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MEETING NOTICE:

The Advisory Council on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement will meet to appoint members to the Independent Medical Examiners panel at 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 2 at 2410 Centre SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. See <https://workerscomp.nm.gov/Advisory-Council> for more information..

WCA Remembers Colleague Kyle Benally

*"If there be any truer measure of a man than by what he does, it must be by what he gives."*  
 --Robert South

**K**yle Benally, New Mexico Workers' Compensation (WCA) financial auditor in the Self Insurance Bureau, died on March 4, 2023 after a brief illness. He was 32 years old.

Kyle joined the WCA in October of 2021, having previously worked at the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department. While there, he trained Rachael Duran at the agency in 2018 before she joined the WCA's Self Insurance Bureau in 2022 as an auditor.

"He was a very kind, intelligent man," Duran said of her friend and colleague. "He always made me laugh, even if it was as simple as a meme." They stayed in touch despite changing jobs, and their friendship continued at the WCA.

After being hired as an auditor for the WCA's Self Insurance Bureau, his supervisor became ill and went on medical leave, so Kyle stepped in to take on extra work. He made sure the state's self-insured entities were financially sound so that the future benefits of injured workers were safe. "Kyle built strong relationships with those who were assigned to him and those that he worked with on special projects," said Lisa Romero, his bureau chief. "They have all stated how much they will miss working with him and what a professional he was."

Kyle was highly skilled in collaborative relationships and worked well with others within the WCA. His coworkers would often remark that it felt as though they had known him for a long time. Priscilla Padilla worked with Kyle in the self-insurance bureau, and sometimes went to his home to pick produce from his garden or to gather eggs. "He was



WCA Self-Insurance Financial Auditor Kyle Benally

such a sweet soul," she said of him. "He was a great guy."

Although he enjoyed his work in finance, it was Kyle's goal to earn a law degree and work in the agency's mediation bureau.

Kyle learned to grow food and keep animals while growing up in Farmington. His garden, his cats, Wheatie and Earl, and his chickens, the Golden Girls, were important to him, and he could be counted on to show pictures of them to anyone who asked. Coworkers benefitted from produce such as cherry tomatoes from his garden, and eggs from his hens. His hens' eggs often made it into his baked goods, which he would bring to work to celebrate birthdays or to share his love of baking.

"He was Navajo (Diné) like me, and he often shared his baked goods or Navajo tea with me," said Information Technology Bureau Chief Brenda Henderson. "We enjoyed comparing notes on the 'Navajo ways,' and him correcting me on my limited knowledge of the [Albuquerque] area," she said.

Kyle was close to his family. "His parents – Patricia and Harold, brother Kevin (Toni), sister Rachele, nephew Simeon, and niece Aliyanna were the loves of his life," said Duran. "When he spoke of them, he would get so excited, and when they were coming to Albuquerque or when

# Judges Sworn In at WCA in Public Ceremony

**W**CA Director Robert E. Doucette, Jr., swore in Judges Tony Couture and David Skinner on Monday, April 10, 2023, at the Albuquerque office. The swearing-in was open to the public, with a number of attendees present.

Both Couture and Skinner have previously served as WCA judges. Judge Couture will resume his prior caseload, and Judge Skinner will fill the newly created seat in the WCA's Las Cruces field office, primarily handling a caseload from southern New Mexico. He also currently handles cases that were being decided by former Judge Rachel Bayless.

There are currently five workers' compensation judge positions in the WCA's Adjudication Bureau in Albuquerque and one newly created judge position in the WCA's Las Cruces field office. Workers' compensation judges hear and decide disputes over benefits to injured workers throughout New Mexico.

Judge Couture was initially hired as a mediator in January 2017 after spending 10 years in private law practice. He was appointed a WCA judge in August 2017. Couture continued to serve as a judge until late 2022, when he resigned

to return to nursing, a career he worked in prior to law school. "I'm honored to be reappointed to serve the state of New Mexico along with the other fine appointees," he said.

Judge Skinner worked as a WCA judge from 2011 to 2017. He earned a juris doctor degree in 1987 cum laude from the University of New Mexico School of Law and worked in private practice for various Albuquerque law firms. He was recognized as a specialist in workers' compensation law by the State Bar of New Mexico prior to his initial WCA judge appointment. Since his departure from the WCA, he has worked in personal injury and workers' compensation law, and since July 2022, has served as judge pro tempore for the WCA.

"I am excited about my reappointment and look forward to returning to the bench, this time in Las Cruces," Skinner said. "It's a new idea for a new position."

WCA judges serve a probationary



*Anthony "Tony" Couture sworn in as WCA judge by Director Robert Doucette as his wife, Kristina Blackney, looks on*



*David Skinner sworn in as WCA judge by Director Robert Doucette as his wife, Tani Skinner, looks on*

period of one year. They can then serve five year terms that are open to possible renewal.

## NM Workers' Comp. Adm. Quarterly Bulletin

Robert E. Doucette, Jr., Director  
Diana Sandoval-Tapia, Public Information Officer  
Aileen O'Catherine, Public Relations Specialist

The Bulletin is electronically published in January, April, July and October by the Public Information Office of the New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration. The Bulletin is available free of charge. Send changes of e-mail address and requests to receive the Bulletin to Diana Sandoval-Tapia in the Public Information Office, New Workers' Compensation Administration, WCA-PIO@state.nm.us

Suggestions for articles are welcome. Call Diana Sandoval-Tapia at (505) 841-6052.

Recent issues of the Quarterly Bulletin can be viewed on the Internet at <https://workerscomp.nm.gov/NMWCA-Publications>.

## NMWCA Job Openings

**T**he NMWCA provides postings for job openings on its agency webpage. Current postings include:

- IT Technology Officer - Infrastructure and Support
- IT Technology Officer - Data and Development Manager
- IT Application Developer II

To learn more about these jobs, visit <https://workerscomp.nm.gov/WCA-Jobs>.

Applications must be made through the New Mexico State Personnel Office at <https://careers.share.state.nm.us/>.

## What is the Advisory Council?

The Advisory Council on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement is a task force created by statute, comprised of six members, three representing workers and three representing employers. The primary role of the Council is to advise the governor and legislature on the status of the workers' compensation system in New Mexico. The Advisory Council is required to meet at least twice annually. Scheduled meetings of the Council are announced on the WCA website, <https://www.workerscomp.nm.gov/Advisory-Council>.

## Women in Trades Summit

By Diana Sandoval Tapia

In the spring of 2022, the first ever “New Mexico Women in Trades” summit took place at Central New Mexico Community College, an idea that grew out of a need for more skilled laborers in New Mexico. The brainchild of New Mexico Rep. Pamela Herndon (D-Bernalillo), the event came together in just six or seven short weeks and was capped at 150 attendees.

Fast-forward a year later, and the second annual “Women in Trades” summit attendance grew almost three-fold, according to CNM School of Applied Technologies Dean Amy Ballard. “We had much more lead time this year and we had a multi-pronged outreach approach with social media, direct contact with high school counselors, and even hardcopy flyers around town.”

For those who need to fill labor jobs in and around the state like Courtenay Eichhorst, Business Manager of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union 412, the growth of women interested in these jobs is welcome. Eichhorst, who has led his union’s training center for almost a decade, says that nearly 50 percent of the workforce is women and that growth has occurred over just the past year to year-and-a-half.

## Trisha Platt Named Employee of the Quarter

By Aileen O’Catherine

Trisha Platt has been named WCA Employee of the Quarter for the first quarter of 2023. Platt has been with the WCA for over five years as medical secretary in the Medical Cost Containment Bureau.

Platt’s nominator noted that her positive presence has been an asset to the bureau. Despite recent staff turnover, Platt would always ask how she could help. “She will go outside her normally assigned duties without even being asked. Her forte is excellent customer service,” her nominator noted.

Kicking off this year’s event was keynote Sarah Thomas – yes, THAT Sarah Thomas – the National Football League’s (NFL) first female official. Thomas knows a few things about being a woman working in a male-oriented field.

Thomas is no stranger to sports. She was born and raised in Pascagoula, Miss., where she lettered five times in softball for Pascagoula High School before attending the University of Mobile (Alabama) on a basketball scholarship. But she told the audience she knew nothing about football. She fell into the sport and officiating when she tagged along with her older brother one evening in 1996 to a meeting on football officiating. After officiating high school football for about a decade, she was hired by Conference USA in 2007, becoming the first woman to officiate for the NCAA’s Major College Football Bowl Division.

In April 2015, Thomas was one of nine new game officials and the only woman added to the NFL officiating roster for the upcoming 2015 NFL season. She made history again on September 13 of that season when she was one of the officials to call a game between the Kansas City Chiefs and Houston

Texans. Thomas broke through another glass ceiling in January 2019 when she officiated a postseason game between the New England Patriots and Los Angeles Chargers. She once again made history in February 2020, when she was called to officiate Super Bowl LV (55) between the Kansas City Chiefs and Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Thomas had quite a few nuggets of advice to share with other women breaking into professions traditionally held by men but reminded them to always start with “number one,” and that “when you start something, do not quit until the tenure is up!”

“So many times, we look at things as a roadblock,” she said, “when we need to instead look at it as a speed bump.” She also reminded the crowd to keep moving forward with their goals. “The windshield is bigger than the rear-view mirror.”



*Women in Trades Speaker Sarah Thomas displays her SuperBowl ring*



*Medical Cost Containment Medical Secretary Trisha Platt*

“Trisha is my go-to for just about anything as I know she will jump in with a positive attitude,” said MCC Bureau Chief Jessica Sanchez. “She cares about the internal and external customer, and she is a joy to work with,” Sanchez said.

Platt has worked in her position at the WCA since September 2017. Before that, she worked in pharmacy for 20 years and as an allergist for five years.

“I feel truly blessed to be a part of this WCA family,” Platt said. “I have learned so much from my colleagues and continue

to grow for the success of the workers’ compensation community.”

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## Leonard Fulton Promoted to Employer Compliance Bureau Chief

By Aileen O’Catherine

Leonard Fulton has been promoted to Employer Compliance Bureau Chief, effective April 1, 2023. Fulton had been a compliance officer in the bureau for nearly eight years, bringing his depth of experience and understanding of workers’ compensation employer compliance requirements to the position.

Prior to working at the WCA, Fulton was a retail loss prevention agent and manager with Sears Holding Company, where he conducted investigations into identity theft, credit card fraud, counterfeit money, retail theft and organized crime. He also served as a juvenile corrections officer for three years at the New Mexico Children, Youth and Family Division, where he was a gang task force investigator and supervisor.

“Leonard brings a strong foundation of knowledge to the position,” said his supervisor, Court and Programs Administrator Heather Jordan in her email announcement about Fulton’s promotion.

“I’m extremely excited about my new role as the Employer Compliance Bureau Chief,” Fulton said about the promotion.

Married for 38 years to “my lovely Queen Frances,” a retired APS administrator, the couple have a daughter with a master’s degree in psychology and two sons currently serving as officers with the Albuquerque Police Department. They also have five grandchildren, four boys and one “princess” granddaughter” who “lovingly refer to us as G-Ma and G-Pa,” Fulton said.

Fulton is an avid gardener of a va-



*Employer Compliance  
Bureau Chief  
Leonard Fulton*

riety of veggies, but it is his roses he is famous for, growing and maintaining 22 bushes, his passion for which he shares each spring and summer in the form of

## Priscilla Padilla Promoted to Uninsured Employers’ Fund Administrator

By Aileen O’Catherine

Priscilla Padilla has been promoted to Uninsured Employers’ Fund (UEF) Administrator, starting in the position on March 4, 2023. Padilla has undertaken a variety of roles at the agency since starting as a business operations specialist in 2017 with the Field Programs Bureau. She was promoted to compliance officer with the Employer Compliance Bureau in 2018, and in December of 2019, became a financial auditor in the Self Insurance and Regulatory Audit Bureau. Since November 2022, she has served as interim UEF administrator while also continuing her duties as a financial auditor.

“Every role I have had at the WCA has played a part in me being able to work in the UEF,” Padilla said of her new position.

Padilla finds her work at the UEF reflective of her other positions at the

agency. “There are a lot of similarities to the other jobs I’ve had, but there are new things to learn, which makes it fun,” she said. “I’m very thankful that I get to continue growing with the WCA.”

Her immediate goals for the UEF are to ensure full staffing and to move the bureau from paper to paperless so that information and record keeping is thorough and current.

Padilla received a bachelor’s degree in education in 2010 from the University of New Mexico and an MBA from Southern New Hampshire University in 2022.

“Priscilla has worked her way up the WCA for sure,” said General Counsel Michael Holt about her promotion in an email announcement to staff.

Prior to working at the WCA, Padilla worked for over a decade in the private sector.



*Uninsured Employers’ Fund  
Administrator Priscilla Padilla*

Padilla is thankful for the support of her husband and daughter and looks forward to welcoming another daughter in July.

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## Kyle Benally (cont'd.)

Continued from page 1

he would go home to Farmington – those were his best days.”

When Nicole Bazzano started work at the WCA as the director’s secretary, she didn’t know anyone at the agency. Kyle overheard her saying her birthday was coming up, so he made her a cake with her two favorite flavors, chocolate and strawberry. “It was so heartwarming because he didn’t have to make me anything, but the fact that he did that for me will be my favorite memory because that’s when our friendship started,” Bazzano said. “He was so creative, smart and thoughtful,” she said of her friend.

Kyle’s baking generosity continued even after his death. When the Benally family saw a notation on Kyle’s calendar that he would make his friend Brandon Lopez in the Safety Bureau an orange cake on his birthday, the family brought an orange cake to the WCA. “Just wanted to let you know that there is a cake in the

break room from Kyle’s family,” Lopez wrote in an email to coworkers the day he got the cake. “Kyle had a reminder that he was going to make a cake for my bday. His family found the reminder and made it as a belated bday gift. Please stop by the break room and grab some!”

Everyone loved Kyle’s sense of humor. “His laugh was contagious,” said Romero of her friend. “He was an extremely intelligent man with a quirky sense of humor.”

“He could make me laugh to the point when I’d see him the rest of the day, I would get a cheesy smile on my face, and he knew why,” said Henderson. “Kyle, your friendship was a blessing, your memory a treasure,” she said.

Medical Cost Containment Medical Secretary Trisha Platt hopes to keep the smiles and laughter Kyle generated going at the agency. “Friendship

transcends death,” Platt wrote about her friend. “Memories made will never be forgotten and create a lasting impression on those left behind.” Platt believes everyone Kyle met became a better person for having had him in their lives.

“Kyle was a friendly, kind and positive influence on our WCA family,” said Executive Deputy Director Leigh Martinez, who oversaw his bureau. “He was a wonderful friend, a great baker and was always quick to jump in to lend a hand.”

The WCA has lost several colleagues in the past few years. Facilities clerk Anita Mayberry died in July, 2022. Employer compliance officer Lance Linhares died in July 2021 after his coworker Phil Hayes died in October of 2020.

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## Jessica Sanchez Named Manager of the Quarter

By Aileen O’Catherine

**M**edical Cost Containment (MCC) Bureau Chief Jessica Sanchez has been named the WCA Manager of the Quarter for the first quarter of 2023.

Sanchez has been with the WCA on and off since 2007. She was a compliance officer in the Employer Compliance Bureau over 16 years ago for a year and a half, and came back in 2014 to work as a financial auditor in the Self-Insurance Bureau. She created and ran the WCA’s Return-to-Work Program for nearly four years before being promoted to MCC bureau chief in February, 2020.

Her nominator noted Sanchez has shown the ability to grow her bureau to meet the public’s needs. “Jessica and her

bureau are a great resource for both the internal and external customers that may need assistance in verifying medical costs, fees and returning to work,” the nomination said, adding “Jessica is a major asset for this administration.”

Sanchez was thankful for the award and said she was fortunate to work with the people of the WCA. “This was unexpected and I am so grateful for my Medical Cost Containment and Return-to-Work team,” she said. “I enjoy working at this agency, which has given me so many opportunities to learn and grow. I feel I am helping people in each role I have held.”

Sanchez finds that workers’ compensation continually challenges her. “There is always something new

to learn and it’s rewarding to facilitate communication or use your knowledge to assist people,” she said.

Sanchez has been nominated for the manager of the quarter award multiple times.



*Medical Cost Containment Bureau Chief Jessica Sanchez*

# Alexis Armijo Named Clerk of the Court

By Aileen O’Catherine

Alexis Armijo was named Clerk of the Court, and began that role on February 4, 2023. Armijo’s career began at the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Detention Center, where she worked for nearly 21 years. She was a corrections officer for five years before moving up in a variety of positions. Prior to coming to the WCA, she had managed the records department for about six years.

Armijo wants to learn all she can about workers’ compensation, a subject she encountered once at her prior job when she had a workplace injury. Although she filled out the paperwork for her injury, she learned nothing about the process of coverage. She is now making up for that by learning all she can about the system.

“It’s been great to learn something new, and something as wonderful as workers’ compensation,” she said.

Armijo notes that the service of process of records differs at the WCA from the procedures followed at the county. There, staff didn’t have to inform anyone about what was happening as documents were filed, whereas at the WCA, clerks file the documents and touch base with multiple stakeholders during the process. The importance of that process is something she’d like to ensure other bureaus know about, as she in turn hopes her staff learns more about the work done in other agency bureaus.

Armijo believes her workplace approach can be summed up in a favorite quote from Maya Angelou: “If you don’t



Clerk of the Court  
Alexis Armijo

like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.”

Armijo’s family is “the other best piece of me,” she said. Her husband has been very supportive of her starting a new career. The couple have a 13-year-old son and a six-year-old daughter whose extracurricular activities keep them very busy.



## HOLIDAY CLOSURE

The Workers’ Compensation offices in Albuquerque and all its field offices will be closed on the following upcoming holidays:

- Memorial Day, Monday, May 29**
- Juneteenth, Monday, June 19**
- Independence Day, Tuesday, July 4**

## New Mexico Workers’ Compensation Administration Offices:

### MAIN OFFICE

#### Location & Main Mail Address:

2410 Centre Ave. SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87106-4190

#### Alternate Mailing Address:

PO Box 27198  
Albuquerque, NM 87125-7198

#### Phone Numbers:

Phone: (505) 841-6000  
In state toll-free phone:  
1-800-255-7965  
Fax Clerk of the Court:  
(505) 841-6060  
Director’s Fax: (505) 841-6009

### Regional Offices

#### Farmington:

2700 Farmington Ave., Bldg. E, Ste.2  
Farmington, NM 87401  
Phone: (505) 599-9746  
In state toll-free phone:  
1-800-568-7310  
Fax: (505) 599-9753

#### Hobbs:

James M. Murray Building  
2120 North Alto, Unit 3  
Hobbs, NM 88240  
Phone: (575) 397-3425  
In state toll-free phone:  
1-800-934-2450

#### Las Cruces:

2407 W. Picacho, Ste. D  
Las Cruces, NM 88007  
Phone: (575) 524-6246  
In state toll-free phone:  
1-800-870-6826  
Fax: (575) 524-6249

#### Las Vegas:

32 NM 65  
Las Vegas, NM 87701  
Phone: (505) 454-9251  
In state toll-free phone:  
1-800-281-7889  
Fax: (505) 454-9248

#### Roswell:

Penn Plaza Building  
400 N. Pennsylvania Ave., Ste. 425  
Roswell, NM 88201  
Phone: (575) 623-3781  
In state toll-free phone:  
1-866-311-8587  
Fax: (575) 623-0078

#### Santa Fe:

Aspen Plaza  
1596 Pacheco, St. #202  
Santa Fe, NM 87505  
Phone: (505) 476-7381  
Fax: (505) 476-7390

**WCA Helpline-Hotline: (toll free in New Mexico)**

1-866-WORKOMP 1-866-967-5667

**WCA Website:**

<https://workerscomp.nm.gov>