said. Since the students

See 'Test' on page A3

Richard Cook Sells Big Chunk of Rio Arriba To California Company

By Paul Mendoza
SUN Staff Writer

Yellow Hills LLC is in the process of buying a piece of land twice the size of Española in Northern Rio Arriba County.

Yellow Hills has closed a deal to purchase 7.3 square miles of property southwest of Tierra Amarilla, and has a contract to purchase an adjacent property of 14 square miles, according to Yellow Hills manager Randall Prouty. The combined properties equal 14,293 acres.

Yellow Hills, a subsidiary of World Associates based in Los Angeles, Calif., said the purchase of the land was made from Española

See 'Chama' on page A4

Politics Plagues Española Schools Student Worker Program

School Board members recommend students for positions

By Sarah Welsh
SUN Staff Writer

When Felicia Lopez applied for a summer job at the Española School District, she didn't think she'd have to contend with politics.

The 2005 Española Valley High graduate wanted extra money to defray her school-year expenses at the University of New Mexico, and the District was hiring temporary employees to help with summer maintenance and moving projects.

Lopez submitted her application May 22. She was the very first person to apply with the District.

"The next Monday I got a telephone call from human resources and they had asked which (School) Board member referred me," Lopez said. "I said I was unaware that I had to be referred."

Of the 27 students who applied for the summer positions, 21 had a Board member's name handwritten across the top of their applications. Those 21 were hired by the District at \$7.50 an hour.

Superintendent David Cockerham denied that Board members had an improper role in choosing summer employees. He said anyone could refer a student to District personnel, or students could refer themselves.

But of the four student applications that were designated "walk-in" across the top, which included Lopez's, all four were rejected. Two more applications were turned down, one blank on top and

one reading "Referred by LeAnn Salazar." Board member Leroy Salazar has a daughter with the name LeAnn Salazar.

All five Board members were represented on the applications, broken down as follows: President Joe Guillen with three, Vice President Leroy Salazar with four, Secretary Ralph Medina with five, Joe Romero with three, and Isaac Medina with six.

Guillen denied that the Board had a hand in selecting summer employees. He said he didn't know what the administration's selection process was, but it was normal for Board members to forward employment requests.

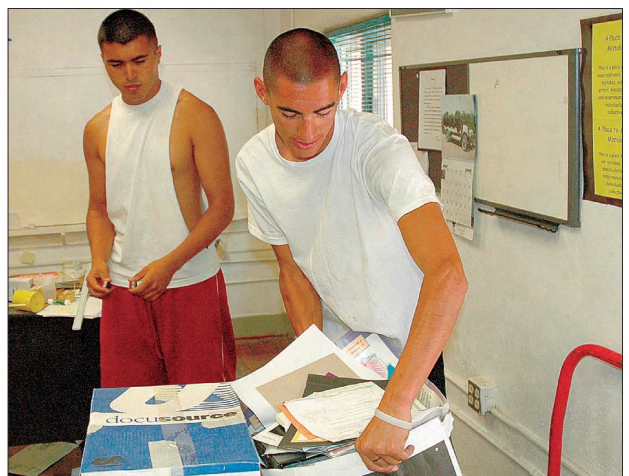
"We referred interested students to the program," Guillen said. "On a regular basis we get calls for employment and we refer those to personnel."

Cockerham said he didn't know why Board members' names had been written on the applications, and he didn't know why applicants may have been directed to get a Board member's recommendation.

"That's not my policy," Cockerham said.

All hiring authority rests with Cockerham, who said he hadn't seen the applications when he made his hiring decisions. Rather, the Human Resources Department headed by Associate Superintendent

See 'Student' on page A3



(SUNfoto by Sarah Welsh)

Española Valley High School juniors Michael Salazar (left) and Daniel Martinez move boxes at San Juan Elementary as part of the Española School District's summer employment program.



NEWS BRIEFS

Jemez Schools Names New Head

SUN Staff Report

Jemez Mountain School Board hired Adan Delgado as its newest superintendent late Tuesday evening. The board split 3-2, with President Mark Valdez, Secretary Cornelius Salazar and Wendell Tixier voting to approve Delgado.

"It was a very hard choice," Valdez said.

Delgado will replace outgoing Superintendent Robert Archuleta, who has accepted a position at Mesa Vista Schools.

Delgado has been serving as Jemez interim superintendent since May 8. Prior to that he was the District technology director and principal of Coyote and Gallina Elementaries.

Valdez said that after experiencing high turnover in the superintendent's position, the District was looking for someone with staying power.

"Right now, we're probably looking at longevity because we haven't had any continuity," Valdez said.

Española Board Judges District Head

SUN Staff Report

After a budget hearing with the state Education Department on Tuesday, the Española School Board met for a third closed-door session to hash out its evaluation of Superintendent David Cockerham's performance.

"It's a very positive evaluation with some strengths and some goals for the future," Board President Joe Guillen said, who has been a staunch ally of the superintendent.

The first evaluation meeting on June 12 lasted more than three hours.

The Board met again June 19 to attempt to finalize its evaluation report, which will be presented at Wednesday's public meeting.

"I guess because we goof off so much, we waste time," Board Member Joe Romero said.

Cockerham's current two-year contract runs through June 2007. Guillen said the Board will not

be taking any action on that contract until December, when another performance evaluation is scheduled.

Guillen said Cockerham will remain at his current salary of \$115,000.

The superintendent's contract states that he will earn \$110,000 annually, but he is receiving a 5 percent raise in next year's budget.

The state mandated an average five percent raise for all school employees, but that raise has not been distributed evenly throughout the District.

Board Member Isaac Medina said he's been pleased with Cockerham's performance, particularly his commitment to raising test scores and his attendance at school events.

"He's had to make some drastic decisions, and we supported him," Medina said.

But Medina also said he's concerned that skilled people in Northern New Mexico are being passed over for key District positions.

"He's been bringing in a lot of outsiders," Medina said. "I wish he would consider more people from here."

4-H Hosts Horse Show in Abiquiú

From a press release

The 2006 4-H Horse Show is scheduled for Saturday at the new Livestock Pavilion at the Rural Events Center in Abiquiú. Approximately 35 4-H members from seven Northern New Mexico counties will compete in 12 different events throughout the course of the day.

The Rio Arriba County Extension Service 4-H Program will host the event which will begin with registration at 8 a.m. and run until about 4:30 p.m.

Novice, Junior and Senior 4-H members will compete in events such as Equitation Over Fence, Working Hunter, Hunter Seat Equitation, Showmanship at Halter, Western Pleasure, Barrels and Poles, Reining and Western Horsemanship, and more.

The public is invited to attend the event. For information, call 685-4523.

CORRECTIONS

A story titled, "Non-Profit Wastes Grants," on page A1 of the June 15 issue requires a correction.

Cindy Fresquez is not the head of New Mexico Legal Aid but is a paralegal with the organization, who is listed as a contact for the organization in the Rio Arriba Family Care Network's online membership list.

A photo caption that accompanied a story titled, "Rio Arriba Certifies Results," on page A18 in the June 15 issue requires a correction.

Deputy county clerk for Rio Arriba County should have been identified as Maria Elena Rodela.

The story titled, "Española City Council Cancels Entire Planning Commission," on page A1 of the June 15 issue requires a correction.

It was reported that Española City Councilor Cecilia Lujan supported keeping former city councilor Patrick Trujillo on the planning commission. In fact, she abstained from voting when his name was called. Trujillo is Lujan's first cousin.

The story titled, "Another Pilgrimage Arrives at Chimayó Santuario," on page A5 of the June 15 issue requires a correction.

Father Ed Savilla is the pastor at Church of the Ascension Parish in Albuquerque.

The story titled, "Española's New Mayor Shuts Out Media," on page A15 of the June 15 issue requires a correction.

It was reported that Municipal Judge Stephen Salazar was sending convicts to Victory Faith Outreach, the church he attends, as part of their sentencing. In fact, he has sent convicts to Victory Outreach International, which is a separate entity from the judge's church, Victory Faith Church.

Weddings, anniversaries, events and other activities are important to us. We are a community newspaper, and that means we want to reflect all the news of our Northern New Mexico communities.

In short, we want your news. To make it easier for our readers to submit news to their newspaper, we offer the following guidance:

Contact information:
Kevin Bersett
news editor
rgsun@cybermesa.com
753-2126 (phone)
743-2140 (fax)

• **Write legibly.** Include a contact name and phone number in case we have questions.

• **Include basic information.** Who are you (or your club)? What are you doing? Where will your event take place? When is the event? (Date and time.)

• **Remember the deadlines.** If an announcement must run it has to be turned in by noon Monday the week of publication.

• **If you name children, please identify both parents or primary guardians and their respective places of residence.**

• **Photos must be submitted on photo paper or on a computer disk.** If your photo is digital, please save it at 300 dpi.

• **We make every effort to run all items submitted.** However, we make no promises of publication. Items are run as space is available.

• **Government or public agencies cannot use our announcements to provide notice to the public for meetings, events or to request public comment.**

SCHOOL DEMOLITION



Workers from Leroy's Excavating, a subcontractor for Blue Sky Builders, tear apart a wall at Española Elementary building. Demolition began Tuesday, and Española Superintendent David Cockerham said an addition to the school will open on time for the upcoming school year. Plans call for additional classrooms and new administrative offices.

(SUN photo by Sarah Welsh)

Cop Denies Charge . . . Truchas Man Escapes From Jail

Continued from A1

ley asked if he wanted a date for \$40.

"I said, 'no ma'am! I wouldn't,' Romero said. "I'm just giving you a ride."

Romero said he took Hurley to a friend's house, but no one was there so she asked if he could use his identification to get her a motel room for the night. He said he agreed and started heading toward the motel.

That was when Albuquerque police pulled him over, he said.

Romero said that he had \$30 in cash on the seat next to him and moved it closer when Hurley got into the truck. When he was pulled over, he said, the money fell out of the truck.

Romero said a police officer picked it up and asked him to confirm the amount to prove it was his.

He said that as he was talking to one officer, another was looking through the truck. This second officer found a traffic citation Romero had written earlier, and asked Romero if he was a cop. Romero said he was.

"They said, 'that's the worst thing you could have told us,'" he said.

Romero said that's when they placed him under arrest.

Hurley told police a different story.

According to the report, Hurley said that when she got into Romero's car he offered her \$30 for "half and half" — a slang term referring to a deal in which the patron receives sexual intercourse and oral sex. Hurley told Romero she was not selling sex,

but asked the young officer if he could get her a room because she did not have any identification, Hurley reported to police.

Romero pulled away from the curb, according to the report, and police initiated a traffic stop and arrested Romero and Hurley.

In his report, Landavazo stated that the \$30 was in Romero's hand when he was arrested.

Romero said he couldn't account for how Hurley knew the amount of cash he had out was \$30.

"I can't explain how she knew that," he said.

He insisted he wasn't going to spend it on sex.

Romero said he is in the process of setting up a polygraph, also known as a lie-detector test.

Albuquerque Police spokesman John Walsh said there were no problems with the report, which places the \$30 in Romero's hand at the time of arrest.

"It's what the detectives observed," he said.

Charles Romero, Armando Romero's father, said his son was only trying to be helpful.

"There's not a law that says you can't give a ride to a prostitute," he said.

Charles Romero said his son is naive, but not criminal.

Pastor Brian McMath, of the Valley Bible Baptist Church where Armando Romero is a member, said he believes Romero's version of events. McMath's belief is based in part on his experience with Romero's faith.

"Here is a man who has never

dated, and he has made the statement that he is waiting for the perfect one that God has for him and now his entire reputation has been ruined on a false report," he said.

McMath said he went to Albuquerque on Monday to discuss Romero with Albuquerque Police Chief Ray Schultz.

Hurley's arrest June 14 was her second arrest for prostitution. Her first was in December 2005, according to court records. She also has two shoplifting charges, criminal trespassing, and possession of a controlled substance on her record, according to Bernalillo Metropolitan Court records.

Romero has no prior charges, according to court records.

The arrest has placed Romero's law enforcement career on hold. Romero was in training to become a member of the Española Police Department. He was finishing in-house training and preparing for the academy, Española Police Chief Richard Guillen said. Guillen said Romero has been placed on unpaid leave pending the outcome of court proceedings.

"We want to be fair with everybody," Guillen said.

Guillen said the priority for Romero at the moment was keeping his admittance into the police academy on track.

Romero's academy work is set to begin July 23, Guillen said.

He said Romero will be reinstated if he is acquitted. If Romero is found guilty of the charges, he will be terminated, Guillen said. Romero's arraignment is set for July 3.

Truchas Man Escapes From Jail

From a press release

The Santa Fe County Sheriff's Department is asking for help locating a prisoner who walked away from the jail Tuesday at 9:30 a.m.

According to the sheriff's office, the escaped inmate is a 32-year-old man named Aaron Michael Torraço. He was working as an inmate laborer when he walked off.

Torraço is described as a 5-foot, 11-inch man, about 180 pounds, with short brown hair. He has tattoos on both arms.

He has an address in Truchas.

According to the press release, he was arrested March 29 of this year for violating probation. According to New Mexico court records, Torraço was first arrested in April 1998 on charges of robbery, attempt to commit a felony, and escape from a police officer. His most recent arrest was the second time he was picked up for a violation of his parole from the 1998 arrest.

Anyone with information on Torraço's whereabouts is asked to call crime stoppers at 955-5050 or the sheriff's office at 986-2455.

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