Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Former county manager weighing an effort to 'fry bigger fish'

Having successfully worked as McKinley County Manager for 18 months, not to mention a previous six-year stint as the executive director of the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce, Bill Lee now seeks the District 3 seat on the McKinley County Board of Commissioners. The seat includes Gallup and Gamerco.

Lee left the county post in recent months to run for office without any potential for conflicts of interest, and returned to the local Chamber, but this time as CEO.

"I think I have the experience to do a very good job as a commissioner," Lee said. "It's not about trying to fry bigger fish. I have dealt with county budgets. I am from Gallup. I have dealt with businesses as chamber director. It makes sense to run for this seat."

If elected, Lee would like to work to secure sustainable funding for Na'nizhoozhi Center, Inc., commonly called NCI, and Gallup's sole detox center. Over the years, the center lost a lot of annual funding – at one point about $4 million - from the Navajo Nation, which forced the city to step up its funding portion.

"With respect to NCI, one of the things we have to do is make NCI a gateway, a way for people to find jobs and housing during what is a period of transition," Lee said. "We have to create

ways of partnering with the Navajo Nation, the city of Gallup, and IHS."

Another thing Lee said deserves attention is the improvement of county infrastructure. "We have to work together," he said. "We have to look for ways to collaborate when it comes to not only funding, but other things as well."

Lee noted that as county manager he was privy to reviewing gross receipts taxes reports and budgets. "We have to find ways to make the best possible use of revenue in a time when revenues are not necessarily increasing," the former county manager said.

Lee is an avid balloonist and owns X-Treme-Lee Fun Balloon Adventures. He has been actively involved in Gallup's annual Red Rock Balloon Rally, both as a board president and participant, for the better part of two decades. He is active as a city and state tourism promoter, having served on various boards like New Mexico Hospitality Association and the state tourism board. Lee was appointed by Gov. Susana Martinez to the State Fair Commission. Some view Lee as Gallup's primary promoter and marketer.

Lee graduated from Gallup High School and attended Eastern New Mexico University and North Idaho College in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Lee faces former McKinley County Commissioner David Dallago, former City Fire Chief Johnny Greene, Jr., and retired Bureau of Indian Affairs administrator Gerald O'Hara in the June 7 primary. The general election is Nov. 8. Each of the candidates is a Democrat and Gallup native, except O'Hara who is from Pennsylvania. McKinley commissioners annually earn around $19,000.

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