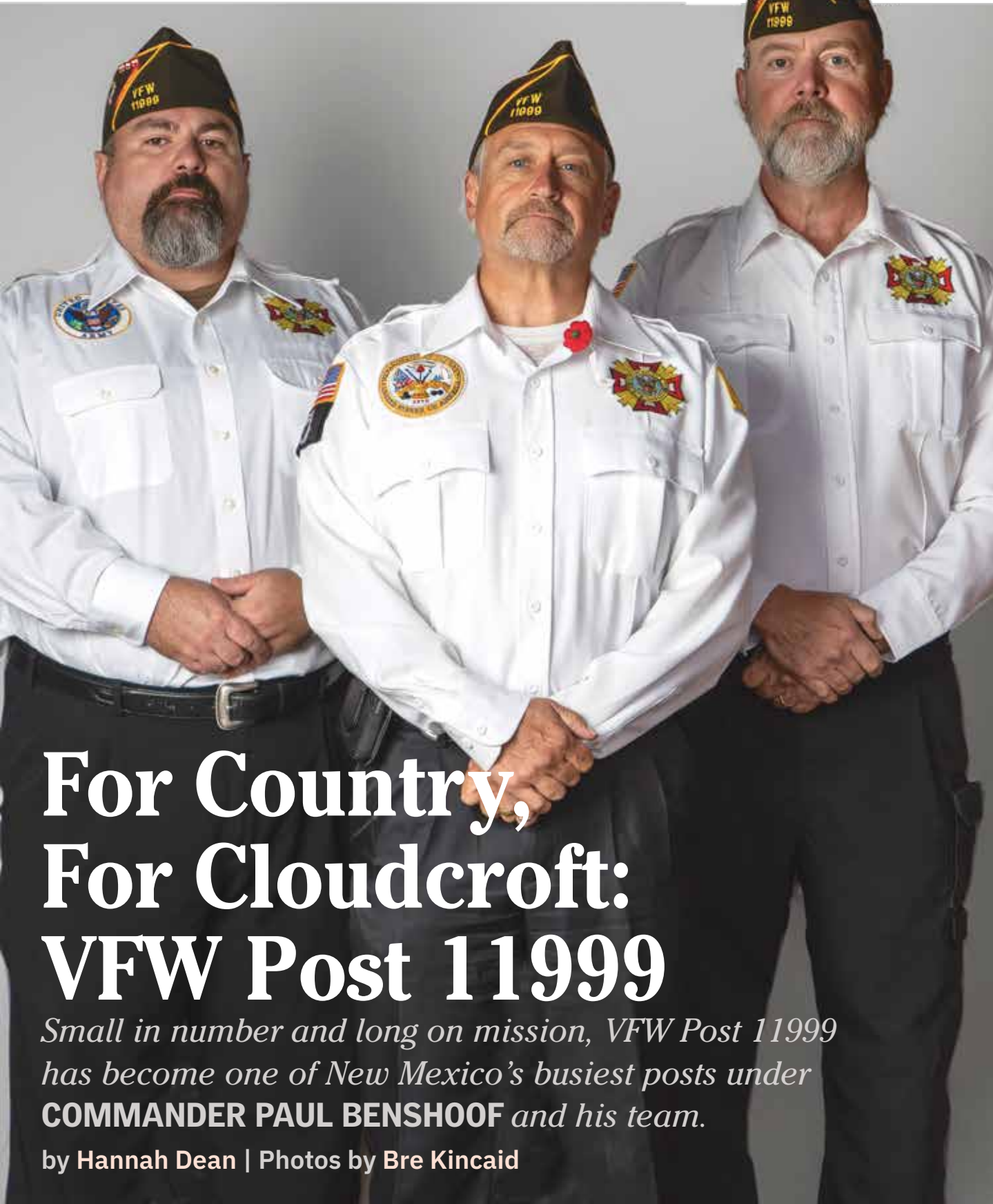


Mountain Monthly

Your Guide to Cloudcroft and the Sacramento Mountains

NOVEMBER 2026



For Country, For Cloudcroft: VFW Post 11999

Small in number and long on mission, VFW Post 11999 has become one of New Mexico’s busiest posts under
COMMANDER PAUL BENSHOOF *and his team.*

by Hannah Dean | Photos by Bre Kincaid

If you’ve watched Cloudcroft’s Fourth of July parade, noticed flags lining the village on a patriotic holiday, or passed volunteers picking up litter along the highway, you’ve already met **VFW Post 11999**.

On a crisp September evening, Post Commander **Paul Benshoof**, Junior Vice Commander **Sean Lofland**, and Quartermaster **Casey Stengel** met with me under the Zenith Park Pavilion, yards away from the Blue Star Memorial that honors United States armed forces service members.

The post is Cloudcroft’s only Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) chapter, serving the mountain communities around the village. It has about 87 members on the books, and a core of eight to 10 who do most of the volunteering. This year that small crew earned All-American status from the national VFW, an honor that goes to a small fraction of posts that clear roughly 20 benchmarks in community service, veteran support, recruiting and administration.

“The VFW is different in that you have to be in a war zone or hazardous duty overseas,” Benshoof explained.

“It was flattering that we made All-American, but that’s not why we’re here,” said Benshoof. “We’re going to do this stuff anyway, even if we don’t get All-American, because we want to be out rolling up our sleeves.”

From the Signal Corps to the Smithsonian

Benshoof has lived in Cloudcroft for 31 years. “I didn’t know exactly what I was getting into,” he said. “But once I got here, I just fell in love with the place.”

He was commissioned as an Army officer in 1988 and served nine years in the Signal Corps, the branch responsible for military communications.

“Although I was a signal officer, I never actually was assigned to a signal unit. I was always somebody else’s [signal officer]. And every combat unit needs communication, so I got attached to all of those guys. I got to see an awful lot,” he said.

Instead, he was attached to infantry, field artillery and military intelligence units that needed someone to keep them connected, and he became a combat paratrooper along the way.

His first overseas post was Korea, where he built the secure network for a military intelligence unit collect-

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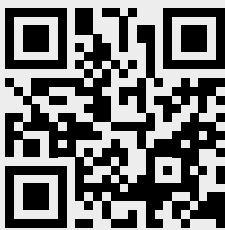
Inside Trey McCurley’s Little Gallery

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ing on North Korea from the Korean Demilitarized Zone, or DMZ. Stateside stops included Fort Hood, Fort Bragg, Fort Benning and Fort Monmouth.

“I moved around so much. The longest I was anywhere was 13 months. ... Most of the time it was six months or less,” Benshoof said.

Benshoof’s final assignment was meant to be a quiet desk job at the GPS Joint Program Office at Los Angeles Air Force Base. “When I heard I was going into GPS, I actually had to say, ‘What’s that?’ ... And my assignment officer said, ‘I’m not sure, let me go check.’”

He arrived as the office’s “token Army guy” just as Desert Shield was building toward Desert Storm. GPS was brand new. “There weren’t a whole lot of receivers available for the military. So we had to go to the commercial sector. We bought everything they could make, painted those receivers green, and sent them out to the desert. We had it. The Iraqis did not,” Benshoof said. “That turned out to be a real game changer.”

He then trained as an engineer and went on to serve as program manager for the Precision Lightweight GPS Receiver, known as the PLGR or “Plugger,” the military’s first handheld GPS unit, built for all branches. More than 500,000 were fielded, and the receiver is now on display at the Smithsonian.

After leaving the Army, Benshoof took a test job at Holloman Air Force Base, home of the military’s lead GPS test organization. Today he is technical director of the 746th Test Squadron, which focuses on position, navigation, and timing.

“Our soldiers actually became so overly reliant on GPS, that point did not escape our adversaries. ‘Let’s jam out the satellite signals and make GPS unavailable

for these guys.’ Or even worse, send out some false signals and see if we can get GPS tricked into sending our soldiers to the wrong location,” he said.

His team works with receiver makers, the Space Force and allied partners, including a recent trip to Australia, to stay ahead of those threats.

“Never a dull moment,” he said.

A Mountain Retreat for Recovering Soldiers

The post’s signature event is Mountain Assault, an all-expenses-paid weekend in the Sacramento Mountains for roughly 30 soldiers and their families from the Soldier Recovery Unit at Fort Bliss. Some will return to duty; others are preparing to leave the military.

“These are soldiers coming back from theater. They’ve been injured, they’re sick, a little bit of PTSD. Just need some help getting back into action,” Benshoof said.

The post hosts them at the Sacramento Camp and Conference Center, formerly the Methodist camp, and covers lodging, meals and activities. The program dates to 2011, and in 2017 it earned the national VFW’s Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project Award. This summer, the Fort Bliss unit presented the post with a certificate of appreciation for organizing and hosting the retreat.

VFW Post 11999 Junior Vice Commander Sean Lofland, an Army veteran who served in Iraq with a Stryker brigade, chairs fundraising and has taught himself grant writing to help pay for the weekend.

“Veterans service organizations saved my bacon in multiple ways,” Lofland said.

The post also hosts soldiers when the chance comes up. For the Fourth of July, America’s 250th Independence Day, members brought up a Vermont unit training at Fort Bliss before deployment to march in the parade. When they learned two of those soldiers had just married each other, the post arranged a honeymoon stay at Cabins in Cloudcroft.

The post runs on fundraising. The post meets at the Cloudcroft senior center. “It’s not our building, so we don’t have a mortgage. That means all of our fundraising can go straight to our community and veterans programs,” Benshoof said.

Raffles bring in much of that money. This fall the post is raffling a Henry tribute rifle bearing the Cloudcroft VFW insignia, one of only two made, along with a weekend stay donated by Cabins in Cloudcroft.

Casey Stengel, a Marine veteran of Desert Storm and retired Texas state trooper, is introduced as “Quartermaster” by Benshoof, to which Stengel smiled and said, “which means I am responsible for money,” and Benshoof added, “and our equipment, all supplies.”

Close to Home

“We’re the ones who are doing the roadside cleanups. We’re the ones that put out the flags on the holidays. We officiate the patriotic ceremonies. So you see us around town quite a bit,” Benshoof said.

On Memorial Day, members hold four ceremonies: at the Blue Star Memorial in the village, then at the James Canyon, Mayhill and Weed cemeteries.

The Blue Star Memorial has its own story. The marker, part of a national garden club program, once stood near

the library until a snowplow destroyed it. The post replaced it and worked with the village to move it to Zenith Park.

Lofland would also like to see Cloudcroft proclaimed a Purple Heart community like Albuquerque or Nazlini in the Navajo Nation.

Youth are central to the mission. The post charts Scout Troop 958, a role it took over from the Methodist church. Scouts help with flag retirement ceremonies, where members teach them how to retire a worn flag with dignity. They also serve at the post’s annual November spaghetti dinner at the senior center and draw the raffle winners there.

Each year the post sponsors the VFW’s Patriot’s Pen essay contest for middle schoolers and Voice of Democracy for high schoolers, announcing winners at the school’s Veterans Day program. Local winners receive a modest scholarship and advance to state and national competition. At Thanksgiving, the post supplies turkeys for about 30 holiday baskets assembled by Summit Christian Fellowship. “They put together the baskets, we supply the turkeys, and the church actually administers who gets them. They know who the needy parts of the community are,” Benshoof said.

The VFW meets the second Saturday of each month at the Cloudcroft Sacramento Mountains Senior Center, and members quickly credit the Cloudcroft community.

“We’re eternally grateful,” Stengel said. “We couldn’t do it without them.”

Benshoof said, “One thing that I’ve often said to post members is the one thing you can do is show up. Showing up is half the battle. Once you’re there, you’re there to help.”



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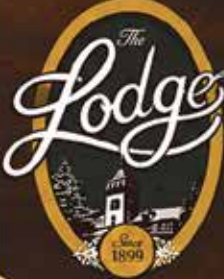
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Home Front

The view from here



Local Luke Finch tackles the Rim Trail as the youngest competitor in the Cactus to Clouds Sky Race (photo: Lobo Photo NM)

Dear Readers,

As we enter the holiday season, we're proud to feature the local Veterans of Foreign Wars post and their quiet acts of service on our cover. VFW Post 11999 also charters the local scout troop and helps with their highway cleanups. Read more in the Scouting Around dispatch on p. 22 in Voices.



Also in that community-driven section, the Forest Service outlines how to get your own Christmas tree from the Lincoln National Forest, p. 23.

In this issue you'll also find voices from Cloudcroft Schools with students **Paula Finch, Ivy McMillan,** and **Sammy Stubbs** reporting on Bear's sports. You'll also find first-hand writing from the Cloudcroft Volunteer Fire Department, the Sacramento Mountains Historic Museum, and from longtime Sacramento Mountains dweller, Lyn Canham.

Our Digital Media Producer **Vivian Barreras** recently reported on "Believe," which was recently filmed in the village. Local talent Trey McCurley was cast in the film. Learn more about McCurley and his Little Gallery on Burro, p. 30.

We at the Monthly are fortunate to work with local talent: writers, photographers, designers, and videographers. One such talent is Lynn Melton.

Melton taught chemistry at the University of Texas at Dallas for forty-two years. Before retiring in 2013, he moved to the Science and Mathematics Education Department and worked to assist middle school science teachers. In the Sacramento Mountains, he became the current author of the Trail Guide to the Lincoln National Forest and in 2014-19, he served as Project Coordinator for the reconstruction of Bonnie's Trestle by New Mexico Rails-to-Trails.

His curiosity pushed him to hike and map old railbeds and roads, and – always a teacher – to share that information with others. Over the years he has written many history pieces, some light, for the Mountain Monthly. He also has a keen interest in the Sacramento Mountains Historical Society and its museum.

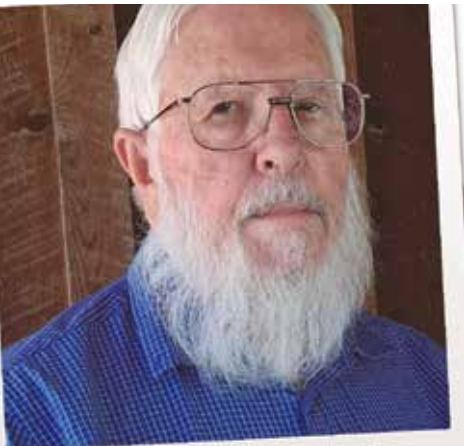
Extra, Off the Press

November marks the end of the busiest tourism season in Cloudcroft, when the weather and pace of mountain life cool down. Locals gather together for Taco Tuesday (at the Western, Dusty Boots, or the Lodge), start working their way through their shopping lists from their friends' and neighbors' businesses, and pray for snow.

This month also marks the open season of the James Sewell Ice Rink at Zenith Park, under new management. With an ice plant, the refrigerated rink is slated to remain open all winter long, just one of many changes. The rink recently announced their Jr. Hockey league

mascot—the Sasquatch. You can get the gear exclusively at The Highland across the road.

One ice rink tradition that stays alive this year: Ullr Fest. The rink is hosting the annual bonfire where locals gather in hopes for snow—with live music and



Lynn Melton

in partnership with High Altitude—Saturday, December 5 from 7 to 11 pm. Look for the village's November events, p 18.

For those looking to gather at Thanksgiving--**Mayor Dusty Wiley** and **Vicky Wiley** are offering up their annual Dusty Boots Thanksgiving Day meal to the community at 1 pm. Free of charge, and "all are welcome," Wiley said.

Have an event you'd like to share? Send it our way: hello@mountainmonthly.com.



Editor: **Hannah Dean**

Contributing Editors: **Drew Gaines, Jonny Coker**

Contributors: **Rand Carlson, Lyn Canham, Damon Marez, Christina Olvera, Paula Finch, Lynn Melton**

Community Voices: **Sandra Barr, Katie Grabowski, Greg Crinklaw, Paul Benshoof, Paula Finch, Jorden Scott, Katie Jones, Dylan Smith, Samantha Stubbs, Ivy McMillan**

Multimedia storyteller: **Hilary Kitzman**

Editorial Photography: **Bre Kincaid, Sam Seth, Crystal Tompkins, Dwight Raulerson, Bobby Moberly, Terry Snoody**

Cloud Puzzle Constructor: **Wells Vaiana**

Social Media: **Ray Media**

Distribution: **Amy Felix Miles o' Paper Distribution Co, Stevie Dean, Rian Whisenhunt**

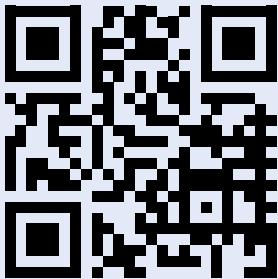
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Switchbacks by Rand Carlson



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Features the live drawing for the annual fundraiser
raffle: Henry VFW .22LR Tribute Edition Rifle with
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NOV 11 CLOUDCROFT SCHOOLS VETERANS DAY ASSEMBLY

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Cloudcroft Schools’ high school English teacher and A.I. policymaker, Windey McKelvie, takes students from the traditional basics to ‘A.I.-Empowered’

School Smarts: How Cloudcroft Is Navigating the A.I. Era

How Cloudcroft’s schools are writing – and testing – the rules for a technology Superintendent Jocelyne Gillespie says is moving “almost like a speeding bullet” by HANNAH DEAN

When artificial intelligence exploded into public consciousness in late 2022, most school districts scrambled to catch up. Cloudcroft Municipal Schools got an early start.

“Mrs. Gillespie was like, A.I. is coming, we need a policy,” said **Windey McKelvie**, a veteran English teacher at Cloudcroft High School who helped craft the district’s A.I. guidelines. “We put together a committee before the state was even requiring it.”

The committee of high school, middle school, and elementary teachers spent nearly a year on questions now being debated in districts and legislatures nationwide: What is A.I.? When does it help students learn, and when does it get in the way? Who’s responsible when it goes wrong?

The result, adopted by the Cloudcroft Board of Education on Sept. 16, 2025, is two policies: one for employees (Policy EGDA) and one for students (Policy IJNDC). The district’s technology-use regulation and the user agreement that students, parents, and staff sign also reference A.I.

They cover what staff can and can’t feed into tools like ChatGPT or Claude, what students must cite, and who decides whether A.I. is allowed at all: under the student policy, it’s off-limits on an assignment unless a teacher permits it.

The policies say they are “informed by New Mexico Public Education Department guidance, federal principles including the A.I. Bill of Rights, and Cloudcroft Municipal Schools’ existing technology framework.”

What Is Artificial Intelligence?

The term covers a wide spectrum of tools, and understanding the differences matters, McKelvie said, because teachers and parents often conflate them. “I don’t think that everyone is fluent in understanding what A.I. is exactly — like the underpinnings of it, and what the difference is between predictive and generative LLMs.”

The district’s policies define A.I. broadly, as machine-based tools that can “perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence, such as generat-

ing text or images, solving problems, creating images, or analyzing data.” They name Magic School, ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Claude, DALL-E and Grammarly as examples.

A.I. Models in School

- * Predictive text A.I. is built into everyday tools like spellcheck and Grammarly, suggesting the next word or flagging errors. McKelvie said of this tier: “Even that, I think, degrades the necessity of [students] to think for themselves.”
- * Large Language Models (LLMs), or generative A.I. like ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Anthropic’s Claude, are trained on vast amounts of text and can produce original-seeming writing, answer complex questions, and summarize documents. Cloudcroft’s policies say they “particularly” cover generative A.I. such as LLMs.
- * Education-specific A.I. tools, like Magic School A.I., which the district offered teachers during the 2025–26 school year before discontinuing it, run on similar LLM technology wrapped in interfaces built for lesson planning.
- * A.I. Reading assessment tools like AMIRA, the state’s designated reading screener for K–2 students, use voice recognition to listen to students read aloud and score their performance. These are assessment tools, not content generators, a different category than chatbots.

Teacher Discretion

“You can’t put students’ names in. You can’t put any kind of information that’s covered under any kind of protection,” McKelvie said.

The employee policy states that the district has no contracts with any A.I. provider and that “no A.I. tool meets the District’s security, privacy and compliance standards for handling anything besides public data.”

Employees may enter only publicly available information. The policy specifically bars FERPA-protected information, student names and grades, student work, disability-related information, health information, ID photos, and information about employees and their performance.

Acceptable employee uses include general-knowledge questions, brainstorming, summarizing online research, building Excel formulas, and drafting email or letter templates that don’t identify a student or employee.

The policy prohibits using the full text of A.I. output in final work products, or skipping review of it; generating grades, individualized assessments, lesson plans, presentations or IEP determinations without human oversight; and substituting A.I. for professional judgment, “especially in teaching, counseling, or disciplinary decisions.” An IEP, or Individualized Education Program, is a legally binding plan for students who receive special education services.

Employees must also disclose when they use A.I.-generated content, such as in parent communications or reports.

For students, A.I. is off by default.

“Teachers will prohibit the use of A.I. in an assignment unless the use of A.I. is permitted,” the student policy reads.

When a teacher allows it, students may use A.I. for “brainstorming, skill practice, or research support,” must cite it “as is expected with any other source,” and may be asked to explain or revise their work. The policy says students should use A.I. “as a resource and for background material, rather than using the A.I. Tools to complete the assignment,” and it bars “unauthorized or unvetted A.I. platforms on school networks or devices.”

The user agreement that students and



parents sign adds that “A.I. tool interactions” are not private and are subject to district monitoring.

The policy also says A.I. detection software “is not a definitive measure of misconduct.” Teachers may use it as a reference but should rely on academic judgment, conferences, and other evidence. “There’s no A.I. tracker that can actually tell you this was 100% A.I.-generated or not,” McKelvie said. “They’re very fallible.”

The district “currently allows teachers professional discretion in determining whether and how A.I. may be used within their classrooms,” Superintendent Jocelyne Gillespie wrote in an email to the Monthly. “However, A.I. assistance must not replace, generate, or improperly influence students’ independent work, especially in CORE academic subjects.”

Leveling Up to A.I.-Empowered

McKelvie uses a simple color-coded scale — 0 through 3, red to yellow — for A.I.-free, A.I.-assisted, A.I.-enhanced, and A.I.-empowered work. The labels will soon go up on classroom walls, K-12.

Her AP students write in-class essays by hand, transcribe them into an LLM, prompt it to improve the essay, then compare the two versions. “What did I produce? What did A.I. produce? Was it better? Did A.I. do a better job? Did A.I. pick up things I missed? Like, how can I make my writing better?” she said.

“You can’t freely use it until you have the skill set to use it,” she said. “There are students who are sophisticated enough to know how to use A.I. in a very sophisticated way. That’s another reason things need to be done with pen and paper.”

Some students, she said, feed their own writing into A.I. and ask it to imitate them: “Model my writing. Write something that would look like I wrote it.”

For most assignments, McKelvie assigns in-class, pen-and-paper work. “That’s the only way you can be a hundred percent sure that A.I. hasn’t been used.”

Her students sit AP Literature, AP Language and Composition, and AP Government exams on locked-down, browser-controlled devices, with no A.I. and no spellcheck. “Those students must 100% compose everything by themselves, with spelling, punctuation, and everything coming from their own mind. We’d be doing them a disservice by not having them create things completely from scratch.”

The district’s student policy flags that AP and dual-enrollment courses “may have additional restrictions and limitations regarding the use of A.I.”

McKelvie worries that even ambient A.I., like autocomplete in Google Docs or Grammarly’s suggestions, quietly erodes abilities. “Even though they don’t realize that it’s a passive use of A.I., it’s still involved in what they’re creating.”

“It’s a dangerous crutch to wholly rely on A.I.,” she said. “We can’t just rely on A.I. to do thinking for us.”

K-8: Scaling Back Devices

“We are scaling back the use of digital devices across grades K-8,” said K-8 Principal Nolene Adams. “The state-mandated AMIRA A.I. tool for K-2 is in use, and some early-grade teachers have expressed concerns

about its accuracy due to frequent errors.”

Adams said the concerns underscore “the importance of having great foundational teachers.”

Teachers elsewhere in New Mexico have raised similar concerns. Some told the Albuquerque Journal the program struggles with students who have speech disabilities or foreign accents. APS has said it will take at least one full school year to know how Amira’s results line up with state assessments; the state switched from Istation after a corporate merger.

McKelvie ran into the same issue when the district tried to extend AMIRA to her English Language Learner students. “When you have an accent or your English is not the baseline, it’s not a good tool because it can’t differentiate,” she said. “I said it’s not going to work for us.”

In an email response to the Monthly’s questions from New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) Communications Bureau Manager **Janelle Taylor García**, the agency says AMIRA is built on three decades of federally funded research from Carnegie Mellon University, including over 100 peer-reviewed studies, and has been calibrated over two decades to handle accents and dialects, pointing to a demonstration video as evidence. On voice data, PED says AMIRA stores recordings, de-identified, for the duration of the state’s contract; districts can opt out of audio retention locally, and there have been no incidents of student voice data being hacked or misused.

AMIRA, New Mexico’s state-approved A.I. reading screener for K-2, has been required three times a year. In August, PED gave districts the option, for this school year only, to use it without its voice-recording feature or to substitute a paper test or their own assessment.

Middle School: “Go Slow to Go Fast”

At Cloudcroft Middle School, Serena Myers teaches computer science and computer applications. “For 6th grade it’s keyboarding basics,” she said. She focuses on building comfort with Google Workspace’s most common apps. From there, instruction moves to fundamentals: “just getting an understanding [of] what computer science is and the world that we live in. We’re in a tech era.”

“Cloudcroft Municipal Schools is requiring students to take a semester of computer science to better prepare them for high school and build foundational skills,” Myers said. The requirement applies to eighth graders.

A.I. is already built into tools students use daily — Code.org (now Code A.I.), Project Lead the Way, Samsung’s Bixby, Apple’s Siri, Google’s Gemini and Copilot. When students turn to a browser’s built-in assistant for research, Myers pushes them to verify it. “I always ask, OK, so what are the three sources to prove that it is reliable — because there are more hoax sites than there are authentic.”

On the content-monitoring software the district uses on school networks, GoGuardian, she said: “I’m pro that. More than anything, it’s just to let them know — you don’t know what you don’t know. Students test their boundaries in the classroom. They’re gonna test it online too.”

District regulation requires content filtering on school networks and says internet use through district systems



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“shall be monitored periodically or randomly.”

She compares A.I. to the early days of school internet access, when it took years to build a knowledge base to use it well. “It needs to be a gradual release — go slow to go fast, not get shoved.”

“We have learned during the shutdown that continuous use of devices and increased screen time has hindered learning,” Myers said. “Attention span has shortened, and we are in the study stages of what is developmentally appropriate.”

On the district’s pace overall: “I give full kudos to Cloudcroft that they are forward-thinking when things happen ... it shows some grace, allowing some time so we can absorb and practice before we go all in. It’s a wise move.”

And on her students: “My jewels are showing open, inquisitive minds, challenging me to be present and the best for them.”

The Student View: “There’s a Need for a Balance”

Michael Anthony is 16, a junior at Cloudcroft High School, and a chapter officer in the school’s Technology Student Association. He has competed in TSA’s video game design event for three years. This spring, at the state conference in Las Cruces, he’ll try something new: an A.I. event the organization added this year.

He doesn’t know yet what he’ll be asked to make. Competitors get their prompts on site.

“It’s a brand-new event they just recently added, but from the event guide that I’ve read, they’re going to give you something they want you to create,” he said over the phone. “And then you have to use your selected A.I. and create a prompt, or generate an image of what they want. And whoever gets the closest gets the most points and does well in the event.”

“Sometimes if it’s a lot of reading —

because I’m not very good at reading, I’m mildly dyslexic — I copy and paste the notes into Gemini or ChatGPT and just have it summarize the important information that I need,” Anthony said. “I think it’s very useful to have that kind of thing right there, where it’s less words to have to read, but also the same information.”

“It really does help,” he said.

“I think they have a pretty decent amount of it, because they can’t really stop kids from using A.I.,” he said. “So I think they more encourage it here now. They’re not saying, ‘Oh, you can’t use ChatGPT.’ One of my teachers last year told me, ‘Just don’t use A.I. to write your essay. Use it to assist you in writing your essay.’”

“I write down most of the information I want,” he said, “but if I’m confused on how to make MLA format — like I did with an essay recently — I was like, ‘Can you make this in MLA format for me?’ And it did that really quickly.”

“I think there’s maybe one or two that would have an issue with it,” he said, “but I don’t think many teachers have an issue with it.”

Neither of the district’s A.I. policies addressed using A.I. as an accommodation for students with learning differences like dyslexia. The employee policy says A.I. “has the potential to support personalized learning and help teachers identify areas where students need extra support,” but neither policy says how A.I. fits with IEP or 504 accommodations.

“I’m not very good at art — I really suck at it — but I have these crazy visions, these crazy stories,” he said. “On my Instagram I have this A.I. picture of a suit of armor kind of thing. I didn’t know how to design it, so I was having A.I. generate some concepts for it. And I found one that I really liked.”

“I’m a really big fan of Copilot for video game design,” he said. “I’m using it a lot to help me code things I don’t know

how to understand. I can code pretty well, but I don’t know everything, and it really helps me to understand how to do that kind of coding.”

“Google’s very specific, but I can go up to ChatGPT, like, ‘What are the results for this game?’” he said. “And they’ll tell me the results for the game.”

“I feel pretty prepared to have A.I. in my future,” he said.

His grandmother recently assumed something she saw had been made with A.I.

“It’s so ingrained now that people are thinking it’s in everything, but it’s not,” he said. “And there’s also a balance of how people abuse it — just use it for everything — and how people use it to assist. I know someone who used A.I. to write an entire essay just recently, and I’ve used it just to help me write a few topics or think about certain ideas. There’s a need for a balance.”

“We had a whole discussion about this in AP Lang the other day,” he said. “When you’re having A.I. generate your entire thing for you, you’re not gaining that critical thinking experience, and you’re not gaining the ability to think and grow and learn how to write yourself. You’re just having ChatGPT do all that for you, and you’re not developing those skills. But if you’re actually writing it and thinking about it, you’re developing those skills — and just having A.I. come in and help you if you can’t think of a problem like that.”

Nathan Brokaw, a Cloudcroft High School junior, member of TSA, Student

Council, Skills USA, and football player, answered the Monthly’s questions by email.

“I sometimes use A.I. to clarify what a sentence is saying if I do not understand a sentence and I am like at home doing school work, but otherwise I don’t really use A.I. at all,” he wrote, “because even if you use it to clarify or make your work better, you can still get docked for plagiarism.”

“I feel like the school is a little too strict about the A.I. policy, because if you only use it to make your work better but not use it to complete it, you should not be docked for it unless you use it for over half of your work.”

The student policy treats A.I.-generated content submitted “as original work without permission or disclosure” as plagiarism, with consequences that can include revising the assignment or losing credit. It also puts the burden on students to ask their teacher whether A.I. is allowed on an assignment, and to what extent.

“I feel slightly prepared for a future with A.I., but I feel like people will use it too much just to do all of the work for them instead of doing it themselves,” Brokaw wrote. “I feel like A.I. can be used for good, but if you use it wrong it can be bad and could possibly make you lazy from doing it.”

“I feel like in the future it could possibly also stop listening,” he wrote, “because it is all about the info you feed it, and if you feed it the wrong information it could take over, not listen to you and possibly even hack



Cloudcroft Students Show Up and Show Out at Otero County Fair

Cloudcroft Schools FFA members and arts and crafts exhibitors placed across livestock and indoor exhibit categories at this year’s Otero County Fair, according to results compiled by Cloudcroft Schools Activity Director **Joni Watson**.

Preston White earned Grand Champion market goat. **Ava McNatt** claimed Grand Champion county-bred goat, along with first place heavyweight goat, second place lightweight goat and fourth place cross lamb.

Loralei McNatt took Grand Champion OPB pig, first place OPB lamb and fifth place cross pig. **Kendryck Baker** placed first in class with a goat, and **Brayden Green** was named Reserve OPB breed champion.

Brinley Flemming led the lamb results as first place Hampshire and overall champion, breed champion fine wool cross lamb, class winner fine wool lamb and second place blackface lamb, and also placed fifth with a Berkshire pig. **Gavin Blankenship** earned Reserve Champion lamb, **Braieleigh Green** placed third in lamb and **Kacie Hughes** placed fourth and sixth. In open class pigs, **Bennett Flemming** placed second and **Bristal Flemming** placed third. **Avalyn Ross** placed fourth with a rabbit.

In indoor exhibits, **Stevie Dean** earned Grand Champion along with first and second place in arts and crafts. **Clayton Hughes** earned Grand Champion in woodworking, was named Junior Top Hand and also showed a market goat. **Kacie Hughes** earned Grand Champion in woodburning and entered additional indoor exhibits.

Brieleigh Green, **Remington Green** and **Kendall Virden** also competed in open class lamb.

Did your student place at the fair? Send results to hello@mountain-monthly.com.

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off of your devices and stuff.”

How Cloudcroft Compares

PED doesn’t currently track which districts have adopted formal A.I. policies, so no statewide comparison is available.

A New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee working group recommended in July 2025 that PED establish an oversight body to vet A.I. tools and help schools find funding, noting that “A.I. is moving faster than our systems can keep up.” PED Secretary Mariana D. Padilla framed the state’s vision this way: “A.I. can enrich the learning experience, but it is human oversight, inquiry, and reflection that ultimately drive meaningful education.”

At the state level, there’s no funding earmarked for A.I. professional development — districts allocate existing training budgets at their discretion. What the state offers is free A.I. literacy training through Canvas, its statewide learning management system, plus a procurement toolkit to help schools vet tools. Janelle Taylor García wrote in her email that the agency’s role is less about mandating policy and more about equipping districts to make their own decisions, and that funding for professional development remains a local call.

“At this time, Cloudcroft Municipal Schools has not established mandatory artificial intelligence (A.I.) professional development for all staff,” Gillespie wrote in response to a Monthly inquiry over email.

Instead, teachers take up A.I. in Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs, during regularly scheduled meetings. There they discuss its “potential benefits and concerns” and share training available through PED and other organizations. The employee policy says the district “will

provide professional development and guidance” on ethical use, bias and misinformation, and the secure use of district-approved tools.

On tools, “Currently, the District is not evaluating any A.I. tools for teachers,” Gillespie wrote. The district used Magic School A.I. during the 2025–26 school year; “however, the majority of our teachers did not use it.” Instead, she wrote, “Teachers are utilizing A.I. tools they are comfortable using and sharing their knowledge with colleagues.” The employee policy, meanwhile, says no A.I. tool meets the district’s standards for handling anything but public data.

Both policies also refer to approved A.I. tools, and the student policy says “efforts will be made to provide all students with access to approved A.I. technologies.”

Gillespie said the district will review its A.I. guidelines at least annually, “with additional evaluations as significant technological advancements, state guidance, or legal requirements emerge,” through PLC discussions and administrative review.

“Artificial intelligence is advancing at an extraordinary pace—moving almost like a speeding bullet—and school districts across the nation are struggling to keep policies, instructional

practices, and professional development aligned with rapidly changing technology,” she wrote.

“Rather than resist its advancement, our District is committed to being responsible stewards of this technology, embracing its potential while teaching students to use A.I. ethically, responsibly, and with integrity. Our goal is to prepare students for an A.I.-driven future without compromising the critical thinking, creativity, and independent learning essential to their success,” she wrote.

The Water Bottle Moment

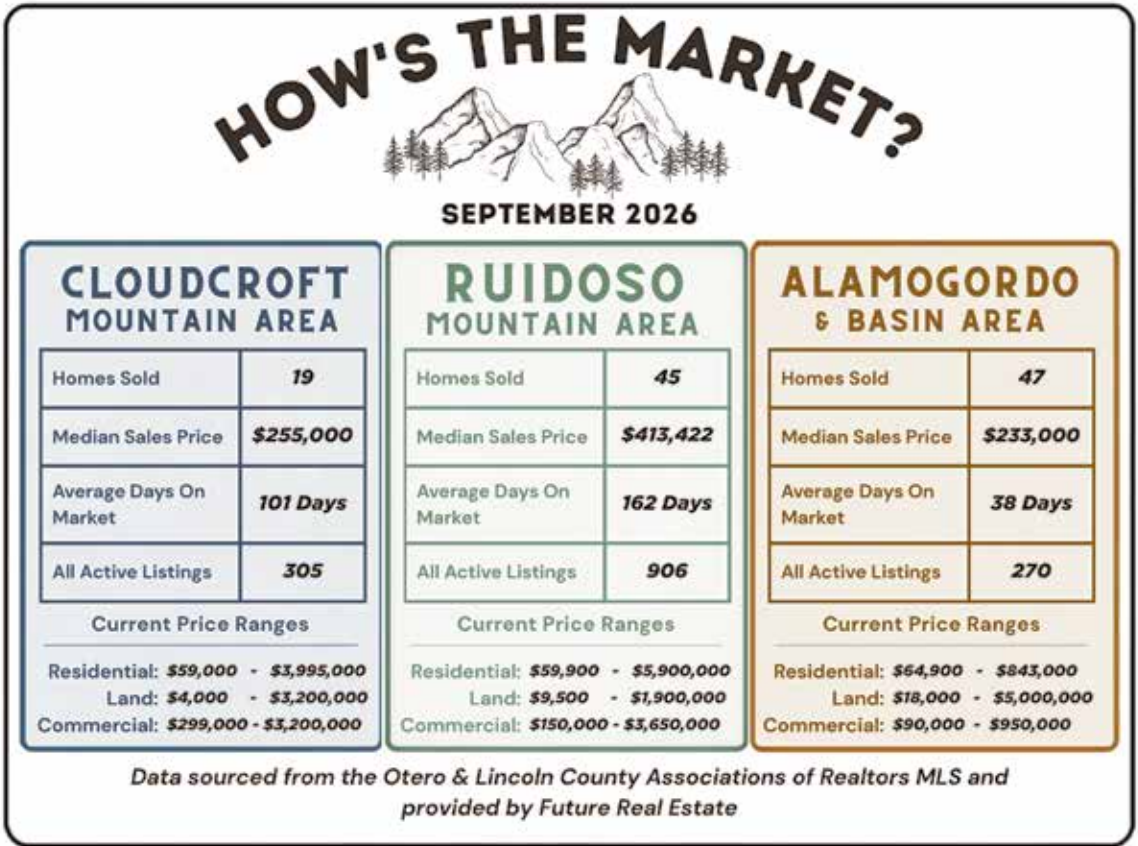
McKelvie was demonstrating A.I. to her students by asking it to generate something silly involving a vocabulary word when a student stopped her.

“One of my students said, ‘You just wasted 20 bottles of water doing that.’”

“I actually was thinking, wow, you know what, you’re right,” McKelvie said. “There’s a consequence for playing around with it. It’s not just for fun. There are real-world ramifications behind using A.I. indiscriminately.”

A student raising environmental concerns unprompted says something about the A.I. literacy already developing in Cloudcroft’s classrooms.

“I have not talked to any educators who are like, no one should be using A.I., it’s a terrible thing,” McKelvie said. “Educators understand that it’s here. Like, what do you do? You can’t shut the box again.”



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A Push to Keep Moving: Council Commits \$800,000 to Keep Wastewater Plant Running

Cloudcroft Honors Jody Mancillas, Funds Wastewater Fix

A day honoring Jody Mancillas, an \$800k Wastewater Treatment Plant spend, critical board vacancies filled, and more from the Tuesday, October 13, Village of Cloudcroft Council meeting

Before a full audience at the village chambers, Mayor **Dusty Wiley** proclaimed September 18, 2026, **Joseph “Jody” Mancillas Day**, honoring the longtime Cloudcroft worker and neighbor who died that day. His mother came forward while Wiley read the proclamation, with many of Jody’s family and friends in attendance.

Then trustees got to work, approving

every item on an agenda heavy with infrastructure and budget problems left over from previous administrations.

\$800,000 for the Wastewater Plant

Trustees unanimously approved up to \$800,000 from the general fund to replace and expand the wastewater treatment plant’s (WWTP) aging membranes. Read our online analysis:

<https://www.cloudcroftreader.com/p/a-push-to-keep-moving-council-com-mits>

Another WWTP approval: the plant’s control computer runs on 2007-era Windows, and Public Works Supervisor **J.J. Carrizal** said the plant can’t run if it fails. Trustees awarded the SCADA upgrade contract to Better Industrial Technology Services, the top scorer of three proposals. An existing grant of roughly \$400,000 covers the wastewater plant and lift stations. The goal is installation before winter.

Critical Vacancies Filled

The Library Advisory Board finally met a quorum at Tuesday’s meeting, when **Gary Truex**, **Gail Overstreet**, and **Tracy Machado** joined the board by unanimous approval.

Overstreet currently serves on the Village’s Outdoor Lighting Advisory Board and recently joined the 2026 cohort for **Leadership Cloudcroft** (LC).

Before moving to Cloudcroft, Machado served on several nonprofit and business boards and on the Community Development Committee of the City Council in her prior hometown of Highland Village, Texas. She also joined the 2026 LC cohort.

Truex, the preacher at the Cloudcroft Church of Christ, is board president for the New Mexico Rails-to-Trails Association and works at the Sacramento Mountains Senior Center.

Cloudy’s co-owner and 2026 LC alum, **Dylan Kincaid**, was unanimously appointed to the Planning & Zoning Commission. Read more about Kincaid: <https://www.cloudcroftreader.com/p/cloudys-the-store-cloudcroft-has>

Trustee **John Snook** was appointed alternate council representative to the Southern New Mexico Economic Development District/Council of Governments, filling former Trustee Gail McCoy’s seat.

Water: Losses Climb, but Smart Meters Are Catching Leaks

In his department presentation for Public Works, Carrizal said water loss is at its highest level so far this year. The village lost close to 27% of its produced water in September.

The new cellular meters flagged three or four customer-side leaks this week. One was running 6 gallons a minute and was caught within 24 hours.

A thunderstorm knocked out the SCADA monitoring at the Hilltop tanks. Staff are checking the tanks overnight.

All storage tanks are full. Spring flows are tapering off after monsoon season, and the village wells are running again.

Clearing the Backlog

Trustees learned that unpaid back gross receipts taxes from FY23-24 were higher than estimated in August, so that budget line rises from \$170,000 to \$220,000. The council approved a budget adjustment to resolve the issue. Leftover ARPA money, \$135,858, covers part of it.

The council approved closing the defunct corrections fund, with \$357.51 moved to the general fund.

Wiley read into the record that the state Department of Finance and Administration moved the village’s FY25-26 budget from conditional to full certification.

In a follow-up call, Wiley said the village is catching up on past-due bills, including penalties, and that more may surface in next quarter’s adjustments.

Upcoming Library Events, Schedule Change

Library Director **Sandra Barr** proposed closing on Mondays through March, since Mondays often see only 10 or 11 patrons. The change is slated to start the last Monday in October, and the proposal was not on the agenda.

The art show is returning; last year it drew 93 people. This year, there are no rules on size or media. The opening reception is planned for Friday, November 6, from 5-7 pm.

Barr said Friends of the Library is down to two members and needs volunteers.

Public Safety

After a semi-truck crash on Highway 82 that caused injuries and a road closure, Police Chief **Roger Schoolcraft** delivered an update to the council. He said a semi-truck carrying steel I-beams crashed after losing its brakes.

Schoolcraft said several people were taken to the hospital with injuries and that he knew of no fatalities.

Schoolcraft said camera footage helped solve a larceny at King’s Treasure thrift store in the village, and that more theft had occurred at the site. Volunteers patched recent vandalism at the pickleball courts, and the village is working on nighttime security there.

Fire Chief **Erich Wuersching** reported that the annual fire hydrant flow testing is underway, so residents may see water running in the streets. Public Works was aware of the testing and said the system could support it. Testing was moved up this year to avoid flushing hydrants in freezing weather.

Wuersching also reported that the Tularosa Basin Regional Dispatch Authority, which handles 911 calls, is being restructured after Alamogordo’s exit. He expects the village to start paying again in 12 to 18 months, once a credit it built up from earlier payments runs out.



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Contracts

Trustees renewed three janitorial contracts with a 3% increase and fixed a signature page to reflect a lower winter rate.

Carrizal said water loss is at its highest level so far this year. The village lost close to 27% of its produced water in September.

They also approved an amended James Sewell Ice Rink lease with Southwest Sports Solutions, which clarifies that rent credits apply only to improvements the village keeps, not to the lessee's own equipment.

Coming Up

A presentation by Artesia General Hospital on a mobile clinic was postponed to next month because of technical problems.

Mayor Wiley said he plans to bring a gross receipts tax increase to trustees at the November meeting.

Trustee **Keith Hamilton** reminded the room that early voting is open. Election Day is Nov. 3. Vote in Cloudcroft at the High School.

The next regular village council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 10 at 6 pm. See you there.

—Hannah Dean

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Cloudcroft Neighbors Hand Off
Command of Holloman Air Force Base’s
Detachment 1

The 944th Operations Group, Detachment 1 at Holloman Air Force Base has a new commander. Major Nicholas Hanna recently succeeded Lieutenant Colonel David Abel in the role.

Detachment 1 is a geographically separated unit of the 944th Fighter Wing, based at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Since 2015, it has provided F-16 training support to Holloman’s 54th Fighter Group. Hanna will lead the unit as it continues that partnership.

Both Hanna and Abel live full-time in Cloudcroft with their families.

Pictured above: Commanders Abel (L), Hanna (R) and their spouses, Cori and Chelsea, pose with Detachment 1 Honorary Commander Jim Maynard and Susan Maynard.



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Higher Grounds
Instant Karma & Chai Bar
Base Camp 9k

- B**
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Western Package Store
Hotel Cloudcroft
Kennabelle's Kreations Bakery
Gary Mack Real Estate
The Bear Track
High Altitude
High Altitude Bike Shop
Scotty's Propane

- C**
Elevation Park and Disc Golf Course

- D**
Otero County Electric Cooperative
Cloudcroft Therapeutic Massage
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Cloudy's
Crystal Tompkins Photography
Coco Blu
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Osha Trail Lodging
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Laughing Leaf Dispensary
Eight the Cake
Mountain Magic
Poke the Bear

- E**
Burro St. Boarding House
Cloudcroft Brewing Company
The Distillery
Sparks and Rec

- F**
Ski Cloudcroft

- G**
Aspen Trails Realty
Big Daddy's Diner
Tularosa Communications
Cloudcroft Animal Hospital
Dusty Boots Cafe & Taco Cantina and Motel

- H**
The Lodge Resort
The Lodge Golf Course
1899 and Saint Andrew's Lounge
Seasons Boutique Gift Shop
SugarPines RV Park

- I**
Grand Cloudcroft Hotel
Cloudcroft Chamber of Commerce
Cabins at Cloudcroft

- J**
Zenith Park and Playground
Pickleball and Tennis Courts
Zenith Park Pavilion
Byron Ligon Disc Golf Course
James Sewell Ice Rink
Anglican Church of the Epiphany
Family Dollar
Brother-N-Law BBQ
Magnum's Guns II
Crofting Bed & Breakfast

- K**
Sacred Heart Catholic Church
Village Plaza
Homee
Be in the Mountains Yoga & Massage Therapy
Road Runner Cannabis
High Rollin' Coffee

- L**
Mad Jack's Mountaintop BBQ
Roots Flower Co.

- M**
New Village Hardware
Pre-School and Extended Care
Cloudcroft United Methodist Church
Summit Inn
The Lodge Pavilion

- N**
Presbyterian Medical Center
Rick Roger's Auto & Equip Repair
Cloudcroft Truck & Auto Parts
Cloud 9000 Coffee
Fernando's Burritos

- O**
United States Post Office
First National Bank
Village Office

- P**
Allsup's

- Q**
Future Real Estate
The Highland

- R**
Deer Park
Cloudcroft Sandwich Shop

- S**
Cloudcroft Schools

- T**
Burro Street Exchange
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Tree Top Teez
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Old Red Brick Schoolhouse
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- V**
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Welcome to Cloudcroft, New Mexico--a mountain village with timeless charm and plenty to do.

Here, we feature where to eat, sleep, shop and play. Go deeper online with our full guide, [DiscoverCloudcroft.com](#), powered by the *Monthly*.

There, you'll find everything you need to plan your visit: An inside look at restaurants, stores, lodging, and up-to-date events.



Where to Eat & Drink

Big Daddy's Diner

1705 James Canyon Hwy, 575-682-1224, [bigdaddysdiner.com](#) Comfort food and desserts. Try the fried chicken basket. Open daily 7:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m.

Black Bear Coffee

200 Burro Ave., 575-682-1089, [mybbcoffee.com](#) Locally-roasted beans on the west end of Burro. Head upstairs for conversation nooks, enjoy the downstairs gallery wall with rotating exhibition. Wednesday-Saturday 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Sunday 8:00-3:00.

Cloudcroft Brewing Company

1301 Burro Ave., 575-682-2337, [cloudcroft-brewing.com](#) In-house and regional brews, live music, and fantastic atmosphere. Gnosh on wood-fired pizza, soup du jour, salad, chips & guacamole. Closed Tuesdays. Open 11:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m. the rest of the week--til 10:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday.



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Cloudcroft Sandwich Shop

505 Burro Ave., 575-551-0065, [cloudcrofts-andwich.shop](#) Traditional deli in the Burro Street Exchange. Mural photo op in the outdoor patio. Get any sandwich as a salad, then a monster-sized cookie--#balance. Open everyday..

Cloudy's Market

102 Mexican Ave. Cloudcroft's neighborhood grocery with discovery goods, locally sourced produce, and the essentials. Open daily from 10 am- 6 pm.

Dave's Cafe

300 Burro Ave., 575-682-2127 Classic burgers, fries, and more at a casual setting in the heart of Burro. Open 11:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m. Monday-Thursday, and 11:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m. Friday-Sunday.

High Rollin' Coffee

109 James Canyon Hwy Gourmet freshies galore on a rotating weekly menu. Open Monday and Tuesday 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., and Friday-Sunday 8:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Instant Karma Chai Bar

302 Burro Ave. Global spice blends, ayurvedic teas, soothing cacao, and more at their countertop. Stay awhile. Open daily from 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

KennaBelle's Kreations Bakery

308 Burro Ave., 575-682-2712 Follow your nose to this pink patisserie. Custom cakes and orders. Gluten-free options. Open 7:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m. Monday-Saturday. Closed Sunday.

Mad Jack's Mountaintop Barbeque

105 James Canyon Hwy, 575-682-7577 Legendary barbeque in the old mercantile building. Don't let the line deter you--it's worth the wait. Open 11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Thursday-Sunday, or until sold out.

Noisy Water Winery

505 Burro Ave., 575-682-6610 Local wine, cheese, charcuterie, and gifts. Upscale offerings, casual boardwalk venue. Open 10:00 a.m.-6:30 p.m. daily, open until 7:00 on Friday, and until 7:30 on Saturday.

Saint Andrew's Lounge and 1899 at the Lodge

601 Corona Pl., 575-682-2566, [223collectionhotels.com/the-lodge](#)

The Distillery

1303 Burro Ave., 575-682-2337 Craft cocktails with New Mexico and in-house spirits for date night--adults only.

Western Bar and Cafe and Package Store

304 Burro Ave., 575-682-2445, [westernbarandcafe.net](#) Dark and cozy dive bar with tasty food for lunch and dinner. Beer on tap, full bar. Play pool while you wait. Closed Wednesdays, open 11:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m. the rest of the week.

For more detailed information on where to eat, go to [www.discovercloudcroft.com/complete-guide-where-to-eat-in-cloudcroft-2026.html](#)



Where to Shop

Aspen and Ivy Boutique

206 Burro Ave. Bespoke goods, candles, plants, and local art. Open Thursday-Sunday 11:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

The Elk Shed

505 Burro Ave. Southwestern goods, clothes, gourmet pantry staples, and more. Open 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily. [theelkshed.com](#)

The Fat Rabbit

206 Burro Ave. Silver and turquoise, plus. Open 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday.

High Altitude

310 Burro Ave. 575-682-1229 Your favorite little outdoors store, boutique, and bike shop. [highaltitudenm.com](#)

Homee

109 James Canyon Hwy. Real Estate Property Management and Rentals in [homee.com](#)

Instant Karma

302 Burro Ave., 575-682-2651 Ayurvedic goods, yogi-friendly clothes, books, and yoga. Open 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. daily. [getinstantkarma.com](#)

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202 Burro Ave. 575-682-5524 Thrift to your heart's delight without breaking the bank. Open 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. every day except Sunday.

Mountain Magic

508 Burro Ave. 575-682-2348 Cloudcroft shirts, woodland toys, baby gifts, natural goods, and more. Open 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. daily.

New Village Hardware

61 Curlew Pl. 575-682-2849 Everything you need for your latest project. Open 7:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Sunday.

Poke The Bear

510 Burro Ave. 575-682-1341 Find the music playing on Burro boardwalk for fun and unique finds--lamps, upcycled furniture, outdoor goods, t-shirts, and humor gifts. Open 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. daily.

Red Wall Jewelry

505 Burro Ave. 575-682-4414 Delicate and artisanal wares--great for gifts. Open 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. daily.



Where to Stay

Burro St. Boarding House

608 Burro Ave., 575-682-3601 Rustic and artful digs near downtown. [burrostreet-boardinghouse.com](#)

Cabins at Cloudcroft

1006 Coyote Ave., 575-682-2396 Retro casitas by the park. [cabinsatcloudcroft.com](#)

Dusty Boots Motel

1315 James Canyon Hwy, 575-682-7736 Themed rooms with a restaurant next door. [thedustyboots.com](#)

Grand Cloudcroft Hotel

1207 James Canyon Hwy, 575-601-2202 Relax in the indoor pool and spa. All king-sized beds. [grandcloudcroft.com](#)

Osha Trail Lodging

102 Mexican Ave., 575-937-3767 Modern, conveniently-located suites. Book on Airbnb or [oshatrailodging@gmail.com](#)

Summit Inn

103 Chipmunk Ave., 575-295-3235 Chic interiors, classic mountain exterior. [summitinnnm.com](#)

The Lodge

601 Corona Pl., 575-682-2566 Historic beauty. Stay, eat, play. [thelodgeresort.com](#)

For more in-depth lodging information and pictures, go to [discovercloudcroft.com/complete-guide-to-lodging-in-cloudcroft-new-mexico-2026.html](#)



Where to Art

Cloudcroft Art Society Co-op Gallery

90 Swallow Pl. Artist-run rotating gallery. Open seasonal Saturdays 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. and for holiday sales. [ccartsociety@gmail.com](#)

Off the Beaten Path

100 Glorietta Ave. 575-682-7284 Regional handmade art selection of all media. Open 10:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 11:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Sunday. [offthebeaten-pathstuff.com](#)

Samantha Odom Art Gallery

(300 Burro Ave. (575) 649-9951) Original paintings and affordable prints by Samantha Odom. Open 11:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Friday

and Saturday.

The Little Gallery (206 Burro Ave.) Fine arts and paintings by local artists, and funky souvenirs. Open Wednesday-Sunday 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. or by appointment.



Where to Heal

Be in the Mountains Yoga & Massage Therapy (109 James Canyon Hwy (575) 415-4573) Cozy space and comfortable pace in the Village Plaza. Open by appointment at yogaincloudcroft.com

Cloudcroft Animal Hospital (1403 James Canyon Hwy (575) 682-2645) Critter care and adoptions. Open 8:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. and 1:30-5:00 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Cloudcroft Therapeutic Massage (404 Burro Ave.) Relax and recover upstairs at the OCEC building. Open by appointment at cloudcrofttherapeuticmassage.com

Laughing Leaf Dispensary (504 Burro Ave. (575) 682-1354) Locally-owned bud tender.

Presbyterian Medical Center (74 James Canyon Hwy (575) 682-2542) Clinic by appointment or walk-in. Open 7:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Trestle Medical Services (1200 James Canyon Hwy) Local family practitioner. Open Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 9:30-11:30 a.m. and 12:30-4:00 p.m. trestlemedical.com



Where to Play

Deer Park Playground (30 Swallow Pl.) Behind the Burro St. Exchange. Picnic tables, easy downtown access.

Elevation Park (230 Mescale-ro Ave.) Disc golf, trailheads, and stargazing.

James Sewell Ice Rink (751 James Canyon Hwy) On the west end of Zenith Park. Seasonal skate rentals, snack bar, fireplace.

Pickleball Addicts of Cloud-croft (pickleballaddictsofcloud-croft.com) Join them! Regular seasonal play at Zenith Park.

Ski Cloudcroft (1920 1/2 Hwy 82) Southernmost ski area in NM—skiing, tubing, wood-fired pizza, and more.

The Lodge Golf Course (703 Corona Ave.) Scottish 9 in the clouds. Visit the pro shop for gear, snacks, and drinks.

Zenith Park (1001 James Canyon Hwy) Meadow in the middle of the village with playgrounds, ice rink, disc golf, walking path, pickleball courts, and more.



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\$77,000

CLOUDCROFT

12 Wildwood Loop

The lot includes an rc that will convert with the purchase, offering 2bds and 2bths for comfortable mountain vacations.

Debbie Tate - (575) 430-9511



\$210,000

MAYHILL

4 Friar Tuck

Located in the desirable Robinhood subdivision of Mayhill, this cozy 3-bedroom 1,320 sq ft sits on a .28 acre lot.

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



UNDER CONTRACT

\$89,900

CLOUDCROFT

207 Bell Canyon Road

Over 3.5 wooded acres offering privacy, mountain views, easy access from Bell Canyon Road, and several flatter areas with potential building sites.

Rebekah Graham - (575) 921-5517



\$654,900

HIGH ROLLS

36 Old Railroad Drive

Pristine 3BR/2BA home with multiple living areas, pellet + wood stoves, remodeled kitchen/baths, landscaped yard, greenhouse, workshop, and barn.

Cori Abel - (816) 896-2674
Emily Kellam - (575) 214-9479



\$689,000

TIMBERON

7 High Meadow Lane

Custom retreat on 6 acres with income potential & unmatched views. Beautifully custom built with the perfect blend of comfort and functionality.

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



\$24,000

CLOUDCROFT

27 Ponderosa Pines Trail

This beautiful lot offers the perfect setting for your dream mountain home. This property has the ideal blend of accessibility, usable terrain and stunning natural surroundings.

Megan Corvin - (575) 551-1999



\$195,000

CLOUDCROFT

99 Haynes Canyon Road

Mountain property featuring an unfinished site-built home, an older mobile home, expansive basin views, and ditch water rights to the Middle Fork of the Fresnel.

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



\$435,000

CLOUDCROFT

16 N Loop Road

True gem in the Twin Forks Area of Cloudcroft, NM! Escape to the cool mountain air and tall pines with this beautifully finished 3-bedroom, 2-bath mountain home situated on approximately .667 acres.

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



(575) 415-4039
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Cloudcroft, and Ruidoso



\$649,900

HIGH ROLLS

128 Westside Road

Rare High Rolls farm & ranch property with direct National Forest access, nearly 12 flat, usable acres, updated home, and massive 40x80 shop.

Sylvia Humphreys - (575) 921-1094



\$1,250,000

CLOUDCROFT

102 Mexican Avenue

Osha Trail Lodging. Unique multi-family investment opportunity. Includes 6 nightly rental units, a retail space, 6 storage units, and a large finished and heated garage.

Megan Corvin - (575) 551-1999



UNDER CONTRACT

\$499,000

CLOUDCROFT

5 Bear Spring Road

3 lots, 1.16 acres total, updated 3-bedroom mountain home with ground-floor primary suite, walk-in closet, deck access, garage.

Danica Shaw - (575) 302-8845



\$425,000

HIGH ROLLS

14 Bootlegger Road

Welcome home to this beautiful 2-bedroom, 2-bath retreat nestled on 4.75 peaceful acres bordering the National Forest.

Megan Corvin - (575) 551-1999



UNDER CONTRACT

\$276,000

CLOUDCROFT

1001 Paqua Avenue

Beautifully refreshed 3-bed, 2-bath home on the sunny side of Cloudcroft. Features new carpet, paint, and lighting. Walk to town!

Megan Corvin - (575) 551-1999



\$343,000

CLOUDCROFT

27 N. Oak Ridge Drive

This property is nestled on 3 lots totaling just over 2 acres and backing directly to the Lincoln National Forest. 3 bedrooms and 1.5 baths makes this the perfect getaway!

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



\$379,900

CLOUDCROFT

1008 Victoria Avenue

A rare find in the heart of the Village of Cloudcroft! This home is situated on the "sunny side" of the mountain. Enjoy natural light and warmth year round!

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



\$540,000

CLOUDCROFT

18 Forest View Road

With three expansive decks, there are plenty of opportunities to enjoy the crisp mountain air, peaceful setting, and outdoor living throughout the seasons. Inside, abundant windows fill the home with natural light, while vaulted ceilings create an open, airy atmosphere.

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



\$995,000

CLOUDCROFT

142 Ely Lane

Perched high amongst the pines on a private 2.1-acre mountaintop- backing the Lincoln National Forest, this exceptional Cloudcroft estate delivers the kind of seclusion, serenity, and elevated living rarely found in the mountains. This 3-bedroom home + a 1-bedroom guest home is designed for both retreat and full time living.

Rebekah Graham - (575) 921-5517



\$875,000

CLOUDCROFT

80 Mamaw Street

Spacious 4-bedroom, 2.5-bath home on over 6 acres backing directly to the Lincoln National Forest, offering privacy, mountain scenery, and abundant wildlife.

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



\$260,000

CLOUDCROFT

10 Oak Trail

Cozy 1 bedroom, 1 bathroom A-Frame cabin with 2 decks, just 10 minutes south of Cloudcroft in the Silver Cloud area.

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



\$285,000

CLOUDCROFT

12 Little John Lane

2 Bedroom, 1 bathroom with lots of updates. Enjoy working on projects in the workshop with electric.

Megan Corvin - (575) 551-1999



\$150,000

MAYHILL

5 Primrose Lane

Affordable mountain getaway in Mayhill, NM! This modified A-frame cabin offers 2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, and plenty of rustic mountain character.

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



\$382,000

HIGH ROLLS

10 Red Mountain Drive

Escape to this 5-bed, 2-bath log-style home on 3/4 of an acre in High Rolls, NM. Features multiple living areas for entertaining and a beautiful wrap-around porch perfect for enjoying nature.

Annie Daniels - (575) 442-3444



\$285,000

CLOUDCROFT

12 Little John Lane

Charming 1,400 sq. ft. 2BD/1BA cabin on 0.25-acre. Features fireplace, pellet & wood stoves, new LVP flooring, epoxy countertops.

Megan Corvin - (575) 551-1999



\$955,000

HIGH ROLLS

61 Haynes Canyon

A rare mountain sanctuary where craftsmanship, astronomy, and luxury living come together beneath some of the darkest skies in the Southwest.

Annie Daniels - (575) 442-3444



\$354,000

MAYHILL

18 Carpenter Lane

This inviting 3 bedroom, 2 bath home is filled with natural light thanks to the abundance of windows that create a bright and welcoming atmosphere.

Debbie Loper - (575) 430-7044



\$320,000

HIGH ROLLS

00 Deer Haven Road

This exceptional 20-acre unrestricted parcel in High Rolls offers panoramic mountain views and total privacy.

Megan Corvin - (575) 551-1999



\$819,000

MAYHILL

48 Milky Way

Architectural mountain retreat with sweeping views, wildlife, and an integrated roll-off-roof observatory for exceptional stargazing.

Megan Corvin - (575) 551-1999



\$24,000

CLOUDCROFT

27 Ponderosa Pines Trail

This beautiful lot borders the former Ponderosa Pines Golf Course and offers scenic beauty, privacy, and dual access points.

Megan Corvin - (575) 551-1999

Scan Here!



**for more listings
& property
details**



\$325,000

CLOUDCROFT

0 Evergreen Lane

Just over 12 acres of beautiful mountain property with the flexibility to camp in your RV, build a cabin or place a manufactured home.

Sylvia Humphreys - (575) 921-1094



NOVEMBER 2026

Events

| Community |

Cloudcroft Schools Veterans Day Assembly

Wednesday, November 11 | 9:30 a.m. | Cloudcroft High School Gym. Cloudcroft students honor our local veterans at the annual assembly. Veterans, families, and the community are welcome. Details: cmsbears.org.

Mountain Top Classic 8U Hockey Tournament.

Saturday–Sunday, November 7–8 | James Sewell Ice Rink, Zenith Park on young skaters at the first annual 8U youth hockey tournament on Cloudcroft’s new outdoor rink.

VFW Post 11999 Spaghetti Dinner & Fundraiser

Saturday, November 14 | 4–7 p.m. | Cloudcroft Senior Center, 212 Glorietta Ave. Dine in or carry out spaghetti, dessert, and a drink, available at the door while supplies last. The evening includes the live drawing for the Post’s annual raffle, a Henry VFW .22LR Tribute Edition rifle with display case. Proceeds benefit local veteran assistance programs and

community service projects.

Community Holiday Party Potluck in Mayhill

Saturday, November 21 | 6 p.m. | Mayhill Community Center, Mayhill. Bring your favorite dish and a dessert to share. There will be giveaways and holiday fun, and everyone is welcome.

Cloudcroft Schools Thanksgiving Break

Tuesday–Friday, November 24–27 | No school. Classes resume Monday, November 30.

Cloudcroft Christmas Market

Friday–Saturday, November 27–28 | 10 a.m.–4 p.m. | Cloudcroft High School Gym. The Cloudcroft Chamber of Commerce presents a holiday market with gifts, art, homegoods, jewelry, wreaths, pottery, goat milk soap, jams and jellies, and a food truck. Start your stocking-stuffer shopping here.

Santa Land by CLOC

Saturday, November 28 | 4–7 p.m. | Zenith Park Pavilion. Cloudcroft Light Opera Company hosts crafts, cocoa, and holiday fun, free to the public. Santa and Mrs. Claus



Ullr Fest is happening again at the ice rink

arrive at 5 p.m. and stay until the last child has had a visit.

Looking Ahead: UllrFest

Saturday, December 5 | 7–11 p.m. | James Sewell Ice Rink, Zenith Park

Join Cloudcroft’s annual snow-summoning tradition. Old skis go on the bonfire as an offering to Ullr, the Norse god of snow, in hopes of a deep ski season. Expect live music, fire, and fun under the stars. More: @iceskate-cloudcroft.com

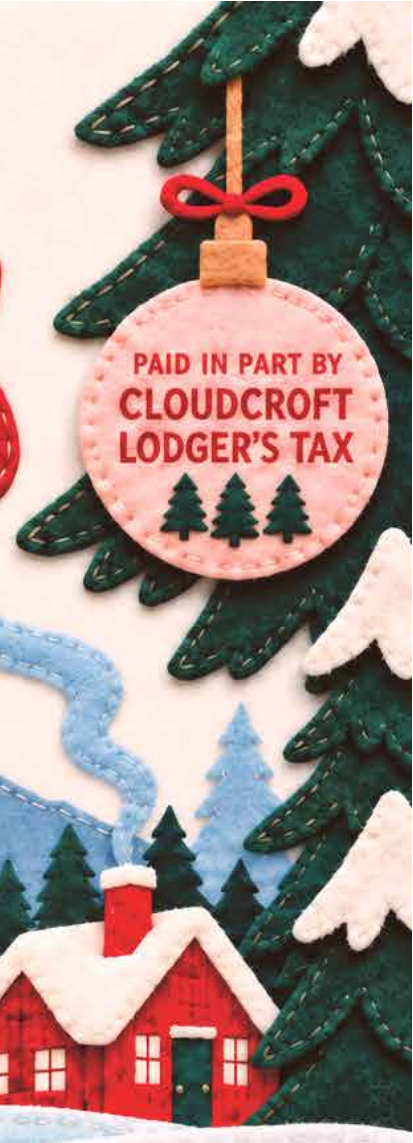
| Art and Music |

2nd Annual Cloudcroft Makes Art! Open Art Show

Friday, November 6 | 5–7 p.m. | Michael Nivison Public Library, 90 Swallow Place. A juried community art show that’s open to everyone. Amateur and Professional categories, with three age groups from youth to adult. Prizes go to the top entry in each group, plus Best in Show.

3rd Annual CHRIST Art Show at Samantha Odom Art Gallery

Opens Saturday, November 28 and runs through January 1, 2027 | Samantha Odom Art Gallery, Burro Avenue, Cloudcroft. A juried show of artwork centered on Christ. Artists who want to enter can text photos of up to three pieces, with title and size, to 575-649-9951 by November 14.





CLOUDCROFT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

CHRISTMAS MARKET

NOV. 27 & 28

— 10 AM–4 PM —

CLOUDCROFT HIGH SCHOOL GYM

— FREE ENTRY —

Gifts, art, homegoods, jewelry, wreaths, pottery, goat milk soap, jams & jellies, and a food truck



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CLOUDCROFT
LODGER'S TAX

Sponsors and volunteers needed for Mountain Christmas Village.

Seeking Christmas Tree Sponsors and Zenith Park decoration sponsors, including inflatables, decorated trees, and a food shack. All sponsors will get a spotlight on Facebook.

Email chamber@coolcloudcroft.com



Annual CAS Holiday Art Show

Saturdays | 11-3 p.m. | CAS Gallery, Old Red Brick Schoolhouse, 90 Swallow Place. More than a dozen Cloudcroft Art Society artists sell original paintings, photography, pottery, pine-needle baskets, gourds, ornaments, and gifts. The gallery adds an extra day during the Christmas Market.

Otero Arts Members’ Show

November 6–29 | Thursday–Sunday, 1–4 p.m. | Otero Arts, 1118 Indiana Ave., Alamogordo. Otero Arts’ annual members’ show fills the gallery all month. It’s an easy afternoon drive down the hill. Info: 575-446-3880.

Live Music at Cloudcroft Brewing Company and The Distillery

Weekends | 1301 Burro Ave. Catch live music all month, plus karaoke on Mondays from 6–9 p.m. and family-friendly trivia on Wednesdays from 6–8 p.m. Check their schedule for dates and times.

| Get Outside |

Ranger-Guided Lake Lucero Tour at White Sands National Park

Saturday, November 21 | 10 a.m.–1 p.m. | Small Missile Range Gate, U.S. Hwy 70 between mile markers 174 and 175. Caravan with a ranger to the dry lakebed known as the birthplace of the dunes, and see its secrete crystals up close. The hike is a moderate 1.5 miles round trip. The tour is limited to 50 people and is not recommended for young children. Reserve at recreation.gov.

Moonlight Hike at White Sands National Park

Tuesday, November 24 | 4:30–6:30 p.m. | Dune Life Nature Trail, White Sands National Park. This is the season’s last ranger-guided hike over the dunes under the full moon. It covers about 1 mile of steep sand in the dark, and flashlights aren’t allowed. The program fee is \$8 for adults and \$4 for kids 15 and under, plus park entrance. Check-in is 30 minutes early. Reserve at recreation.gov.



Cloudcroft Schools honors Veterans at their annual assembly

Sip & Paint at Noisy Water Winery

Monday, November 9 | 6–8 p.m. | Cloudcroft Tasting Room, 505 Burro Ave. An instructor-led paint night, and no experience is needed. Your ticket includes one glass of wine (\$15 or less), beer, cider, or a non-alcoholic drink, plus everything you need for an evening of art and good company.

Reptiles & Amphibians of New Mexico at Oliver Lee Memorial State Park

Saturday, November 14 | Oliver Lee Memorial State Park, Alamogordo. A state park presentation on New Mexico’s reptiles and amphibians at the foot of the Sacramento Mountains, a good fit for curious kids. Included with regular park entrance.

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MENU

STARTER

House Salad

Garden fresh greens, tomatoes, cucumbers, and carrots, served with homemade ranch dressing.

MAIN COURSE

Stuffed Chicken Breast

chicken breast that is stuff with a spinach and cheese topped with a creamy garlic sauce

SIDES

Creamy Mashed potatoes

Silky whipped potatoes with butter.

Green Beans

Slow-simmered green beans seasoned with savory herbs and smoked turkey for depth

Severed with dinner rolls with butter

Water and Lemonade included

Flavored by Faith

Gilly's Sweets

Proudly providing the evening's exquisite Dessert Table

Santa Land

by CLOC

CLOUDCROFT LIGHT OPERA COMPANY

At the CLOC Zenith Park Pavilion

Nov. 28

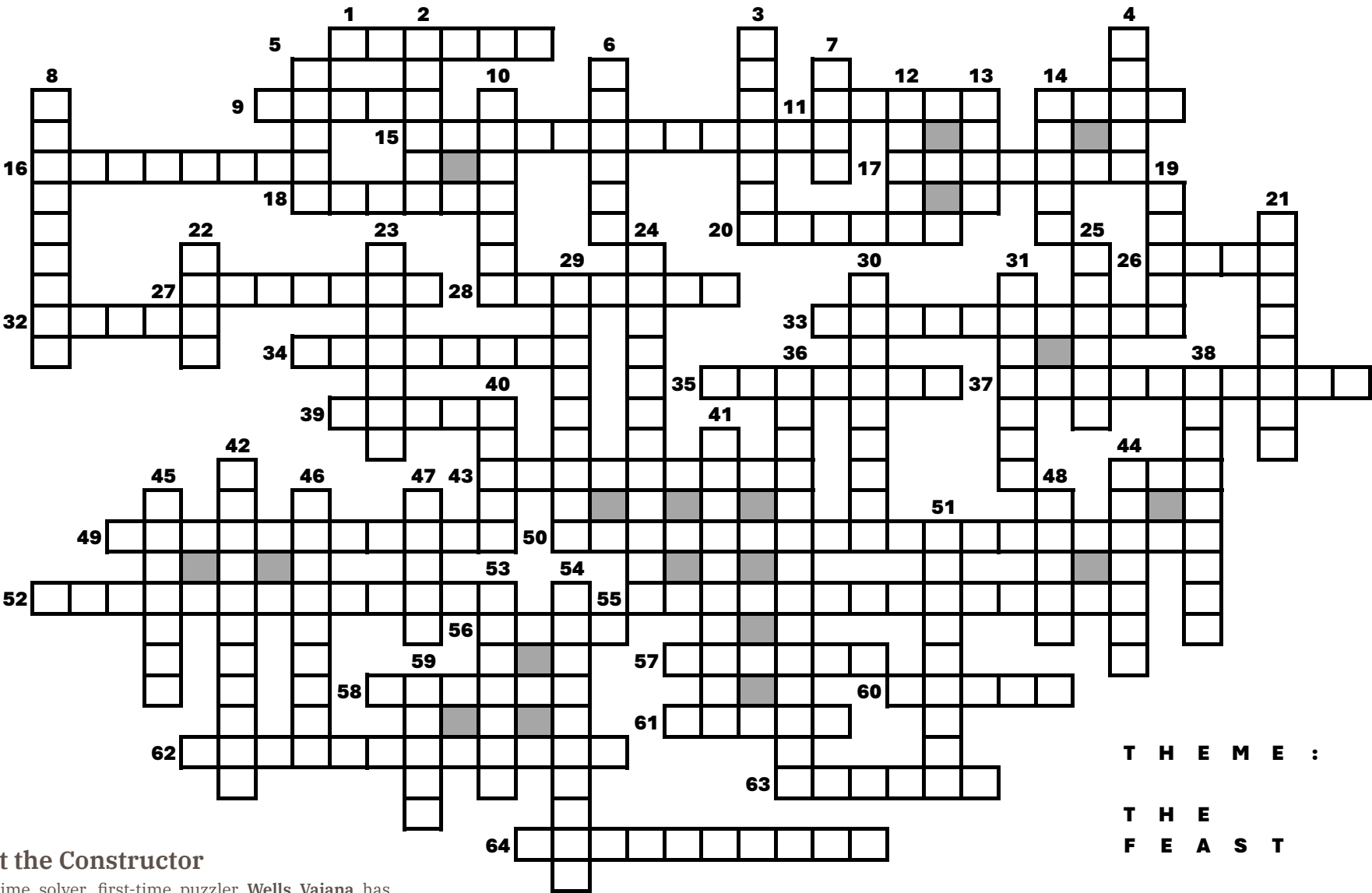
4-7 PM

Free to the public

crafts, cocoa, letters for Santa, and holiday fun

* The Clauses arrive at 5 PM.

“The Feast”



T H E M E :
T H E
F E A S T

Meet the Constructor

Long-time solver, first-time puzzler Wells Vaiana has lived in Cloudcroft since 2018, and his love for the village is clearly expressed in each puzzle, which is created without AI or any kind of online assistance. Wells is proud to be contributing these puzzles, and plans to continue doing so until they eventually drive him insane. Enjoy! dude.wells@gmail.com

UNWIND UNDER THE PINES



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Clues

- ACROSS
- 1 – THE CALL OF THE LARGE FOWL, RARELY SAID JUST ONCE
- 9 – TYPE OF COOKING DONE TO CHESTNUTS, COFFEE BEANS, AND A RUMP
- 11 – SAVORY SAUCE POURED OVER PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING
- 14 – COMMON SERVING VESSEL FOR 11 ACROSS
- 15 – THE HOLIDAY OF FEASTING, PILGRIMS, AND APPRECIATION
- 16 – BIG DAY FOR THIS AMERICAN SPORT
- 17 – LARGE GOARD FOR PIES AND LATTES
- 18 – DIETARY NUTRIENT DERIVED FROM POTATOES, RICE, AND WHEAT etc
- 20 – COMMON NAME FOR THE EVENINGS MEAL
- 26 – NaCl: A FREQUENTLY INGESTED MINERAL
- 27 – SORT OF MEAT SOURCED FROM A DEER
- 28 – WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENS, IF YOU CAN STAND THE HEAT
- 32 – TO GIVE A QUICK WASH, AS YOU SHOULD VEGGIES. _____ OFF
- 33- WORD FOR THE KNIVES, FORKS AND SPOONS USED AT THE TABLE
- 34- HOLEY STRAINER
- 35- FOWL INNARDS, GIZARDS, GUTS, HEART... PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING EDIBLE
- 37- NM STANDARD, ADDED INTO PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING (2 words)
- 39- SEARING WITH INTENSE HEAT, USUALLY FROM ABOVE
- 43 – SOMETHING THAT IS PLEASANT TO THE TASTEBUDS IS DESCRIBED AS BEING:
- 44 – COMMON COOKWARE, SPANISH FOR BREAD, OR A GREEK GOD
- 49 – A COLLECTION OF SNACKABLE MEATS, CHEESES AND CRACKERS
- 50 – LIME COLORED LEGUMES, SMOTHERED AND COOKED IN A TRAY (3 words)
- 52 – A SIMPLE ORGANIC COMPOUND WHICH STORES ENERGENCY FOR CELLS
- 55 – NYC TRADITION SINCE 1924, BROADCASTED SINCE 1953 (3 words)
- 56 – LARGE NATIONAL NON-PROF DEDICATED TO THOSE 50+ IN AGE (abbrev.)
- 57 – CIRCLUAR WAY PRE-COOKED HAMS ARE CUT
- 58 – A PYRAMID SHAPED CUT OF BOTTOM SIRLOIN BEEF
- 60 – PRESSED JUICE FROM A COMMON TREE FRUIT, OFTEN TIMES ALCOHOLIC
- 61 – SPANISH FOR BLESS YOU / S! TO YOUR HEALTH!
- 62 – A CONSUMED WHOLE EAR OF SWEET MAIZE (4 words)
- 63 – A COMBINATION OF FLAVORS WHICH ARE OPPOSITE OF SWEET
- 64 – SHEET-LIKE LINEN BELOW IT ALL

- 2 – CHURNED CREAM, BELOVED BY PAULA DEAN
- 3 – A STYLE OF 7 DOWN, BOILED IN HELLFIRE PERHAPS?
- 4 – EVERLASTING BLEMISH/DISCOLORATION. WINE IS OFTEN THE CULPRIT
- 5 – SIDE DISH OF INDIVIDUAL BREADS
- 6 – SMOOTH STYLE OF PRESSED POTATOES
- 7 – OBLONG BIRD BIRTHINGS
- 8 – THE REMAINING FOODSTUFFS, TAKEN FOR ANOTHER DAY
- 10 – CENTRAL PART OF A PORK LEG, USED TO SEASON STEWS (2 words)
- 12 – FAMOUSLY AMERICAN TREE FRUIT, POPULAR IN HIGH ROLLS
- 13 – ORANGE ROOT VEGETABLES, SWEET IN TASTE
- 14 – COOKED BY WAY IMMERSING IN HIGH HEAT FOR SOME TIME
- 19 – PERIODICALLY COATING THE OUTSIDE WITH JUICES WHILE COOKING
- 21 – A MIX OF BREADCRUMBS AND FLAVORING SHOVED INTO A CAVITY
- 22 – LARGE HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCE, SPACE IN HERE IS A HOT COMMODITY
- 23 – WORD FOR FOWL WHEN FARMED FOR ITS MEAT.
- 24 – MILK AND SUGAR; RAPIDLY WHISKED FOR A WHILE (2 words)
- 25 – HAVING A COOKED COATING i.e. HAM, POTTERY, DOUGHNUTS, AND EYES OVER
- 29 – LARGE FOWL HAS ONLY TWO, HUNDREDS SOLD AT REN-FAIRS (2 words)
- 30 – BODILY FUNCTION WHICH CONVERTS FOOD INTO ENERGY/ WASTE
- 31 – EDIBLE AND HEALTHY LEAFY GREEN, a.k.a – “SALAD ROCKET”
- 36- TINY CABBAGES, NAMED FOR THE CAPITAL OF BELGIUM
- 38 – BITTER BOG FRUIT, SOME SAY BETTER FROM THE CAN
- 40 – LARGE COOKING UTENSIL USED FOR SERVING SOUPS
- 41 – A SEASONAL SYMBOL OF BOUNTY aka “HORN OF PLENTY”
- 42 – WHITE PILLOWS FLOATING ATOP SWEET POTATOE PIE/ HOT COCOA
- 44 – COMPLEX ORGANIC COMPOUND COMPOSED OF AMINO ACIDS
- 45 – BITTER CELERY-LIKE STALK USED IN PIES. JUST NEVER EAT THE LEAVES!
- 46 – A GROTESQUE COMBINATION OF 3 DIFFERENT FOWLS
- 47 – RESIDUAL LIQUID FROM STEWING MEATS OR VEGGIES, USED FOR FLAVOR
- 48 – SWEET TREE NUT USED IN PIES
- 51 – BITE SIZED DISHES MEANT TO ENTICE THE PALLETE
- 53 – STOVE TOP COOKING TECHNIQUE WITH OIL (past tense)
- 54 – THE ORGANIC CHEMICAL OFTEN BLAMED FOR LETHARGY
- 59 – TEXAN MADE CAN OF TOMATOES AND CHILES



Cloudcroft Schools' third graders hit the Osha Trail for a forested field trip.

Mountain Life

Folks caught on camera living their best mountain life



Jordan and Shelby Denney tied the knot this summer



The Ice Men: Cory and Dave prep the rink



JV Bears celebrate on the volleyball court



Mason, Tux, and Robin coffee talk at Black Bear Coffee Shop



Susan Maynard and Christina Sullivan serve the school as PTO



Tyler Smith and Mayor Dusty Wiley team up for the Elevation Park Bucket Golf fundraiser



Bucket Golf Costume contest winners bring the fun



Matt Stout, Chris and Cooper Klodziejczyk, and Kelly Gray take a swing at Bucket Golf



Tylan and Julie Bragg take to the field for Bear Football Seniors Night



Fire Prevention Day in September brought together area first responders

A Look Inside the Otero County Firefighter’s Association

Cloudcroft’s Volunteer Fire Department report

BY KATHLEEN GRABOWSKI

Otero County Firefighter’s Association (OCFFA) meets monthly and invites fire service leaders and anyone who wants to know about local fire departments and upcoming training.

This allows coordination between multiple departments, which improves training before working together on emergency responses. Members from Otero County Emergency Services, American Medical Response, the Otero County Sheriff’s Office, Forest Service, and the dispatch center also attend regularly.

Current President Will Skaggs, part of the Alamogordo Fire Department as well as fire chief for Otero County’s

District 9, is seeking ways to increase attendance amongst firefighters. Every fire department is interested in more members, and there’s so much to do in the fire service besides fight fires and answer calls.

Archie Koenemund, who has been hosting, planning, and emcee-ing the annual 9/11 memorial for the county, considers his greatest contribution to actually be part of founding the OCFFA. First discussed by nearly a dozen county firefighters (from Boles Acres, Cloudcroft, Alamogordo Fire Department, Alamo West, and La Luz) in 1977 at the Holiday Inn in Alamogordo, the association wanted to unite the disparate fire departments, bringing together paid and volunteer county firefighters. The ones in the mountains didn’t know what the ones in the basin were doing, and from north to south or east to west, they weren’t working together.

All the basin departments, plus High Rolls, Cloudcroft, and Alamogordo FD, joined the organization at the beginning. Orogrande had funds to build a county-wide training facility, so it was sited closer to Alamo West, but

open to all county fire departments. Recent efforts by the association have been to update and improve the training center. Mountain departments were slower to join the organization because to them it felt like the training facility wasn’t something they would be able to use.

Cloudcroft Fire Department now hosts a training facility in the mountains, and there is a portable burn building that can be borrowed by any department.

The first OCFFA training was a propane Christmas tree that could be extinguished by teams of firefighters with hoses in La Luz. There was a lot of mud. Archie, the State Fire Marshal Carl Standeford, and state fire academy instructor Dave Rubio operated the propane training prop.

The first official meeting took place on a Thursday evening in 1978 at the Cloudcroft fire hall after their regular monthly meeting. Departments in attendance included La Luz, Boles Acres, Chaparral Flats, Dungan, Alamo West, and Cloudcroft.

The original board included President

Larry Daniels, Vice President George Bently, and Secretary Archie Koenemund. They also had a quartermaster who gathered orders from individual departments to order gear and equipment in bulk quantities. To make sure that firefighters and their trucks were equipped to fight fires in their neighborhoods, initial donations of fire hoses and nozzles came from FDNY and Chief Watts of Holloman Air Force Base provided gear to departments who had none.

Today, OCFFA can provide loans to departments for equipment. The rest of the funding comes from state grants and the quarter percent tax is split between departments to fund gear and equipment.

The current board also includes members from mountain and flats departments. Jacob Bock, vice president, current deputy emergency manager for the county has also volunteered as a firefighter. Penny Hall has been secretary of OCFFA and Cloudcroft VFD for many years in addition to volunteering as a firefighter and EMT. Karen Rodriguez is a firefighter and the EMS Battalion Chief in District 7 and recently took on the treasurer role.

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Cub Pack Grows in Size and Service

The cubs set up a recruiting booth at Lumberjack Day on September 19 at Ski Cloudcroft. The event, now in its 33rd year, featured axe throwing, relays, climbing, vendors, and food trucks. I stopped in to see how things were going and met several visiting Scouts who came by our booth, including one from as far away as Los Alamos. I was pleased to see that their recruiting efforts have really been paying off. This cub pack is growing!

On October 10, our Scouts joined John D. Rider VFW Post 11999 for a roadside cleanup along Highway 82. The haul included roofing material, a plastic fender insert, a tow bar, and five bags of trash.

Together, the Scouts contributed nine hours of community service on a beautiful day along the eastern approach to Cloudcroft. Thank you to the VFW, our chartered organization, for getting us out there.

Our Cubmaster, Billy Coyle, completed his BALOO training this month. That stands for Basic Adult Leader Outdoor Orientation, and it gives him practical tools for taking our Cubs and their families camping. There’s a lot to think about when you’re responsible for a campsite full of kids! We’re proud of Billy and grateful that he’s making time to learn alongside the kids he leads.

Pack 958 and Troop 958 welcome girls and boys. If your family would like to join us, contact info@CloudcroftScouts.org.

—Greg Crinklaw



El Niño Snow?

Life in the Sacramentos with Lyn Canham

As we all move into November, often one of the drier months of the year in the state and in our area, we are wondering about the increases of rainfall we have enjoyed since mid-September. It was so strange to get so much “monsoon” rain at the end of the calendar-summer season (meaning by the day of the Fall Equinox).

The end of the annual monsoon was actually entwined with ample moisture from tropical systems, most specifically, the remnants of Hurricane Polo. We were so grateful to participate in those remnants, since so often the moisture is focused in the southwest, west, and north (the systems always move from southwest to northeast).

El Niño is said to be behind the late-October movement of tropical system moisture into western, northern, and later in the week, southern and eastern NM (these are the conditions as I write).

The National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center (NWS CPC) favors an active southern storm track, raising the odds of above-average rain and early mountain snowfall, especially across northern NM. Yes, the common refrain: for several years now, we have seen winter snows accumulate reliably in the state’s northern mountains and we hope that even our most prominent southern NM peak of Sierra Blanca can get some of the snow action. Maybe we will finally get used to what is now an infamous snow shortfall in southern NM.

But in the meantime, it is possible that all of NM’s ski areas will get enough late November or December snowfall to open early; November snow accumulation of that degree is much more assured for the Taos, Santa Fe, Sipapu, Pajarito, Red River, Angel Fire and hopefully Ski Apache ski areas, and less assured for Sandia Peak and Ski Cloudcroft. I know for myself, I am pretty happy if our part of the state participates in El Niño weather. I remember the last two El Niños to visit NM were very partial to the northern third of the state.

Many are hinging on the near-70% chance given in the late summer that the southern US will experience the record-strongest El Niño, although called “uncharted waters”, due to our record warm climate and what that could do to the prediction for the “Super El Niño.” In NM that mainly means above-average rain and snow, especially in our winter months – November and December - as well as January and February.

But it will be nice to enjoy the 1 to 2

Christmas Tree Permit How-To

US Forest Service Press Officer Jorden Scott shares seasonal fun

Hello Forest Friends. As the holidays draw near and the scent of pine fills the air, we’re back with everything you need to know about Christmas Tree Permits on the Lincoln National Forest.

Beginning November 12, you can purchase your permit in person, by phone, or online. Cutting dates will run from November 12 through December 31 this year and each permit will cost you 10 dollars.

It’s important to note as you plan for your Christmas decorations that each household may purchase only one permit (note: a \$2.50 processing fee applies online). Also, if you are a fourth grader and you have a valid Every Kid Outdoors pass or voucher you are eligible for a FREE Christmas tree permit, available online or in person at one of our offices (note: a \$2.50 processing fee applies online).

For more information about Every Kid Outdoors program, please visit www.everykidoutdoors.gov.



Before you head out on your festive search for the perfect tree, keep these helpful tips in mind:

- Trees may not exceed 10 feet in height, and cutting the tops off taller trees is not allowed.

- You can cut your tree in most areas of the forest, but not in wilderness areas, within 300 feet of recreation sites such as campgrounds, or along developed trail systems.

- You must be at least 100 feet away from any paved road when cutting.

- Be sure you are on Lincoln National Forest lands, not private property. Yes folks... it has happened before!

With your permit, you’ll receive a map of a preferred Christmas tree cutting area that is especially promising this year.

To ensure you stay on designated routes, pick up a free Motor Vehicle Use Map at one of our offices or download it from our official website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r03/lincoln/maps-guides/motor-vehicle-use-maps>.

For more information or to purchase your permit online, visit Recreation.gov.

Happy tree hunting and happy holidays from all of us at the Lincoln National Forest!

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degrees Fahrenheit below normal that we are forecast to experience, at least. And we can hope for more rain, if not snow. The southern Sacramentos have decreased in drought category this fall, although to different degrees. For example, the western So. Sacramentos moved down from Severe Drought to Moderate Drought and the eastern So. Sacramentos moved down from Extreme Drought to Severe Drought (borderline Moderate).

Over here, we'll take what we can get.

I would certainly love to see Ski Cloudcroft covered in snow – with no ground showing – for a significant portion of the winter, and weekend lines for the various ski services offered there. We hope the area experiences local and visitor families getting ski lessons for their kids and enjoying the sledding hills, and it would be really awesome to see people riding the lift and skiing down a couple of the steeper inclines behind the “bunny ski” area. Happy Early Winter!

-Lyn Canham

Victories as Bears Gear up for Winter Sports

Peak Performance: Cloudcroft Lady Bears take down Capitan in pink as the community comes together for Breast Cancer Awareness Month; cross-country runners prepare for the season's biggest race.

Pink ribbons lined the bleachers and

three breast cancer survivors stood at center court as the **Cloudcroft Lady Bears** volleyball team hosted the **Capitan Tigers** on October 15, turning the match into a tribute to local women who have battled breast cancer and those still fighting it.



During the Breast Cancer Awareness game, the night honored three survivors, **Yvonne Barnes**, **Beth Blankenship**, **Kathy Darnold**, and **Susan Maynard**, who received flowers and were introduced before the varsity game. Maynard's two daughters, **Julie Bragg** and **Shelly Hughes** accepted flowers on her behalf.

The Lady Bears took the first set, 25-20, before Capitan answered by winning the second, 25-22. Cloudcroft responded with two straight sets, rolling through the third 25-8 and closing out the fourth 25-21 to win the game 3-1.

The win gives the Lady Bears a district victory and moves them to 9-7 overall and 1-1 in district play. Cloudcroft hosted the Mesilla Valley Sunblazers on Saturday, October 24 at 12:30 P.M. and the Lordsburg Mavericks on Saturday, October 31 at 1:00 P.M. The team celebrates Senior Night against the Mescalero Chiefs on Tuesday, November 3 at 4:30 P.M.

Runners in Artesia, a New Personal Record

A week before the pink-out, the Cloudcroft cross-country team set new bests of its own at the **Coach Mo**



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& **Marquise Weast Twilight Race** in Artesia on October 9. The meet hosted **26 teams** from all over the state on a flat course held in an Artesia desert park, making the team’s personal records even more impressive.

Senior **Triston Tompkins** led the boys, finishing with a time of **19:02**. Senior **Jadon Myers** followed and finished with a time of **20:11**, and freshman **Forest Odom** crossed the line 11 seconds later with a time of **20:22**. Then, eight seconds later, **Tyler Mezler** crossed the finish line with a time of **20:30**.

On the girls’ side, senior **Gena Davis** led the way with a time of **23:04**. Freshman **Adelyn Tompkins** ran for a time of **25:53**, senior **Brisa Johnson** ran for a time of **28:03**, and senior **Alyssa Singer** ran for a time of **30:13**.

The cross-country team raced locally on October 23 at the Dust Devil Dash in Alamogordo, a final race before the district meet on Saturday, October 31, in Roswell. From there, the goal is a trip to the state championship on Saturday, November 7th, at Albuquerque Academy.

Winter Sports Excitement

As Cloudcroft’s fall sports come to a close, both basketball teams are already in the gym for preseason conditioning. The boys open their home schedule Tuesday, December 8, against the Tularosa Wildcats. Both teams then compete in the biggest tournament of the year: **Mountaintop**, December 10-12 at the high school and middle school gym.

From the pink-filled gym in Cloudcroft to the desert course in Artesia, Cloudcroft athletes spent October competing hard and showing up for their community. The Cloudcroft Bears look forward to bringing that energy into our basketball season, which will tip off in December.

-Lyn Canham

Strong Finishes and Season of JV Persistence

Middle schoolers Ivy McMillan and Sammy Stubbs deliver the Middle School Bears’ sports report

Big congrats to our middle school volleyball teams on a great season. The A-Team finished with an awesome 13 wins and only 1 loss. The B-Team finished its season with a 4-9 record. Win or lose, every player put in some serious work and got better as the season went on, representing Bear pride.

We also want to shout out our middle school/freshman football team for finishing their season with spirit. They wrapped up their games with 2 wins and 4 losses. Their teamwork and persistence grew each time they stepped on the field.

Go Bears!

The Work of a Conductor on the A&SM Railroad

Historic Imagined Interviews: Part 1 of 2

I’ve chosen to create an imaginary interview with Conductor Smith that took place in 1924. In such an inter-



Pumpkin Tres Leches Cake

Flavor Lab: Brought to you by Freshman **Forest Odom** and the CHS Culinary Program

From Forest: “This is my recipe for THE BEST Pumpkin Tres Leches Cake. This is my all-time favorite cake; go ahead and try it out and let me know what you think.”

Prep Time: 1 hour

Cook time: 25 min.

Soaking time: 6 hours

Pumpkin Cake

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice, or to taste
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 5 large eggs, separated
- 1 cup granulated sugar, divided
- 3/4 cup pumpkin puree, not pumpkin pie filling
- 1-2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Tres Leches Mixture

- 12 ounces 1 can evaporated milk
- 14 ounces 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1/2 cup whole milk (I use half-and-half for a much more rich flavor.)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- Pinch of salt
- 1 1/2 cup heavy cream, must be cold (do not substitute with any other type of dairy)
- 3-4 tablespoons confectioners’ sugar, sifted if lumpy
- 1/2 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- (Optional) ground cinnamon, optional for dusting

Instructions

Cake Shortcut: make a spice cake mix with pumpkin puree like I do

using the same measurements. Bake It, Cool it, and then carry on with making and adding the Tres Leches Mixture and Whipped topping outlined Below.

Preheat the oven to 350 F and spray a 9x13-inch baking pan with cooking spray; set aside.

Pumpkin cake: To a large bowl, add the flour, pumpkin pie spice, baking powder, baking soda, salt, whisk to combine; set aside.

Flavoring Tip - Add the pumpkin pie spice to taste, and many times I’ll add additional ground cinnamon and ground ginger because I like those flavors, but it’s up to you.

Separate the Eggs: Use 3 bowls to separate the 5 eggs. One bowl to crack into, one for your yolks, one for the whites, so that one bad egg will not ruin the whole batch.

Tips - Crack eggs when they are cold and straight from the fridge because the yolks are less likely to break. not a single drop of yolks can get into the whites, or they will not whip properly. Make sure your bowl is EXTREMELY clean. Any residue grease, natural oils, etc. are bad for whipping eggs.

Beat Yolks: To the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment or large mixing bowl and handheld electric mixer, add the 5 yolks, 3/4 cup sugar, and beat on medium/high speed until pale and thick; about 3-4 minutes. Don’t rush it. Add the pumpkin puree, milk, vanilla, and beat to incorporate, about 1 minute. Stop to scrape down the sides of the bowl.

Dry Ingredients: Add the dry ingredients to the mixing bowl, and stir by hand or beat on low just until combined; don’t overmix or the cake will be tougher. Set aside.

Beat Egg Whites: To separate medium mixing bowl, beat the egg whites to stiff peaks, about 5-10 minutes.

Tips - Soft peaks will not cut it. They need to be able to completely hold their shape before they go into the batter.

Sugar: Add the remaining 1/4 cup sugar and beat it into the stiff peaks.

Fold Carefully and Gently: Gently

fold the egg whites into the pumpkin batter and do not overmix.

You don’t want to deflate those glorious egg whites that you took the time to whisk to stiff peaks because this is what gives the cake its sponge.

Bake: Turn out the cake batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 25-30 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean and the cake is springy to the touch. Rotate pan once midway through baking. Start checking at about 20 minutes.

Cool: You must cool the cake fully. Depending on your climate and kitchen temp, this can take up to 6 hours. Hard to say, but it needs to be cold because warm cake absorbs the milk mixture too fast on the surface and not evenly throughout. Whereas a fully cooled cake soaks gradually and evenly all the way through.

Poke: Poke the cooled cake all over with a skewer (wooden or metal) or a fork. Make a lot of little holes I’d say about 100; poke down nearly to the base of the cake but not the very bottom.

Tres Leches Mixture: To a medium bowl all of the ingredients.

Pour: Slowly pour the mixture over the cake, letting it absorb gradually as you pour. Don’t rush.

Soak and set: Cover and refrigerate for at least 6 hours, preferably overnight, which is why this is such a good make ahead dessert. You can make it up to 48 hours before you plan to serve it.

Whipped topping shortcut: Use at least one tub of thawed Cool Whip or a similar type of whipped topping to get that same taste.

Whipped Cream: To the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment or large mixing bowl or handheld electric mixer, add the cold heavy cream and beat for about 5 minutes, or until it thickens. Gently fold in the sugar to taste, vanilla, and beat to incorporate.

Spread: Evenly spread the whipped cream or whipped topping over the surface of your chilled cake lightly with a spatula or offset spatula



Turkey Season

Wildlife of the Month with biologist
Christina Olvera

With November comes turkey season – literally! Turkeys are quite out and about this time of year. Turkeys can run up to 18 miles per hour and 50 miles per hour in flight – perhaps they’re trying to escape the dinner table on Thanksgiving? They also roost in trees at night, don’t let their build fool you.

But, there was a time when turkeys weren’t nearly as abundant. In the early 1900’s, turkeys were nearly hunted to extinction.

With conservation efforts implemented through the Pittman-Robertson Act there are nearly 6.5 million wild turkeys today! Talk about a comeback. Ben Franklin felt that turkeys were a more appropriate national symbol than the Bald Eagle, believing they were a “bird of courage”. Can you imagine if the turkey



was our nation’s bird?

Thanks to successful conservation efforts, it’s likely you’ve all seen a turkey or two here, especially if you hang out in Wills Canyon or Agua Chiquita, just a couple hotspots for turkey hunting.

While there are two distinct species of turkeys in the world, there are five North American subspecies – if a hunter gets all five, that’s called a Grand Slam. In our mountains, we have Merriam’s turkey, and there are Rio Grande and Gould’s turkeys available as well within the state.

Turkey season is open November 1-30, 2026 – be aware of your surroundings and wear bright colored clothing if you’re hiking the trails.

view, I’m filling in gaps between facts. In doing so, I may be wrong, but never intentionally create false statements, and the words put into Conductor Smith’s mouth are realistic.

In early 1924, I made a search for Conductor Smith, who was on the train that brought the first logs from the Sacramento Mountains to the big new sawmill in Alamogordo.

Lynn Melton (LAM): Mr. Smith? Are you the Conductor Smith who brought the first logs to Eddy’s sawmill in Alamogordo? December 1898.

SMITH: I am. Gosh, that was a long time ago.

LAM: Can I ask you some questions? I thought a conductor took up tickets. Why were you on a log train?

SMITH: Have a seat on the sofa. You need to get comfortable ‘cause you have a lot to learn.

You see, a conductor is the captain of a train. It doesn’t move until the conductor says so. It stops when the conductor says so. Check that switches are set proper. Freight on, freight off, paid for and accounted for. All that.

Beyond that, the conductor and the engine have to team up to make the trip work. I’ll give you an example. The engineer sits on the right side of the locomotive, and he can look forward and backward, but only on the right side. He can’t see a damn thing on the left side. Spose you are headed into a left bending curve. The engineer can’t tell whether there is anything on the track – cow, wagon, whatever. The conductor watches the left side and helps the engineer run safe.

LAM: Never thought of that. Do you remember that first log train to Alamogordo?

SMITH: It’s coming back to me, bit by bit. But we need to start somewhat before that trip. H.A. Sumner laid out the A&SM and was the Chief Engineer. Good & Company did the dirt work. Somebody else built trestles and wood boxes – I can’t remember that name. The Sumner’s crews came along and polished up the dirt work and laid the rails.

We used to make runs with engine 101 – that wood burner with that double cone stack - to bring rails, spikes, tie plates,

any supplies they needed. Just following Sumner and getting him what he needed.

Up to the end of the tracks and then back to Alamogordo. Sumner didn’t build a wye until he got to Toboggan. That meant that every supply train had to back down all the way back to Alamogordo. Doing that, I had to be at the rear car watching out downhill for every strange thing. I had a big time whistle to blow and make the engineer stop the train.

LAM: So, along toward the end, you had to back the train for nineteen miles?

SMITH: You got it. But things got a lot better after Sumner got to Toboggan and built the wye. After that, we started toting supplies to the Alamogordo

Lumber bunch at Bailey’s Camp.. Short trains, so we could run the entire train out on one leg of the wye, uncouple the engine and turn it around on the wye. Then we could back the supply up to where the crews were laying track.

With the locomotive already pointed toward Alamogordo, it was an easy run through the wye and downhill.

If you are following along, you ought to have figured out that we were taking loaded trains uphill and bringing unloaded trains downhill.

Now, do you see what was different on December 1, 1899, the first time we took Eddy’s logs to Alamogordo?

A few days before, Wilbur Bailey and his bunch had track all the way to Bailey’s Camp. We made a run with a few empty log cars. Just like before, turn the engine around in the wye. But this time we backed the train all the way up to Bailey’s. We left the log cars there and ran just the engine to Alamogordo.

We gave them a few days to load the log cars. First time, they didn’t have the proper equipment. Men just figuring out how to move logs on to the log cars.

On the big day, we ran Engine 102 – the coal burning World’s Fair engine -- up the road. We could use 102 because Eddy had coal coming out of the Salado mines. Anyway, we turned 102 around at the wye, backed up to Bailey’s and coupled to the cars. And, then, -- wipe your brow and throw in a prayer, -- for the first time we ran a heavy train downhill to Alamogordo.

Eight percent grade from Bailey’s. More or less five percent grade from there to Wooten. Less after that. A whole bunch of thirty degree curves. We ran real slow. If you let the train take control, you are pretty much have decided to make a date with the undertaker.

LAM: Was there a big celebration when you got to Alamogordo?

SMITH: No. But we were pretty glad so we blew the whistle a bunch.

LAM: So it became pretty routine?

SMITH: Never routine. One time a train somehow started sliding on the tracks just before the sharp curve to Wooten loop, the brakes didn’t catch, they couldn’t slow the train enough. Two good men died.

With that in mind, sometimes when there was a long string of log cars on the siding at Cloudcroft, I would have the brakemen half set the brakes, and we would go all the way to High Rolls with the wheels screeching on the tracks. It was hard on the wheels and tracks , but you do what you have to do.

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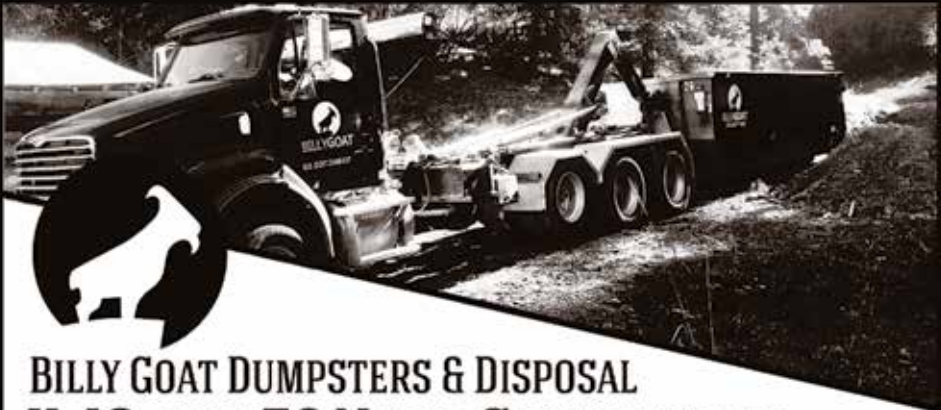


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In Loving Memory of Joseph “Jody” Mancillas

Joseph “Jody” Mancillas, age 55, passed away peacefully on September 18, 2026. He leaves behind a legacy of warmth, kindness, and deeply cherished memories with everyone who had the privilege of knowing him.

One of Jody’s greatest accomplishments was his dedicated career working at The Lodge at Cloudcroft for 35 years. It was truly his pride and joy, a place where he built lasting connections and left an undeniable impact through his decades of hard work and commitment.

Jody was a devoted son, brother, and friend who saw the world through a lens of appreciation and joy. In his younger years, he was happiest out on the court, playing basketball alongside his good friends. He loved bowling with his friends; he always brought a spirited energy to the lanes and thoroughly enjoyed the fun of a friendly competition. His love for local athletics continued throughout his life, and he always thoroughly enjoyed playing in local golf scrambles as well as dedicating his time line judging at high school volleyball tournaments.

Jody thoroughly enjoyed his extensive collection of music and movies, and he spent countless hours sharing his talent for baking, creating

delicious desserts for both the staff and guests at The Lodge as well as for his beloved family and friends. He also held a deep, lifelong love for trains, and one of his favorite simple pleasures was listening to the train pass by.

Above all, Jody spent many hours on his photography, which was truly the biggest part of his life outside of work. He spent his happiest days hiking through nature, finding hidden beauty in everything around him and capturing it to share with the world. He also enjoyed memorable nights playing cards with the Turner family. Even during his illness, Jody brought people together, sharing lots of laughter, and he absolutely loved playing Farkle.

Known for his generous heart, he brought steady comfort and joy to those around him. His presence will be profoundly missed, but his memory will live on forever in the hearts of those he loved so dearly.

He is survived by his beloved mother, Sherry Crosson (husband Tim), and his brother, Jonathan Mancillas, along with a large, loving family of aunts, uncles, and cousins who will carry his strength and laughter forward. He is preceded in death by his father, Joseph L. Mancillas; his grandparents, Lucas and Angelita Mancillas; and his grandmother, Ruth A. Williams.

Family and friends gathered to honor Jody’s life and journey home. Services were held on Wednesday, September 30, 2026, at Sacred Heart Mission Catholic Church (205 James Canyon Hwy).

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Faces & Places



McCurley’s artistic journey began in the theatre.

From Stage to Studio: Inside The Little Gallery with Trey McCurley

Get to know multifaceted talent actor, artist, and new business owner McCurley. by Hannah Dean | photos: Crystal Tompkins

A new splash of color arrived on Burro Avenue when in 2025, actor and artist **Trey McCurley** opened The Little Gallery, a vibrant new art space and studio tucked into the courtyard between Aspen & Ivy and The Fat Rabbit in downtown Cloudfcroft.

Origin Story

McCurley is candid about his feelings toward the promotional side of his craft. “The two things I hate most about acting are photo shoots and interviews,” he chuckles, seated in the gallery’s sunny courtyard.

But the real work, he adds, lies in the hustle. “The game is rejection over and over and over again.”

Originally from Marlow, Oklahoma, McCurley lived full-time in Los Angeles for 16 years. He divides his time between various locations, including his home in the Sacramento Mountains of New Mexico.

Due to virtual auditions becoming increasingly common during the pandemic and a thriving New Mexico filming scene, he no longer needs to live in Los Angeles full-time. He has found a “good middle space” in New Mexico, halfway between his family in Oklahoma and his work in LA.

“My family is absolutely 100% supportive, though they were mildly skeptical early on,” McCurley says.

McCurley’s artistic journey began in the theatre. He started acting onstage at age 14 and was “heavily trained in, and influenced by, classical theater.” He pursued a Master of Fine Arts in Acting at UCLA, and was “one of just nine students accepted to the school that year.”

Over his career, he has accumulated numerous roles, estimating that he has 30 films and TV projects under his belt, and “way more plays than that.”

Recently, McCurley was cast in “Believe,” an action-thriller movie filmed in Cloudfcroft.

Stage acting remains dear to his heart. Playing Hamlet around the time he

turned 30 was a significant theatrical experience; he performed it for a 12-week run in Santa Monica.

“Typically, you get on set and do your job and get out. Sometimes acting can seep in and affect you, to the point where I remember staring down into the shower drain and feeling horrible because every night I was going through that same horrible thing,” referencing the character’s struggles



In Cloudfcroft — and The Little Gallery — McCurley is putting down roots. He hopes you’ll visit and stay awhile.

with his father dying and the conflict of struggling to kill his uncle.

Another influential play was The Greenbird, where he played “Calman, king of statues”. This role involved posing like sculptures, which drew his attention to the original Rodin works in the UCLA sculpture garden. “They were larger than life, like giants or Nephilim.”

He’s often cast as the villain, as seen in his part in Danger in the Spotlight. “Of course, the bad guys are more fun than the good guys,” he says with a smile. “There’s just more to play with. It’s fun to inhabit the character.” His upcoming film role, which will be shot in Albuquerque next month, features him as a “nefarious pharmacist” cul-

tivating deadly plants in a community garden.

He laughs about the nature of acting. “It’s lying. You’re playing pretend. What is the difference? You’re making stuff up.”

From Stage and Screen to Studio

Parallel to his acting career, McCurley is an accomplished oil painter. He began painting around age 26, after finishing graduate school, when he “finally had free time.”

Unlike his formal theatre training, he is self-taught in painting. “It took me 10 years before I made a painting that satisfied me,” he says. “The hardest part was getting my hand and eye to work together. You can see it before

you can do it.”

His work is bold and abstract — bright colors, bold shapes, and even sparkles adorn his canvases, which depict yucca, mesas, and ocotillo plants. Earthy wood assemblages, crafted from roots and foraged materials, punctuate the gallery walls. “I’m a nerd about wood,” he laughs. “Anything I can find out in the forest.”

McCurley says painting offers something different than theater. “I regard theater as the greatest of all art forms. The most immediate way to express to a human being what it means to be human... but painting is also therapeutic. Put on good music, have a drink, make a good painting.”

You can find McCurley in The Little Gallery, which is named after his mother, Trish Little, and late stepfather, Eddie Little, doing just that.

Little Gallery, Big Talents

The Little Gallery showcases McCurley’s work alongside that of his neighbor, Cloudfcroft Reader Contributing Editor and oil painter **Drew Gaines**. Gaines’s realist—sometimes surrealist—paintings of local scenes offer a contrasting style that McCurley feels complements his own. The gallery also sells small artisan items, such as magnets, turquoise-tipped cholla sticks, and other curiosities.

McCurley hopes the space becomes a platform for more local artists. “There are a lot of artists in Cloudfcroft who could use a storefront. My goal is for us to help each other make some money, sell our art, put our names out there.”

The Little Gallery already boasts big talent— Gaines’s work was recently included in the juried Marfa Invitational, and he’s been featured in the competitive print publication, New American Paintings.

Balancing the gallery with an acting career isn’t easy. “Sometimes I have four auditions in a week, and they send me 14 pages to memorize in 48 hours. That’s the hard part — trying to keep the gallery open while handling all that,” McCurley says.

Still, Cloudfcroft holds a strong pull. McCurley owns property here and says the gallery gives him a creative foothold between Oklahoma and LA. “It’s a beautiful little community with a few problems here and there... but it’s an oasis. A thriving downtown. Unlike most of America, which has been stripped of all of that.”

He mentions friends in Cloudfcroft, including old friends from when he lived here 20 years ago, and new bonds he made since returning in 2020. McCurley considers his neighboring business owners, **Cherry Fawn Bell** of the Fat Rabbit and **Nicole Alcorn** of Aspen & Ivy, to be such friends and supporters. He beams when discussing his Burro Avenue Courtyard comrades.

“Those of us who live here stick together pretty well.”





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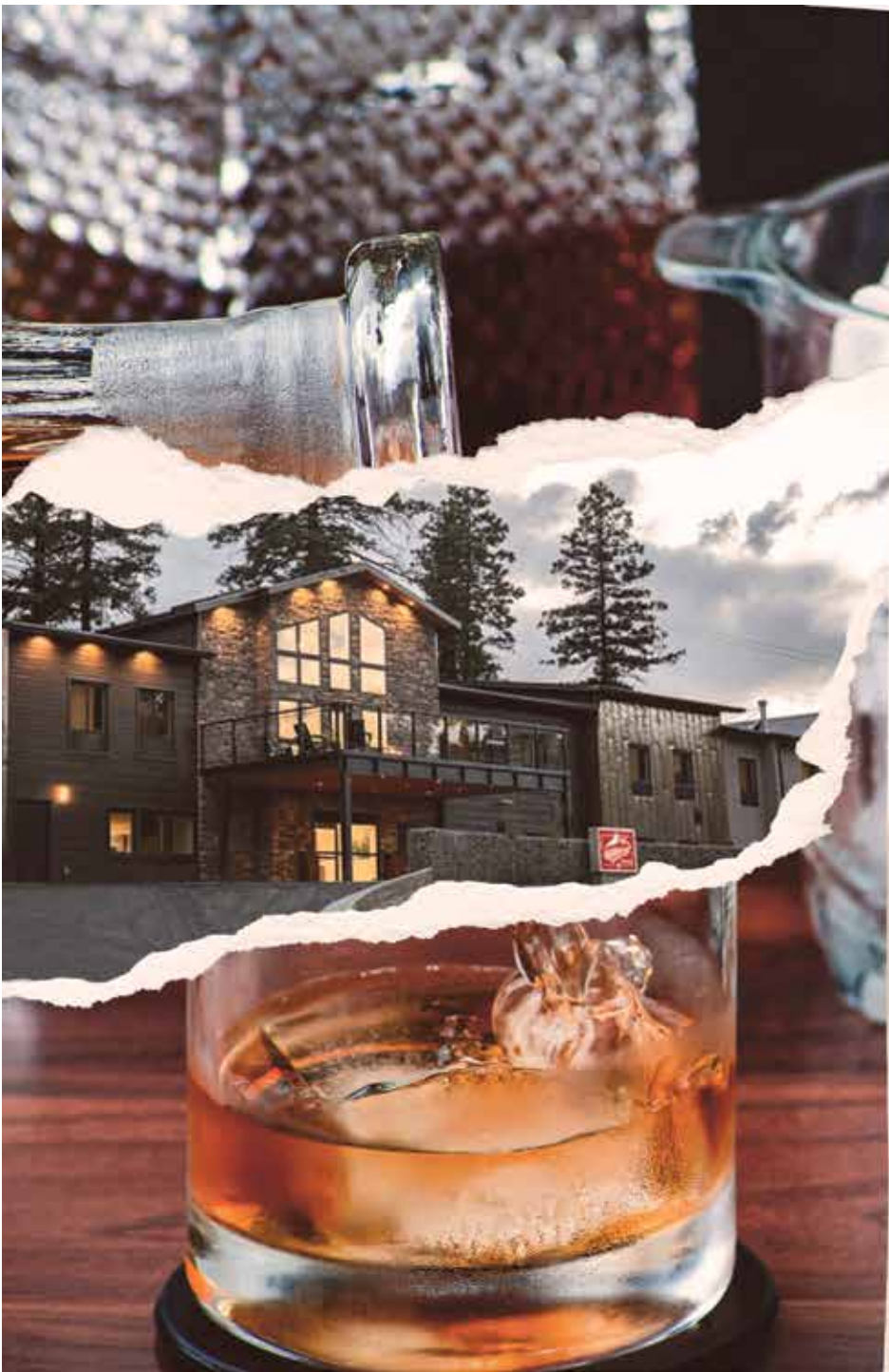
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