Written by By Babette Herrmann Sun Editor
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Mayor Jackie McKinney is as polite as mayors come. He's appears the dapper southwestern cowboy with long silver hair and determined eyes, often donning a southwest bolo tie, pressed shirt, denim jeans and boots. Although soft spoken, he doesn't mince words when it comes down to speaking his mind, especially when the topic is his beloved city of Gallup.

Love him or hate him, he's here to stay for the next four years. Still reeling from a heated campaign against the formidable George Galanis and being reminded of a 47 year old marijuana felony conviction that was pardoned by Gov. Bill Richardson – McKinney perseveres. His life experiences only add to his coolness factor. And depending of your views on the issues, his goals for Gallup will draw ire or praise much like any other politician.

His commitment to curb public intoxication is at the forefront of his agenda, like his last term, and he's exploring "how we can best eliminate it, if not, control it."

For instance, he would like to see the Gallup Detox Center continue to grow in its ability to help those stricken with alcoholism, such as instituting a long-term treatment and aftercare program. He hopes the city can make strides in this area by working with the Navajo tribe on matters concerning the detox center.

"The revolving door," as McKinney refers to it, he wants to see it shut for good. By putting a face to the name of habitual detox clients, he hopes the center can pluck those caught in the cycle of addiction and get them into treatment and aftercare, and help get them back on their feet so they can find work.

"I feel that enabling can hurt and kill more people," he said. "I feel without after care we're

missing the boat."

McKinney was asked how he feels about Gov. Susana Martinez' veto of House Bill 108, which would have set up legislation to fund "behavioral health investment zones" statewide to fund areas considered high risk for alcohol and drug addiction among its citizens, and in need of services to deal with those challenges effectively. McKinley County ranks at the top of the list of high risk counties.

"The governor's staff wanted something that's not legislation, but to handle it administratively."

In a move to find a solution that has ailed Gallup for decades, McKinney, City Attorney George Kozeliski and Gallup Police Chief Robert Cron are taking a trip to Farmington to discover how their public officials deal with public intoxication in a much bigger city, with a population of more than 45,000 residents when compared to Gallup's roughly 22,000.

As for other hot button issues, such as Gallup's financial affairs, McKinney didn't get into crunching numbers, but said the budget meetings slated for next month will give him an idea of where the city sits financially.

"Monies are tight," he said. "With flat GRT revenue coming in, it's going to be hard to expand programs."

McKinney said there are a bundle of projects he would like to delve into and many center on the strategic planning meeting the city held in March.

Tackling crumbling and aged infrastructure also tops his second term priority list.

But a major budget hurdle is how to tackle curbs, gutters, streets and sidewalks that need replaced. He said grants and bonds could be the answer.

Meanwhile, he said, the council has focused on getting the odious smell that wafts through Mentmore to become a thing of the past by cleaning the sludge out of the water treatment plant's lines.

"Those odors will dissipate by summer."

To contact Mayor Jackie McKinney, call: (505) 863-1220, press option 2.