



The Early Years

The 2018 fall semester is very important at UNM-Gallup as it marks the 50th anniversary of the branch campus' existence. Our presence was made possible by a large group of community members who not only left a legacy at UNM-Gallup, but provided an example of how to build and support higher education from a grassroots level.

As early as 1958, Gallup civic leaders began discussions about bringing college-level courses to students of the area. An early partnership with the UNM Extension Division brought 40 students to classrooms at Gallup High School for part-time instruction. In 1966, based on the program's success, Gallup residents were led by Dr. George Young, superintendent of the Gallup-McKinley County School District, in looking at what would be needed to establish a permanent community college. Civic organizations, educational groups and service clubs all became involved in conversations about whether the area could support the enrollment and financial needs of a local college and whether or not demand was strong enough to sustain such an effort.

Momentum continued as the *Gallup Independent* newspaper undertook a large promotional campaign in 1967 touting the importance and necessity of a branch college in Gallup. Publisher John Zollinger and editor Eric McCrossen wrote articles, collected data and encouraged UNM administrators in Albuquerque to consider the value of placing a UNM-Gallup branch within easy access of the local community.

In November of 1967 the Gallup-McKinley County School District took action through board approval of a general obligation school bond to support a UNM satellite campus. As a result of this significant vote, the district superintendent, Dr. W.B. Fitzsimmons, delivered the message to UNM officials that Gallup residents were ready to financially support a branch campus. School board members who voted in favor of the tax levy were Cal Foutz, Ernest Vanderwagen, Richard Wilson and Earnest Becenti. In response, UNM named Robert Lalicker as the liaison official between the university and Gallup. Mr. Lalicker, a University of New Mexico employee from 1956-1984, was a strong advocate for the UNM-Gallup branch and provided assistance in starting up the college.

In 1968, the New Mexico state legislature provided a \$22,000 appropriation to start the campus at the urging of Edward Junker and Louis Romero who were state legislators at the time. With the appropriation in hand, civic leaders started on the road to obtaining a mill levy to support operations of the campus. Dr. Ferrel Heady, UNM president-elect, and local attorney Walter Wolf who sat on the UNM Board of Regents, spoke at numerous community gatherings trying to

garner support of the tax levy. Gallup Chamber of Commerce President Joe DiGregorio and Executive Manager Harvey Whitehill committed the Chamber to paying for promotional materials which explained and encouraged backing of the increased mill levy.

With the initiation of a publicity campaign by the local paper, area citizens were interviewed and quoted as giving their backing for both the school district bond issue and the college tax levy. Publicly giving their support in the *Gallup Independent* were Wallace Leach, Ron Oldham, Walter Wolf, Ira D. Cato, Octavia Fellin, John Guest, Paul McCollum, Fay Radosevich, Jess Walter, T. Ray Erwin and Charles Williams.

The election was a success with citizens strongly declaring their support of higher education in their own neighborhood. 85% of voters were in favor of the tax levy which raised \$7,000.00. This was added to the \$22,000 already provided by the legislature, and the branch campus was in business.

On September 16, 1968, 128 registered students began taking classes at the newly established UNM-Gallup. Tuition was \$312.00 for 12 credit hours. The total budget for this first semester was \$59,000 which included \$22,000 from the state legislature, \$7,500 from the mill levy and \$29,500 from tuition and fees.

On August 7, 1969, the Gallup Lions Club donated their club house to UNM-Gallup establishing a physical location for the campus. The land for the Lions Club site was donated by Bert Cresto and building of the facility was the result of over 250 Lions Club members who donated their time, talent and labor to construct the building. Lions Dan Brentari, Henry Whipple, Art Garcia, J.A. "Red" Abeyta and Bill Lewis were instrumental in fulfilling the Lions Club desire to return the building to the community since local citizens had funded and built the structure. Later that same year, Clair Gurley donated 52 acres of land to the university assuring a permanent location for UNM-Gallup.

As they say, the rest is history. Over the past 50 years, UNM-Gallup's legacy has grown to serve tens of thousands of students as a place where students can start, continue and complete their education. Our roots go deep and as we celebrate our 50th anniversary, we offer acknowledgement and gratitude to the earliest benefactors who allowed UNM-Gallup to begin, grow and continue our educational mission. When the historians remember our 100th and 200th anniversaries, they won't be able to write the story without recognition of those early civic leaders who believed in the value of higher education – and made it happen.

The author would like to thank Octavia Fellin whose publication "A Chronicle of Mileposts – A Brief History of the University of New Mexico Gallup Campus" contributed to the writing of this article.

