Written by Story & Photos by Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
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HP Coalition, a local non-profit, is managed and operated by Mitchel Hicklin, and his story is very interesting.

Born in Ft. Defiance as one of a set of twins, Hicklin had a very tough infancy. His mother and father were both addicted to alcohol, and shortly after his twin died as a result of exposure on the McKinley County Courthouse steps, Mitchel was taken into temporary state custody. He was later released back to his mother, but only until his father's alcohol-fueled rage caught up with her. His father beat the mother to death and served out his life in prison.

The state retained permanent custody until an Anglo family was found to take him home with them. That home was in Texas, and though Hickline did not learn of it for a few years, the family was racially prejudiced in the extreme.

"I ran away from them when I was 14," Hicklin said from his comfortable if rumpled office. "I found more equality on the streets.

"I came back to the area in 2003 and tried to re-unite with my biological family, a sister. That didn't go well – she took money and partied it away. I haven't seen her since.

"I got treatment for mental and emotional instability and lived homeless on the North side of town where I hustled for work of any kind. My longest steady job since 1986 until 2001 had been 90 days, so I didn't have a resume' but I did know how to do jobs that required manual labor.

“I met a lot of people who visited Safeway and other businesses and finally established myself as a steady and reliable worker.”

Among them were Barbara Quinones who lobbied others for the use of a small frame building for Hicklin to live in, and Linda Jeffries, a widow still depressed over the loss of her husband after five years, who became his secretary and partner in life, who provided a space for the small frame house. Others contributed gravel for a base and a wood stove for warmth, and the non-profit got going in 2013 with the addition of more business sponsors to Hicklin’s cause.

“I want to address areas that are not in the budget for the city,” added Hicklin. “It’s important to me that the view of Gallup be presented as a clean place; one where people would like to take their family. I see many areas where weeds and plants grow unabated and which city workers do nothing about. I know they have other demands on their time as well, but that is where I want to help.”

The main stumbling block seems to be the definition of the anti-donation clause in state law. Although the county seems to be able to work around it, this value received for value given legal term seems to be used quite a bit in the city government as a means to stop further negotiations.

In November, 2015, the HP Coalition presented a donor appreciation BBQ for their sponsors at the Gallup McKinley County Chamber of Commerce. Attended by about 15 of the sponsors, the event was actually the two-year anniversary and was enjoyed by all, even though it was not up to the $100-a-plate (or more) quality offered by other local non-profits.

The flyer printed for HP Coalition informs the reader, ‘This corporation is formed to promote and carry out projects to beautify Gallup, NM and to encourage acts of volunteerism in Gallup.’ The reverse side of the flyer encourages anyone who wishes to help through prayer, donation, or sponsorship to contact Mitchel at hpcoalition.org or P.O. Box 675, Mentmore, NM 87319.

“From the Bottom Up” also explains the logo of the company, which includes a suckermouth catfish (known also as Hypostomus Plecostomus, which explains the HP). This species of

catfish is not good for eating, but is very popular among aquarium owners as it cleans up all the accumulated debris in the tanks. From the bottom up, that's where the clean up begins, not downtown or in the high dollar areas, but where the weeds and accumulated trash abounds.

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