



Women's HISTORY MONTH HER story

THE LAS CRUCES Bulletin

Author Jennifer Cervantes draws inspiration from New Mexico

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

It all started with a story Jennifer Cervantes wrote for her youngest daughter, which evolved into the novel "Tortilla Sun," published in 2010.

Today, Cervantes is a New York Times best-selling author with 13 young adult, middle grade and adult novels to her credit. Her work has also been featured in the anthologies "The Haunted Carnival and other Calamities" and "Reclaim the Stars: 17 Tales Across Realms and Space."

She now has a second book coming out for adults, "Anatomy of Magic," due out in mid-March. There will be book signings, book festivals and book sellers' association

conferences to follow.

Cervantes' books are available in the United States and 14 other countries and have appeared on national book lists like Barnes & Noble's Best Young Reader Books, Apple Books of the Month, the American Booksellers Association and Amazon.

Cervantes has won the New Mexico Book Award and the Zia Book Award. In 2023, she received the New Mexico Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts and was recognized as a New Mexico State University College of Arts and Sciences "star of arts and humanities."

Reviewing "Tortilla Sun," Publisher's Weekly said, "Cervantes fills her story with mystical possibilities- talking with spirits, hearing what the wind whispers, gathering powerful herbs by moonlight - but also with the inescapable realities of illness, death, and mourning."

In its review of "The Fire Keeper" (2019), Booklist said, "Cervantes has written an excellent sequel (to "The Storm Runner"). Don't miss it if you like gods and monsters."

Cervantes shares homes in Las Cruces and Santa Fe with her husband, Joseph Cervantes, a Las Cruces attorney and a state sen-

ator. She draws inspiration from the desert down south and from the forest in the north.

"I do find different kinds of inspiration," Cervantes said. "When I feel like I have nothing left to give the page, I'll go on a hike. For me, nature is balm for the soul. It's something that connects me to something greater. I get the most incredible ideas. I know they're always going to come."

"There is no ego involved for me because I think this writing comes from this other place," she said. "It feels like a gift. Some of my ideas, they come out of nowhere."

"It's all wonderful," Cervantes said of the accolades she has received for her writing. "The first time it happens, you're just over the moon. Then you get back to being an artist and all you want is to create."

Her advice to others who want to write: "It's a sequential process and it's one tiny crumb at a time. When I sit down to write a book, I don't think of the whole book, it's too overwhelming, One page, one paragraph, one scene and that's all I'm going to focus on. At some point you've got



to follow your own instincts. You sit down and create the most beautiful story you can create."

"New Mexico has given me way more than I've given New Mexico," Cervantes said. I don't think I'd have become a writer if I lived somewhere else. It was a place as a creator I could blossom."

Find Cervantes on Twitter: @jencerv and Instagram: @authorjccervantes. Visit jccervantes.com.



Marci Dickerson gives back

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

Las Cruces business owner Marci Dickerson is a self-described go-getter.

"So many people see a problem and they feel helpless to provide a solution," Dickerson said. "If I see a problem in the community, I take ownership and try to fix it. That's what you do: You solve the problems. I see problems and the solutions are really obvious; you just needed somebody to do it."

Dickerson, who turns 50 in December, is the owner of the Game and Game II bar and grill in Las Cruces, an associate real estate broker, owner of Dickerson Catering and the founder of the nonprofit Revolution 120 and Cancer Warriors Las Cruces, an organization created in 2023 to raise money for and awareness about women's cancers.

"Realize you can provide solutions and be impactful – just start doing it," Dickerson said. "Stop planning – just

wake up and go do it. You can accomplish almost anything as long as you believe in it and you dedicate yourself to it. You are the only person who can decide when you fail. Change it until it works."

That's the message Dickerson got from her parents, long-time community activists Charlie and Jeanette Dickerson, and it is the message she is passing on to her sons, Saxon Marr, 22, and Weston Marr, 16.

Saxon, a student at New Mexico State University majoring in business, said his mother "continues to do selfless acts, not for profit, taking care of people regardless of the persecution she got and continues to get from around town."

What Dickerson did during COVID-19 is a good example, Saxon said. "I was her son, but there were 125 other children (all of Dickerson's employees) that she took care of every week. Having a role model such as my mother taught

me a lot of things about the value of another human being. That's the kind of father and friend I want to be in life, to be half as selfless and half as hard-working as her."

"Having Marci Dickerson as my mom means always having a wise mentor, a strong protector and a heart full of love guiding me through my life," said Weston, a student at Mesilla Valley Christian Academy who plays baseball, basketball and participates in shooting sports.

Here are some of Dickerson's accomplishments:

- A breast cancer survivor, Dickerson and Cancer Warriors part-



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nered with Memorial Medical Center to reduce the time it takes a woman to get a breast-cancer diagnosis from about three and one-half months to 21 days. Cancer Warriors has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to fight women's cancers.

• Dickerson partnered with contractors and put people to work building outdoor patios for local restaurants so they could stay open during the pandemic. She also oversaw the distribution of 60,000 pounds of food to people in need during that uncertain time. "We could do it because we had the support of business people," Dickerson said. "I've been very blessed by the faith this community has in me when I

need to raise money to do a project."

• She created Revolution 120 in 2017 because some of the charities she had worked with lacked the flexibility to "get goods and services in people's hands when they were in crisis," she said. "We're able to react very, very quickly." For example, "We were the first semi there," when massive wildfires struck in southeast New Mexico in 2024," Dickerson said. And, when New Mexico State Police Officer Darian Jarrott was killed during a traffic stop near Deming in 2021, Revolution 120 raised hundreds of thousands of



dollars for his family, Dickerson said. What's next for Dickerson?

• She is working with French Brothers and A Mountain Construction, "developing subdivisions to create attainable housing," Dickerson said. Feasibility studies are underway for the construction of 330 houses on 546 acres on the East Mesa, with more to follow. "We want to provide lower-cost housing that people in Las Cruces can afford," she said. The City of Las Cruces and El Paso Electric are also part of the project, Dickerson said.

• Plans are underway for the third annual Cancer Warrior Week in Octo-



ber. This year's theme will be a 1950s sock hop, said Dickerson. The week will include an NMSU football game, Las Cruces Public Schools Pink

Out, Zumba and a 5K run/walk, Bingo for Boobies (new this year), luminarias and the highly anticipated Bras for a Cause party.

"Don't just be content with your own personal success," Dickerson said. "You need to make a difference in the community you live in."

Mary Kay Papen: Changemaker

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

"I've seen a lifetime of change for women," said former Las Cruces state senator Mary Kay Papen, who turns 93 in March.

When Papen's then husband, George Kuper, died in a 1971 plane crash, the couple owned Kuper Volkswagen, Porsche, Audi in El Paso. After her husband's death, Papen was told by Volkswagen to find a buyer for the dealership within six months or they would find one for her, she said. "We don't have women who are dealers," Papen was told.

Thirty years later, Papen had been elected to her first term in the New Mexico State Senate, where she would spend 19 years, including eight years as president pro-tempore. Papen was the second woman to hold that leadership position in the New Mexico Senate and the first ever pro tempore from Doña Ana County.

"Women until recently were allowed to do all this work and do the heavy lifting but they couldn't run it," Papen said. "In my lifetime I

have seen it develop where women can stand on their own. I think it's healthy. I think women bring good qualities and I think they can stand shoulder to shoulder to men."

A champion for mental health and for the colonias in southern Doña Ana County during her 2001-20 tenure in the state Senate (she had the same Senate seat her husband, Frank O. Papen, held 1969-85), Papen has been back in Santa Fe for this year's 60-day legislative session, working for daughter Allison Kuper Smith's bill-tracking business.

"I go all over to collect the calendars (legislative) committees are putting out to send to customers so they know when bills will be on the calendar," Papen said. "I'm a glorified gopher," she said, but "when I walk in, they still call me senator. I love it. I get to see old friends. It's fun to be up here."

And, this year, "there are more women in the legislature than ever before," Papen said.

Following the 2024 election, women now hold 60 of New Mexico's 112 House and Senate seats – their first majority in the state's 113-year history, including nine of the 14

legislators who represent all or part of Doña Ana County.

And it's been a good session for mental health, Papen said, as legislators have introduced a number of bills that would help continue to rebuild mental health services in New Mexico, she said, including Senate Bill 1, which would create the Behavioral Health Trust Fund.

Before she got elected to the state Senate, Papen had regularly traveled to Santa Fe to advocate for mental health and domestic violence prevention legislation.

"I came up here and I was just going to those committee rooms and I would just sit there as bills were voted down," Papen said, realizing, "If I sat on the other side, I could be voting yes. That was one of the things that gave me the impetus to run."

As a senator, Papen also became involved with the autism program at New Mexico State University



(where she had earned a degree in agriculture), helping to create the NMSU Papen-Aprendamos Autism Diagnostic Center and reducing the amount of wait time for a child to receive an autism assessment and diagnosis.

"I still need to go back to what my mother said, 'You need to pay for your space,'" Papen said. "As a legislator or running a business, you need to give back."

Shaharazad Booth: Teaching the next generation

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

Shaharazad “Sherry” Booth decided “to hang my own shingle,” opening a law office in Las Cruces in 2019. She already had more than seven years’ experience as an assistant district attorney in Deming and Las Cruces, and she came within 80 votes out of nearly 10,000 cast of winning the Democratic Party nomination for Doña Ana County district attorney in the 2024 primary election – her first time as a candidate.

“I knew I could fix that office,” said Booth, who specializes in criminal defense work.

Her answer was, “We’ll see. There are a lot of options,” when asked if she planned to be a candidate for district attorney again in 2028. “It’s hard to see a problem and know you can fix it and sit back,” she said.

Debates among the four Democrats running for DA last year brought up “how vital to the community and the system” the DA’s office is, Booth said, and “the problems in the community that can be traced to it. The office, she said, has been “a broken spoke of the wheel,” characterized by “a lack of understanding of how the system works (and) what needs to happen for the office to be successful.”

Booth said she is also concerned because “the justice system has created an abuse system for children in divorce cases.” It considers “the comfort of the parents vs. the well-being of the child,” who often is “living out of a backpack” while divorcing parents are fighting over custody, she said.

Booth is on the board of the statewide nonprofit Center for Civic Values Mock Trial program for high school and middle school students. She has taken an active role in get-

ting the program restarted in southern New Mexico after the COVID-19 pandemic, and teaches it at Arrowhead Park Early College High School in Las Cruces.

Teams from Arrowhead Park finished first and fifth in this year’s mock trial regional competition held in Las Cruces in February.

Being part of the mock trial program “is a labor of love,” Booth said.

“I cannot say enough how much I enjoy these kids and how excited they get.”

Under Booth’s guidance, student teams act as both defense and prosecuting attorneys and as witnesses and professional judges and attorneys serve as

volunteer judges.

In the competition, students present jury instructions, pre-trial orders and witness statements, enter pleadings, conduct direct examinations and cross examinations of witnesses, make objections and closing arguments and follow the rules of evidence, Booth said.

“It’s amazing,” she said. “They have to learn this entire thing and be



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real attorneys.”

Participating students “put their intellect on display (and) learn the importance and the working of the judicial system,” Booth said.

Booth said she “is really blessed”

by the help she receives from other attorneys to make the program a success in Las Cruces and southern New Mexico.

“They get the mission,” she said. “They just want to see kids excel. It’s

just phenomenal.”

Booth is a native of Fayetteville, North Carolina; her father was part of the 82nd Airborne Division stationed at nearby Fort Bragg. She graduated from the University of Ar-

kansas at Little Rock School of Law and first came to Las Cruces in 2007. Booth and her husband have a seven-year-old son.

Julia Brown: Believes in women

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

Las Cruces Public Schools secretaries and administrative assistants were a little surprised when Julia Brown, a New Mexico Economic Development Department community, business and rural development representative, spoke to them at a conference in February. After all, Brown had been many things: a Doña Ana County manager; a Sunland Park city manager; an assistant state attorney general in Oklahoma; a United States Army judge advocate general; a retired lieutenant colonel and a national board chair of the American Association of University Women. What did she know about being a secretary?

But LCPS Director of Communications Kelly Jameson, whom Brown had worked with in her previous role as Dona Ana County manager, invited Brown to speak before the LCPS staff. Before long the school staff had warmed to her once they realized she “understood what it feels like to be in the jobs they are in,” Brown said.

After all, before Brown rose to top leadership positions, she had been a clerk-typist, a file clerk, a receptionist and a legal secretary who knew all about office machines and filing systems. She still uses the Gregg dictation shorthand she learned, and is grateful for all the other office skills she acquired as an office worker.

Brown said she also “understands and appreciates the number of balls they keep in the air,” including scheduling appointments, making travel arrangements, setting up ex-

hibits, organizing conferences and answering phones.

And sometimes secretaries and administrative assistants do their jobs

people, not to be a legend in your own mind,” she said, and not to think what you do “is more important than what anyone else does.”

For women and girls who come from poverty and communities of color, Brown said one of the “biggest hurdles is lack of information” about the resources and opportunities that are available to them.

“We’ve got to support each other,” Brown said, and that includes taking the time to bolster someone else’s self-confidence by complimenting them.

“I also tell them it’s important to access the information you find out about, to form alliances and be collaborative,” she said.

Active in the Democratic Party, Brown said she often reaches across party lines. An example,

she said, is working with Marci Dickerson who co-founded a nonprofit to empower ambitious female professionals called The Association Women’s Group.

“They are doing some significant things for women business owners and entrepreneurs,” Brown said.

For the last two and one-half years, Brown has been part of the Community, Business and Rural Development Team in southwest New Mexico for the state Economic Development Department.

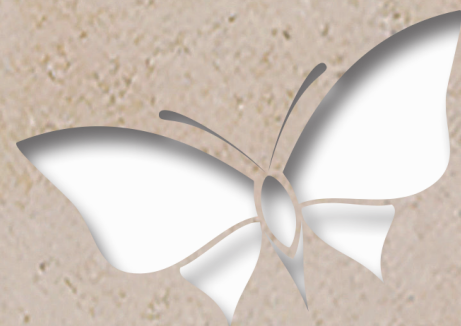
Based in Las Cruces, Brown’s “signature product” is LEDA: Local Economic Development Act grants for economic development projects throughout the seven counties she serves. That includes everything from Gboyz Jerk beef jerky manufactures in Bayard to manufacturing and distilling at Little Toad Creek in Las Cruces to Franklin Mountain Packaging that makes corrugated boxes, exhibit displays, pizza boxes and more in Santa Teresa.

The work is all about collaborating with cities, counties, councils of government, small business development centers and other entities throughout the region, and organizations like El Paso Electric, the Border Industrial Association in Santa Teresa and the Mesilla Valley Economic Development Alliance (MVEDA) in Las Cruces to help pay for land, buildings and infrastructure and guide entrepreneurs and start-ups to create jobs.



without receiving acknowledgement or even a thank you for “working wonders” and helping to make their bosses successful, Brown said.

Having that work experience also taught Brown “not to look down on



The women of the Las Cruces Bulletin



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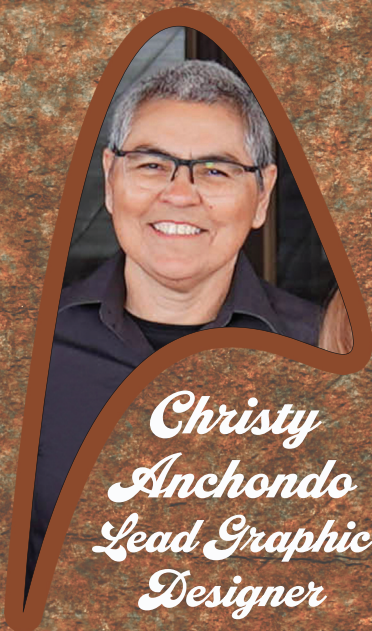
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Cece Meadows: Helping others feel beautiful

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

A Google film crew visited Prados Beauty Owner Cece Meadows last December – she is Google’s representative for small business in New Mexico – to shoot video for a seminar the international technology company was doing for its workspace AI business tool. A few weeks later, Google called to tell Meadows the Prados video would appear in Super Bowl LIX as part of New Mexico advertising during the most-watched football game and would also give it exposure in national commercials.

“Our website was insane that day,” Meadows said. “We took orders from all over the country for three weeks.”

“I was so proud, so honored,” she said, not only for herself and her business, but for the entire state and especially for Las Cruces.

“I love Las Cruces. They just let you be you,” said Meadows, who identifies as Indigenous and Chicana.

Meadows started Prados (a Portuguese word that means “meadows” in English) in New York City in 2018 and moved it to Las Cruces in 2020 when her husband, Daniel, a U.S. Army major, was transferred to White Sands Missile Range.

Since then, business has boomed in her storefront at 1825 Copper Loop and online, and her unique line of beauty products sells in 609 JCPenney stores across the United States.

“You profit, you give back to your community,” Meadows said.

That’s why she started The Prados Life Foundation. The nonprofit buys shoes, coats and backpacks for children living in poverty and helps college students buy books, food and gas. Especially dear to her heart, the foundation supports veterans, including the Wounded Warrior Project, and buys shoes and equipment for young athletes who can’t afford them.

Growing up playing soccer in Arizona, “I didn’t have the things I needed,” Meadows said. “We were poor. We didn’t have money for those things.”

Now, she is able to help others have what they need.

“You grace your community,” Meadows said. “This brand was built on community.”

Meadows credits Las Cruces for her company’s sustainability. She said Las Cruces “has really supported us.”

“If it wasn’t for the community and our people, Prados wouldn’t be where it’s at,” she said.

Prados is also about helping women – and men – with the products Meadows makes and sells, she said.

A cancer survivor, Meadows said “helping women feel beautiful during this hard time in their lives is really important to me.”

She has also created a safe space at Prados Beauty for the LGBTQ community – especially teens and young adults who are not out to

their families but want to “play with makeup” as they explore their identities and be themselves, she said.

“Self-love is essential,” Meadows said. “My message is always, ‘Whatever you look like, no matter what you’ve been through or have survived or are currently facing, you are valuable.’ You literally can do anything if you dedicate yourself to that.”

“Being positive and optimistic in times of great turmoil really speaks of who people are when they’re called to step up. I’ve had to do that,” she said. “Now, I’m getting to live my best life. I’m truly living out my dream and passing it on. I’m building a ladder and leaving it down for those that come after me.”

Raised by her grandmothers, “I still feel like they watch me,” Meadows said. “I don’t want to disappoint them.”

“Pouring love into the world is what we do in creating cosmetics and makeup that is colorful and vibrant,” she said. “It’s more than just a beauty brand; it’s a movement.”

Meadows has two full-time employees and a CFO, and subcontracts



with local entrepreneurs. It’s a small staff “who work really hard,” she said.

“There’s something here you can enjoy and be able to afford,” Meadows said. “It’s a welcoming space to anybody.”

Prados

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THE LAS CRUCES Bulletin



MAMMO TO ANSWERS

EXPEDITED BREAST HEALTH DIAGNOSTIC PROGRAM

THE PROCESS

1 Start with a mammogram

Mammograms are an essential part of preventive healthcare for women. Because breast cancer is very common, and because early detection is so important for successful treatment, most women who are over 40 should schedule a mammogram every year.

3D mammography is a clinically proven screening and diagnostic tool for early breast cancer detection. It uses advanced technology to take images of your breast from different angles and combine them to create a more complete and accurate image of your breast than is possible with regular 2D digital mammography.

For a routine annual (screening) mammogram, women 40 and older do not need a written referral. For patients experiencing unusual breast symptoms, a written referral is required for a diagnostic mammogram.

2 What if everything looks normal?

Most mammograms don't find anything out of the ordinary. If this is the case, schedule your next annual mammogram and keep an eye on your breast health throughout the year by performing self-exams. Visit your primary care provider immediately if any concerns arise.

4 What if something still doesn't look right?

If your breast ultrasound yields unusual findings, your provider may recommend a biopsy. A breast biopsy is a procedure that involves using a biopsy needle or surgery to remove a sample of your breast tissue so that a pathologist can examine it for breast cancer or other conditions.

A breast biopsy is the only diagnostic procedure that can definitively determine if a suspicious area is cancerous. Most often this will be a core needle biopsy (CNB). But in some situations, such as if the results of a needle biopsy aren't clear, you might need a surgical biopsy. A pathologist then determines what type of disease, if any, is present.

Screening for dense breasts

Annual mammograms are the best way to catch breast cancer early, but not all breasts are the same. Dense breast tissue can mask the appearance of tumors, making it more difficult for mammography to detect cancer.

If you are one of the 40% of women with dense breast tissue, your provider may recommend an MRI, whole breast ultrasound or automated breast ultrasound (ABUS) for additional screening and added peace of mind. Memorial Medical Center is the only facility in Las Cruces offering this advanced technology.

3 What if something doesn't look right?

If your provider spots something unusual, they may ask to schedule a breast ultrasound. A breast ultrasound uses medical sonography to obtain additional images of the breast that can help to identify benign or suspicious lesions. With the Mammo to Answers program, we will expedite unusual findings to a breast ultrasound.

Most unusual mammogram findings are not cancer.

A breast ultrasound can show whether a breast lump is a fluid-filled breast cyst (usually not cancerous) or a solid mass (which could be cancer and may need further testing through a biopsy).

5 What if it's breast cancer?

A cancer diagnosis can feel overwhelming. But don't worry! When detected early via a mammogram, breast cancer is often highly treatable. Cancer Warriors offers many resources that can help you. To learn more, visit Cancer Warriors on Facebook or online.

Schedule your mammogram at Memorial's Women's Imaging Center. Call **575.521.5270** (No order is required for a screening mammogram).



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Breast Health Patient Navigator: A teammate every step of the way

We understand that an abnormal mammogram or breast ultrasound that results in a potential diagnosis of breast cancer can be frightening and overwhelming. Patients have many questions, and often don't know where to start. MMC's dedicated Breast Health Navigator can offer guidance and assistance throughout the patient's breast cancer experience.

Our Breast Health Navigator is available to provide assistance for an individual who is navigating the complexities of scheduling and care, so the important tests and treatments occur in a timely manner. Our Breast Health Navigator also offers emotional support and calm reassurance at a time when the patient needs it most.

Should the need for further diagnostics arise, MMC has an appointment reserved for you! The Mammo to Answers partnership between MMC and Cancer Warriors will reduce the length of time from mammogram to biopsy, so a woman can learn more quickly if she has breast cancer and needs treatment.

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