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Newly inaugurated Gallup City Councilor Fran Palochak (District 4) is on a mission to change her beloved hometown’s image.

And Palochak knows from her 25 years of experience as the 11th Judicial District’s court clerk and deputy court executive officer that it’ll take everyone that lives in and around Gallup.

“It’s easy to be critical when you don’t know what’s really going on,” she said. “We all, not just elected officials, have to work together to make Gallup a beautiful place.”

Palochak recalled a conversation she had with an individual who was attending a workshop in Gallup.

This individual decided to drive home to Los Lunas and return the next day instead of staying overnight because Gallup was “not friendly,” she said. “That really saddened me.”

Palochak said that Gallup has also been called the “most dangerous” city in New Mexico.

The title of most dangerous city came from a Federal Bureau of Investigations Uniform Crime Report, which ranked Gallup as number two. Number one was Espanola. The rankings were based on crime rates.

According to the FBI report, Espanola has a crime rate of 110 per 1,000 residents. Gallup’s crime rate is 106 for 1,000 residents.

Palochak said that her plan to combat and reduce crime is to educate everyone about how they can assist the police without getting in harms way and how they can make their homes and neighborhoods safe.

“The police can’t be everywhere,” she said.

Palochak said she’ll be inviting law enforcement representatives to neighborhood association meetings to provide information and answer questions.

The re-establishment of neighborhood associations and, or watches was one of Palochak’s campaign platforms and she’s didn’t forget that.

Neighborhood association meetings are scheduled at the Southside Fire Department on May 7 for the Cedar Hills, Debra Drive, Elva Drive and Chihuahita areas. The Stagecoach Elementary School is the site for the May 13 association meeting for the Viro and Stagecoach areas.

On May 21, the Westside Fire Department will be the meeting place for the Western Skies and Skywest areas. And Turpen Elementary School is where the May 28 association meeting will be held.

All neighborhood association meetings will be from 6-8 pm.

Palochak said that the neighborhood meetings could also be an opportunity for people to share their needs and concerns with her.

She recalled that as she was campaigning that one of the issues that was brought to her attention was domestic violence services.

Palochak readily admitted that providing domestic violence services has been her “passion for 30 years” because as a child, she witnessed her mother being verbally and physically abused by her father.

That was in the 1950s, when people, including the police, believed that domestic violence was a “family matter” to be worked out in private, she said.

There were no shelters and laws to protect her mom and other domestic violence victims, including children, like her, who witnessed the abuse.

“My mom is a domestic violence survivor,” she said. “My dream is for kids to never live in a home with violence.”

Palochak said that she recently received a telephone call from a Native American man about the need to revive the Gallup Indian Center.

The re-establishment of an Indian Center was also one of her campaign promises.

Palochak said she plans to visit the Farmington Indian Center to find out how it’s operated and what services it provides.

But the plans to revive the Indian Center should involve representatives from the surrounding tribal governments, youth, elders, and elected officials from the city, county and state, she said. “I’m willing to work with everybody. And I know I don’t have all the answers.”

Palochak sighed and said that the city has so many needs and concerns but the city budget is limited.

She said that her district has been very vocal about the “smell” from the wastewater treatment plant, which is located on the west side of Gallup.

Palochak said that she met with Vince Tovar, who heads water and sanitation, about the smell and Tovar has been actively working on the elimination of the odor, as well the removal of sludge in June.

She said whenever she smells the odor, she gives Tovar a telephone call.

The smell has been a concern of the west side since before 2010. That’s according to June 25, 2010, Associated Press news article, “Smelly Wastewater Plant to Get Makeover.”

Palochak hopes that the neighborhood association meetings would also be an opportunity for people to learn how city government operates, and especially how it operates on a very limited budget.

She explained that this past state legislative session resulted in a state decision to deny Gallup about $200,000 in annual supplemental funding from the Hold Harmless Tax because the state believed that Gallup could generate the $200,000 from its gross receipt taxes.

The Hold Harmless provision is a 2004 tax that exempted food and some medical expenses from gross receipt taxes and allowed the state to subsidize cities and counties for loss tax revenues from food and some medical expenses.

Meanwhile, Palochak is hoping that the state legislature will have a special session to address $264 million in capital outlay projects and to also allow Gallup the opportunity to regain the $200,000.

She said that in the past that the city used a portion of the $200,000 to purchase police vehicles and as discretionary funds for each of the city councilors to fund projects in their districts.