

# Dancing

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# THE DAILY TIMES

FARMINGTON NEW MEXICO

50¢

Monday, March 14, 2011

## Aztec chamber bestows its awards

— By Chuck Slothower —  
The Daily Times

**AZTEC** — Members of the Aztec Chamber of Commerce celebrated the organization's annual banquet and awards show Saturday night.

"It's the one time where we have a venue where all our members can, in theory, get together," said Christa Romme, the Aztec chamber's executive director.

Aztec Well Servicing was named business of the year. In business 45 years, with more than 400 employees, Aztec Well Servicing is a major employer for the small town.

The business continues to expand, providing much-needed jobs, Romme said. No representatives of the business appeared at the awards ceremony.

Aztec Urgent Care was also nominated in the busi-

ness of the year category.

Joshua Ray was named citizen of the year. The North Carolina native said he enjoys Aztec. "Thank you so much for making me feel at home," he said.

Also nominated in the category was Leanne Hathcock.

Craig Edwards was named educator of the year. A long-time teacher and football coach at Koogler Middle School, Edwards said Aztec remains an "all-American city" that treats its children and seniors well.

Jonathan Acrey and Zoe Daney also were nominated for educator of the year.

Sally Burbridge was given a special merit award. Burbridge, a former chamber director, helped start Fantasy of Lights and is active in many local groups.

"I just enjoy being part of the community," she said.

The chamber awarded

numerous prizes and held a silent auction featuring packages from area businesses.

Red Barn BBQ, a new Aztec business, catered the event. The Bar-D Wranglers, a Durango-based band, played a Western-focused set.

Members of the Aztec High School Key Club volunteered and took donations for the Children's Miracle Network and March of Dimes.

"One of the main reasons we come together is to honor the great citizens, educators and businesses of Aztec," Romme said.

"It was a real joy to be able to read over the nominations," she added. "Every day around us, people are doing amazing things."

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James B. Hale/The Daily Times  
Craig Edwards speaks to the crowd as he accepts the Educator of the Year award at the Aztec Chamber of Commerce banquet Saturday evening.

**Business of the Year:**  
Aztec Well Servicing  
**Citizen of the Year:**  
Joshua Ray



**Educator of the Year:**  
Craig Edwards  
**Special Merit Award:**  
Sally Burbridge

## Hospital CEO looks to the future



Rick Wallace, the CEO of San Juan Regional Medical Center, speaks with hospital employees.

Courtesy San Juan Regional Medical Center

— By Leigh Black Irvin —  
The Daily Times

**FARMINGTON** — Rick Wallace, chief executive officer for San Juan Regional Medical Center, has great expectations for the future of health care in San Juan County.

Wallace, who previously worked as CEO at St. Mary's Regional Medical Center in Enid, Okla., came to Farmington in April 2010 to assume the top role at SJRMC.

"I heard about the position from a friend, who encouraged me to apply," he says. Wallace was unsure that he would get the job, as SJRMC is a non-profit hospital and his past experience includes 25 years working with only for-profit institutions located in Tennessee, Colorado and Texas. Nonetheless, Wallace got the job.

"I wasn't actively looking for a change, but when this opportunity presented itself, it was almost like destiny, like it was meant to be," says Wallace. He and his wife, Betty, have two grown children and two grandchildren, and they found that San Juan County offered everything they wanted

at this point in their lives: a small community, outdoor activities, four distinct seasons, a variety of services, etc. "And after touring the hospital and meeting the staff, I was sold. This hospital has exceeded my expectations, and we are thrilled to be here. We plan to make this our permanent home."

Wallace, who served in the U.S. Army Reserves for 27 years and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel, is a graduate of the University of Tennessee with a master's degree in business administration and a master's in counseling. He is working on completing his doctorate in health services administration from the University of Alabama.

### A hospital in motion

San Juan Regional Medical Center is evolving on a daily basis. A recent report of a heavier-than-normal emergency room load has prompted speculation as to what might be the cause.

"I think patient convenience is a driving factor," says Wallace. "Many people don't have a personal care physician - a medical home, so to speak. So

they use the ER or urgent care center as their medical home."

Wallace believes convenience also plays a role. "Everyone is so busy these days. When we get sick, we want immediate treatment and do not want to wait three weeks for an appointment."

In addition to keeping up with a busy ER, Wallace is impressed with the hospital's ability to address other needs of the community. "There's not much SJRMC cannot handle in regard to dealing with the immediate needs of the patient," says Wallace. Although some procedures, such as open heart surgery, must be performed at larger hospitals in Albuquerque and other cities, "the hospital is able to manage 98% of the situations we encounter," he says.

Wallace believes the importance of such specialized procedures as open heart surgery may be diminishing in response to medical technology advancement. "We can do so much in the way of stints and non-invasive measures, and it's making procedures such as open-heart surgery less necessary," he says.

Wallace acknowledges that

attracting qualified medical personnel to San Juan County can be a challenge. "This is such a unique area. Physicians and other personnel who choose to move here often have a particular attraction for what this area has to offer," he says. "Once people realize the advantages of living here, though, they really enjoy being here. We've had luck attracting very qualified medical personnel to the hospital, and not many have turned down an offer."

Adds hospital spokesman Lee Lamb, "We brought in 19 physicians this past year, including a neurosurgeon who moved here from Chicago. He particularly likes it here because it is a more holistic way of healing. Physicians who come here from big cities find that they're not as 'boxed-in' here, as it's not as competitive. Physicians feel they can practice the full-scope of their services here, and can utilize the full range of their skill sets more easily."

See **Hospital A2.**

## Little oversight for gov.'s fund

— By Sue Major Holmes —  
The Associated Press

**ALBUQUERQUE** — New Mexico governors have great leeway and little oversight in spending a contingency fund tucked into the state budget under a larger amount allocated for expenses of the governor.

The only restriction: The fund must be spent "for purposes connected with obligations of the office."

State law excludes it from being audited.

The fund, which has received as much as \$90,000 a year in tax dollars approved by the Legislature, is not like other government appropriations — it's treated as personal income governors must report on state and federal tax forms.

Republican Gov. Susana Martinez, who took office Jan. 1, asked the Legislature to reduce the fund to \$6,000 a month. Her office said the fund had been \$6,750 a month since April 2009, compared to \$7,500 a month from January 2003 to March 2009.

Longtime state Rep. Luciano "Lucky" Varela, D-Santa Fe, said lawmakers have expressed little interest over the years in changing the process.

Senate Republican Leader Stuart Ingle of Portales said the idea was looked at a few times, but the discussions always ended up being political: "Oh, you're trying to cut our guy off."

Governors are required to give only a general summary of how they spent the fund each year.

For 2008, for example, Democratic Gov. Bill Richardson reported spending nearly \$139,000, including more than \$60,600 for food and beverage, \$41,700 for contract staff and nearly \$13,000 for "miscellaneous/flowers/kitchen equipment/supplies." The fund began the year with more than \$145,800 and ended with a balance of just under \$7,000.

See **Fund A2.**

### Four Corners Information Leader

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### Weather . . . A8



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