



Women's HISTORY MONTH HER story

THE LAS CRUCES Bulletin

Amber Burdge: Coming into her own

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

As a young athlete growing up in Oklahoma, Amber Burdge greatly admired professional skater Debi Thomas, an Olympic medalist and national champion who became an orthopedic surgeon. But Burdge doesn't have a particular hero.

"I want to create my own path. I have never followed the traditional way of doing anything," said Burdge, who became acting director of New Mexico State University Athletics two months ago. She is likely the first woman ever to head up the entire athletic department at NMSU, including all men's and women's sports.

"I've been the first in different roles throughout my career and I stepped into some really challenging roles," said Burdge, who was promoted to acting athletic director by new NMSU President Valerio Ferme Jan. 2, immediately after he fired former Athletic Director Mario Moccia.

Filling that role at a four-year NCAA Division I institution is a long-time goal for Burdge, who has been with NMSU for two and a half years. She has put her hat in the

ring as New Mexico State chooses a permanent leader for the athletic department.

Burdge has a bachelor of science in health and a master of science in counseling and student personnel from Oklahoma State University, and a doctorate of education from Louisiana Tech University. She served as associate athletic director for student-athlete success services at Louisiana Tech for eight years before coming to NMSU as deputy athletic director for strategic initiatives and leadership, and as deputy Title IX coordinator, according to NMSU.

At Louisiana Tech, Burdge helped create that university's Name, Image, Likeness (NIL) policy and even taught it in the business college. Louisiana Tech, NMSU and universities around the country have adapted to the 2021 U.S. Supreme Court ruling allowing college athletes to profit from the use of their name, image and likeness.

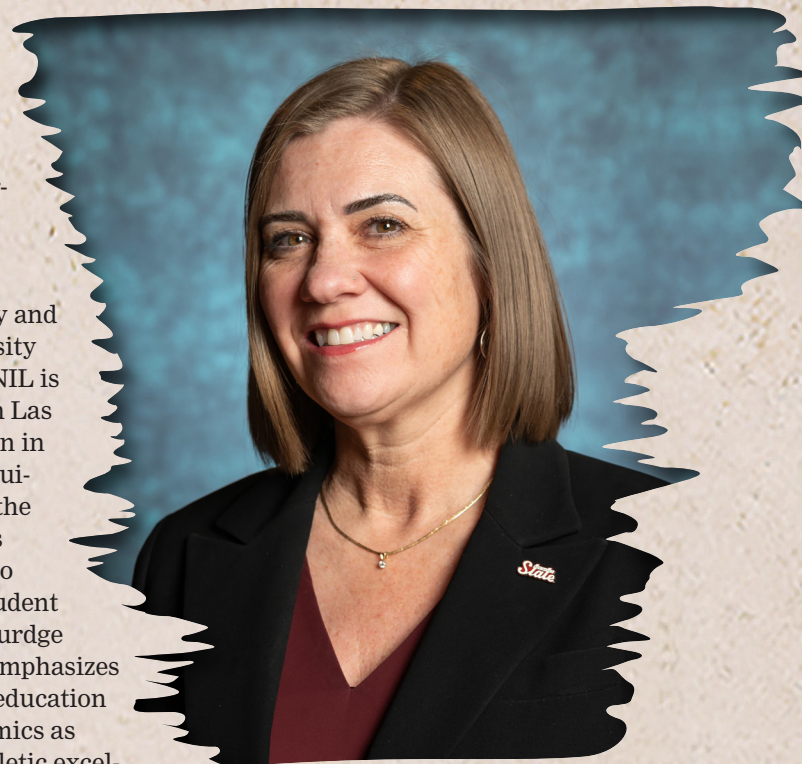
"I see NIL as career development," Burdge said. "I really believe in it."

Because NIL can help a student athlete build a resume, develop interview skills and negotiate and execute a contract, the policy makes

them "more competitive in the job market moving forward," she said.

How the community and the university approach NIL is different in Las Cruces than in Ruston, Louisiana, but the objective is the same: to support student athletes, Burdge said. NIL emphasizes character education and academics as well as athletic excellence, she said.

To achieve those goals, Burdge is working with NMSU athletes and coaches, the community and A Mountain Sports NIL Collective. The collective's mission is to support student athletes' "personal, academic, and athletic ambitions, ensuring



that they can maximize their potential both on and off the field," according to the website.

"Our coaches and our student athletes are doing a phenomenal job of getting student athletes into the community," Burdge said, but "we

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AMBER BURDGE*continued from page 1*

can do better to maximize those connections.”

One of the ways Burdge said she is doing that is by strengthening the connection between young New Mexico State athletes and the university’s alumni.

“When you graduate and start that habit of staying connected with the university, you’re going to stay connected full time,” she said.

Burdge is also working with the NMSU Foundation “to partner on major gifts and endowment opportunities,” she said.

Burdge has started a women’s empowerment dinner, where women student-athletes are paired with local women mentors, according to her NMSU biography, along with the Captain’s Club student-athlete leadership program and leadership training for NMSU assistant coaches.

Burdge has taken over an athletic department recovering from hazing and sexual assault incidents involving the men’s basketball program during the 2022-23 season, and a 2022 shooting involving a former NMSU men’s basketball player.

The scandals have caused some loss of support for men’s athletics at NMSU, said Burdge, adding that, more than two years after the issues, “this is an entirely new program.”

A figure skater from Oklahoma

Burdge grew up in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, a suburb of Tulsa. Her father, Mike Burdge, was a steel worker and electrician who became Sand Springs’ mayor and he remains on the city council. He is also a long-time cross-country coach. Her mother, Cathy, was recognized twice as national woman of the year for her work with Little League. She coached t-ball and Little League teams.

Burdge said her mother was the first person she called about her promotion at NMSU.

“My parents took me to the ice every morning before school,” Burdge remembers, so she could practice and pursue her dream of becoming a professional ice skater.

But realizing she wasn’t going to make it to the Olympics, Burdge hung up her skates.

At age 16, she was the manager of a Little League concession stand.

“I commanded that space,” Burdge said. “I didn’t ask for permission.”

She built work schedules and even kicked out umpires who were harassing employees.

Burdge also recognized she believed in “people working with me, not for me,” and developed a guiding principal of “lift as you rise.”

Before she began work at Louisiana Tech, Burdge served as athletic director for Neosho County Community College in Chanute, Kansas, according to NMSU. She also had

leadership roles focused on academic and leadership development at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, NMSU said.

At New Mexico State, Burdge oversees 16 men’s and women’s sports. And, since about 60 percent of the NMSU student population is female, an equal balance must be achieved in its athletic programs, as mandated by Title IX, the 1972 federal law prohibiting discrimination based on sex in federally funded education, including athletics.

“New Mexico State’s path is not traditional,” Burdge said. “We make sure we do it in New Mexico State’s way, our own way; we make sure that we have a way to be successful.”



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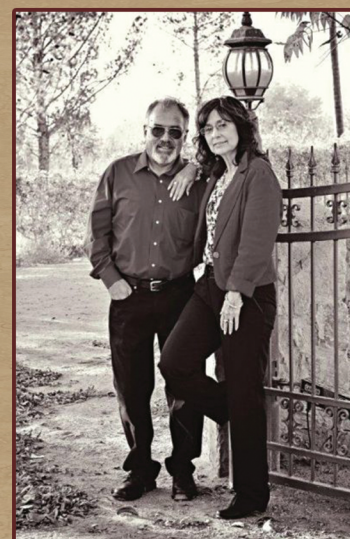
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Sybil Dickerson: One to remember

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

As you walk into the Game 1 Sports Bar and Grill on the corner of Espina Street and University Avenue, look up at the newspaper clipping that is framed with the large black and white photo of two women near the front door. It's the story of a piece of history for Las Cruces and New Mexico State University.

The photo is of Sybil Clagett and Juanita Denton, who were the first two women ever to letter in athletics at what was then (probably 1939) New Mexico State College.

Denton was a junior from Artesia. Clagett was also a junior, from Clayton.

Their accomplishment, as the 87-year-old news clipping so elegantly states, "christened formally" New Mexico State's Women's Athletic Association (WAA).

Clagett was the grandmother of Game owner Marci Dickerson.

Clagett was honored during the first ever Debora Scott Women's Empowerment dinner. Scott was "the first-ever Black female athlete at NM State when she began her tenure in 1973," according to NMSU. During the dinner honoring Clagett held by NMSU in March 2024, Dickerson had this to say about her trail-blazing ancestor:

"When my grandmother was growing up the limitations on women were vast. There was no elementary sports, no junior high sports and no high school sports to prepare and train these women for the athletics. In basketball they could only run a quarter court because people were worried a wom-

an's uterus would fall out if they physically exerted themselves. College opportunities for women were very limited as very few women attended college. Receiving a



higher education was not something that was encouraged for women. In order to letter in athletics they had to earn points in multiple activities."

To letter, according to the newspaper article, Clagett and Denton had to earn 3,500 points by participating in hiking, tennis, basketball, archery, dancing, rifle team and ping pong, along with participation in "skill clubs, recreational events and council meetings."

Clagett married Morris Dickerson, but obtained a teaching job at a school in Mesilla using her maiden name, Dickerson said, "because women who were married were not allowed to have jobs. She was only able to teach for one year until it was discovered she was actually married

and then was forced to quit.

Both Sybil and Morris Dickerson were NMSU graduates, and "lifetime supporters of NMSU athletics," Marci Dickerson said.

"Sybil was an avid fan of women's basketball and volleyball," Dickerson said. "She often entertained recruits in her home, and never missed a women's game. Growing up, I remember sitting in the Pan Am Center with a maximum of 100 other fans watching 'the girls' basketball and volleyball games.

Her grandfather, Morris Dickerson, "was as big a fan as Sybil was," Marci Dickerson said. "He would give the players Hershey's candy kisses at each game."

When Morris missed several games because of illness, when he returned to the stands, "the team all left the court and came and presented he and Sybil with Hershey's candy kisses."

Morris and Sybil ran the Fairacres post office and general store when Fairacres was a separate community from Las Cruces, Marci Dickerson said.

NMSU yearbook

The 1939 NMSU yearbook lists Sybil Clagett as athletic manager for Women's Athletics at the university, and Juanita Denton as president.

The yearbook says the WAA was formed in 1937 "by Mrs. Nora Hines, physical education instructor, for the purpose of promoting athletic interests and activities for women and to foster a high standard of sportsmanship.

"Skill clubs were organized to promote activities which may be adapted to the leisure time of after school life," the yearbook continues. The clubs included archery, basketball, rifle, tennis, dance, golf and fencing."



The yearbook also notes that WAA members made their annual trip to Cloudcroft on Feb. 5 "for a day of skiing, tobogganing and bobsledding."

Three women honored Saturday

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

In honor of International Women's Day (Saturday, March 8), the New Mexico State University women's basketball program will honor three women who are trailblazers and trend-setters and have been instrumental in building the women's athletics program at New Mexico State University.

The game begins at 2 p.m. at the Pan American Center on Saturday, with half-time festivities honoring Barbara Hubbard, Wanda Bowman and Sybil Clagett Dickerson.

Hubbard, who turns 98 in July, retired for the second time in 1998 as director of NMSU's Pan American Cen-

ter after decades of bringing some of the biggest names in the entertainment industry to perform in Las Cruces. Hubbard continues to raise money for the American Collegiate Talent Showcase (ACTS) scholarship campaign she created more than 50 years ago to help students at NMSU and across the country break into the entertainment industry and get an education.

Bowman, 83, will retire March 30 after decades of owning a furniture business in Las Cruces – most recently the 67,000-square foot Ashley Store. Bowman sold the business last October, but will continue a program she recently began in partnership with Las Cruces Public Schools to donate beds to

children in need. She is also a long-time supporter of NMSU athletics.

"Wanda Bowman and "Mother" Hubbard (that's the nickname Hubbard was given by the legendary Bob Hope) have been huge advocates and supporters for (NMSU Women's Basketball Coach) Jody Adams and the women's basketball program," said Las Cruces business owner and community activist Marci Dickerson.

Dickerson will be on hand during the game to accept a special jersey that will be presented in honor of her grandmother, Sybil Clagett Dickerson, who was one of the first two women to letter in athletics at what was then New Mexico State College in the late 1930s.

"Thank you, Jody Adams and NMSU acting Athletic Director Amber Burdge for acknowledging the importance of these women who did it first," Dickerson said. "They have worked so hard to establish women's athletics in this community."

Tickets for the game are available at the NMSU ticket office and at Steinborn Realty, 141 Roadrunner Parkway. You can pick up free tickets to the game – made possible by Marci Dickerson and Steinborn Realty – at Game 1 Sports Bar and Grill, 2605 S. Espina St.

The Aggies women's basketball team, with a 15-14 record, plays Sam Houston State University during the March 8 game.

Bridle Up Hope Las Cruces lifts women and girls

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

"The horses are the therapists."

That's what owner Kelly Koerper said about Bridle Up Hope Las Cruces (BUH), which Koerper founded in 2023 on four and a quarter acres of land south of Mesilla. Her Horsegirls Charities nonprofit affiliates with Bridle Up Hope: The Rachel Covey Foundation, using Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) to help "girls and women to recognize their inherent worth and potential," according to the website.

Equine Assisted Learning was adapted from "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," the international best seller written by Steven R. Covey in 1989. Covey's granddaughter, Rachel Covey, was a horse lover who struggled with depression and died at age 21 in 2012. After her death, the Covey family created the foundation and the Equine Assisted Learning curriculum.

Koerper uses six horses and a pony to help girls and women learn life skills and how to become "better horsemwomen and better people," through her Girls and Women's Experience, she said.

Some of the more than 20 women and girls Koerper has worked with have suffered from trauma and anxiety, she



said, including two widows who came to BUH because nothing else was helping them cope with the loss of their husbands.

"It's working," Koerper remembers one of the women saying.

She also remembers a mother telling her, "My daughter is talking to me

again," after her daughter joined Koerper's program.

Koerper said she has seen girls and women gain in hope and confidence through the relationships they develop during private lessons with horses Tasha, Blake, R Vee, Yogi Bear (that's the pony), Invy, Sugar and Premium. They learn about the horses, how to ride and care for them (including brushing, braiding, washing and even painting the horses), and develop one-on-one relationships with them "in a completely safe space." Koerper and four other teachers lead the program. The teachers include professional horse trainers, a licensed pilot, a yoga instructor and one who has worked with both sled dogs and abused horses.

"It's just beautiful to watch," Koerper said, "to see how horses can change women's and girls' lives."

Koerper calls BUH "a little vortex of miracles" because of the horses that were donated to her for the program and others she was able to buy, and because of the quality of her teachers and other staff. She has

also gotten her first donation, from the Las Cruces nonprofit Tutti Bambini, as BUH starts a scholarship fund.

"Things are happening," Koerper said. "It's very exciting."

The Rachel Covey Foundation also has affiliates in five U.S. states including New Mexico and its home base in Utah, Texas, Arizona and Idaho, as well as in Ukraine, Estonia and the Netherlands.

For more information, call Kelly Koerper at 575-496-4030. Visit bridleuphope.org/locations/las-cruces.



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Wanda Bowman: An adventurer at heart

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

When she was 73 years old, Wanda Bowman boarded a Russian freighter that took her to Antarctica. She rode on a raft from the freighter to the actual ice-covered land mass, dug a hole in the ice and pitched a tent that she slept in that night. It was all part of traveling the world for Bowman, who has been on every continent.

She has also made a world of difference in Las Cruces.

Working with Las Cruces Public Schools, Bowman has donated nearly 400 beds to children in need.

She remembers one donation to a young girl who was hugging one of the bed pillows and told Bowman, "I've never owned a pillow before!" And, until Bowman's donation, she had never had her own bed either.

Getting a good night's sleep is key

to a child learning to read and getting a good education, Bowman said. "We must make sure our kids are learning."

The beds she has donated have gone to students in Las Cruces elementary schools and to others served by the school district's bilingual and migrant education programs and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Bowman said she intends to continue the bed-donation program after her March 30 retirement. She sold Ashley Store last October and plans more travels with her new husband, Jerry Strange.

"At 83, I need to move on and do other things," Bowman said, remembering, "My whole life was this store."

"We've got a wonderful family," she said, talking about her employees, and adding that "Not one

employee lost their paycheck" during COVID-19. And, as soon as the shutdown ended, "we picked up where we left off," Bowman said. "I'm a very big believer that if you serve your community and your employees, things will work out."

"This community has been so good to me," she said. "I will miss seeing the customers. I'm an old farm girl from Illinois. You don't forget who done brung you to the dance."

Bowman and her late husband, Bob Bowman, came to Las Cruces from St. Louis where Bob had been an aeronautical engineer for McDonnell-Douglas. They moved because southern New Mexico's drier climate was better for the health of one of their children.

The Bowmans joined Bob's brother in La Fiesta TV and Music Center on Solano Drive in 1971. They sold Curtis Mathis television sets, Hot Point appliances, Baldwin pianos and Thomas organs. A piano teacher, Bowman has a grand piano, a spinet piano and two organs in her house, although she doesn't get to play as much as she would like.

Taking over the business, Bob and Wanda had a section of Gibson Discount Center located near the intersection of Idaho Avenue and El Paseo Road. Then they ventured out on their own, first in Solano Square and then in Bonita Plaza with Bowman's Curtis Mathis Center.

"We actually owned a building," Bowman said.

They sold televisions and a limited amount of furniture, starting out with four sofas, four love seats, a few chairs and a bedroom set.

Thanks to a loan from First American Bank, the Bowmans opened the 67,000-square foot Ashley Furniture Store on Del Rey Boulevard in late 2013.

"In the long run, it all worked out," Bowman said, "but in the beginning we nearly starved to death."

An avid NMSU Aggie athletics fan, you will find an Ashley banner among the sports banners that hang near the ceiling of the Pan American Center.

NMSU is "my university," Bowman said. "I am a proud sponsor of New Mexico State Athletics," adding the unique recognition in Pan Am is a great honor.

"You work hard to get where you want to go," Bowman said.



Women's HISTORY MONTH

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THE LAS CRUCES **Bulletin**

Heather Pollard: No stopping her

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

Here is how Heather Pollard spends her time: She co-chairs and is one of more than a dozen women who volunteer to run Mesilla Valley Hospice Emporium Antique Store. She is president of the Amador Hotel Foundation. She is a member (and former chair) of the New Mexico State University College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Council. She is president of the Friends of the Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site.

And that's just what Heather Pollard, 81, is up to right now!

Take a look at some of the things she's done in the past to benefit Las Cruces and Doña Ana County:

Advisory board member of the NMSU Performing Arts Center; board member and president of the Doña Ana County Humane Society; chair of St. Paul's United Methodist Church Capitol Campaign; board member of the Las Cruces Symphony Guild; founding board member of the American Southwest Theatre Company when Tony-winner Mark Medoff and Bruce Streett created the board in 1984 to benefit the NMSU Theatre Department; president of the Professional Women's Association; member of the Doña Ana Community College Art Acquisition Committee and the NMSU Library Public Arts Committee; and patron of the Clyde Tombaugh Memorial Window at Unitarian-Universalist Church.

Pollard also served as executive director of Downtown Las Cruces Partnership, and the opening of Main

Street is one of her proudest accomplishments.

Pollard was the first executive director of the Doña Ana Arts Council (DAAC) – where she was instrumental in getting DAAC's Renaissance Arts Faire moved to its long-time home in Young Park. The event had one paid staff member, Pollard said, and she

Pollard said her proudest accomplishment (to date!) is her work as an advocate for domestic violence victims, as she successfully lobbied the National Guard in 1998 to turn over its armory on Walnut Street to the City of Las Cruces, which replaced the building's roof. Then Pollard and a dozen other women, "transformed the build-

"I have been the champion of numerous arts, historical preservation and community causes with an ability to take on large or difficult projects, things important to the community and that needed change and see them to completion," Pollard said.

Oh, and Pollard has also made a donation to the Boys and Girls Club



worked with more than 100 volunteers to build it into one of the community's most popular annual events.

Pollard's awards include the Governor's Award for New Mexico Outstanding Women, 1994; DAAC Papen Award, and Las Cruces Realtors Association Citizen of the Year, both 1997; New Mexico Public Service Award, 2002; YWCA REACH Award, 2003; Rotary International Award, 2007; NMSU College of Arts and Sciences Town Gown Award, 2015; and New Mexico Historic Preservation Awards, 2019 and 2022.

ing into a shelter for victims of domestic violence," which is still its function today.

Pollard was also a member of the La Casa Board of Directors for 14 years and chaired its capital campaign.

It was Pollard who created the Legacy Committee that spearheaded a drive to pay off a \$1 million shortfall at Mesilla Valley Hospice. It was also her idea to create The Emporium, the nonprofit antique shop that celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2025. It will also pass the \$500,000 mark in the amount of money it has raised for Hospice.

of Las Cruces in support of their capital campaign as they move to a new location on El Paseo Road. She has also left them a gift in trust.

Las Cruces has changed in some ways since she moved here more than 40 years ago, and in some ways it's still the same, Pollard said.

"I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. This is a friendly, welcoming community. I want to see good things happen for my (four) grandchildren."

We are proud of our grandma!

Sybil Clagett Dickerson



Clagett And Denton Receive First WAA Activity Sweaters

Still in its infancy, the New Mexico State College Women's Athletic Association was christened formally with the awarding of two letters this season.

Miss Sybil Clagett, junior student from Clayton, and Miss Juanita Denton, also a junior, from Artesia, are wearing the maroon sweaters proudly displaying the Aggie "A". Both young women are attractive brunettes.

Three thousand five hundred points must be acquired before the award may be made. Hiking, tennis, basketball, archery, dancing, rifle team, and ping pong are among sports offered. Skill clubs, recreational events, and council meetings also contribute.

Miss Clagett assists Mrs. Nona Hines, head of the women's physical training department, in aiding the coeds of State College to acquire good posture, poise, and personality.

The annual play-day, featuring cooperative sports from all colleges in New Mexico, will be held at Las Vegas this year. Both Miss Clagett and Miss Denton took a prominent part in arranging the program in 1938, when women from Silver City State Teachers college, the University of New Mexico, New Mexico Normal of Las Vegas, and the Portales Junior college were guests of State College.

