

Gallup's movers and shakers reveal New Year's wish lists

Written by By Kevin Opsahl Sun Correspondent
Friday, 15 January 2021 04:45



Getting ripped, learning to play the piano, or finding the motivation to work on a home improvement project are annually recurring daydreams at this time of year.

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But with the pandemic, some of those may have already been checked off the list.

If that's the case, then what can Gallup residents look to accomplish in 2021?

The *Gallup Sun* asked some prominent people in our community, including the mayor, the community food pantry director, and the Gallup MainStreet Arts & Cultural District director about their wish lists for the new year.

Louis Bonaguidi, mayor of Gallup

Aside from his personal resolution to eat less chocolate, Mayor Louis Bonaguidi had five items for the city on his New Year's wish list.

Vaccinate residents: Vaccines from Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna were the first to be distributed to hospitals across the country at the beginning of December. In its first phase it is being offered to health care workers and those in assisted-living housing. Before long, Bonaguidi said he hopes people in Gallup can get it, too, because he would love to see Gallup "back to normal." He emphasized, "I think the answer is going to be the vaccinations."

Fully open businesses: According to the latest (Dec. 16) New Mexico Health Order, Gallup is currently operating at a "Red Level," which means 25% capacity for essential businesses, indoor dining is prohibited while outdoors is restricted significantly, and recreational facilities that require close contact remain closed. While Bonaguidi expressed his belief that the measures are essential to slowing the spread of COVID-19, it puts a damper on the city's economy. "You have to quarantine yourself. Try to stay at home, and even when you can get out, there's nowhere to go," Bonaguidi said. "Businesses are so important to our community."

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Get children back to the classrooms: The Gallup mayor admits that even though the schools aren't under his control, he would like to see more children return to school — and stay there — and not have to worry about another temporary shutdown due to COVID-19 spread. "It's so rough on our kids. They are not getting the education they deserve," Bonaguidi said. He also pointed out that, the city's recreational facilities are shut down, and emphasized the impact that has on young people. "These poor kids, that pent up energy they have, they're not able to use [it]."

Progress on city projects: Since Bonaguidi came into office in May, he's wanted to reinforce and rebuild Gallup's infrastructure , including parts of the city's pothole-stricken roads. Those plans had to be set aside when the city council cut the budget by 30%.

Hold large gatherings: Sunday services, ball games, visits to restaurants — those are all the things the Gallup mayor would like to see resume. "We miss that stuff," Bonaguidi said. "I'd like to take off, have a cup of coffee somewhere. But you can't do that."

Alice Perez, executive director, The Community Pantry

Alice Perez, who has led the food pantry since 2015, summed up her New Year's desires with one theme: building bridges. Not just for herself, but for her community.

"Without those bridges connecting to resources, opportunities, and creating knowledge, I, myself, along with everyone that surrounds me, won't be able to move forward and have a happy and productive 2021," Perez wrote in an email. "As I'm building and strengthening these bridges, I want to bring people along with me on this journey so that they will be independent from systems and negative lifestyles."

Perez wishes Gallup would be able to go about its business the way it did before the pandemic. Along those lines, she hopes for a day when The Community Pantry is "never" needed again.

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"I would love for us to 'go out of business' simply because we are not needed," Perez wrote.

Kara Smith, executive director, Gallup MainStreet Arts & Cultural District

Kara Smith has plenty of aspirations for the new year. She listed:

"A vibrant community celebration for the opening of our new street on Coal Avenue."

"Safely gathering again! We miss getting together for Downtown Night Out, ArtsCrawl, Ceremonial, art openings, parades, and concerts."

Smith is looking forward to working closely with district partners and the community for the economic recovery of Downtown Gallup. In the meantime, she intends to go all out to create exceptional cultural programming for the city, whether in-person or virtual.

By Kevin Opsahl
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