

## Rio West Mall Second Annual Craft Fair Show

Written by Story and photos by Dee Velasco For the Sun  
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### BRINGING THE COMMUNITY BACK TO THE MALL

Local crafters came out for the Rio West Mall Second Annual Craft Fair, Nov. 19 in Gallup, to display their talented works such as hand-stitched shawls, Navajo Pottery, Christmas candy, Snowman desktops, and much more.

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This year's event drew in quite a crowd to center court as onlookers walked around looking for that unique Christmas gift. With over 35 vendors there was much to choose from, and events like this helps bring the community back to the mall according to Ida Mangum, Leasing/Marketing Manager for the mall.

"We're trying to bring the community back into Gallup and events like this surely do it," she said. "Back in the day they used to have the craft fair here, so I suggested we bring back the craft fair here to the mall once again. I'm a crafter myself and I know how hard it is to find a place to display your art. This year turned out huge and I'm excited about that, while giving the shoppers a reason to come back shopping to the Rio West Mall."

Being invited back for her second year, Heather Eskeets, says this year's craft fair turned out great.

"This is my second year coming back, and the outcome has been pretty good, much busier than last year. I do Black-Eth Navajo Pottery and am trying out new different designs, so this fair is definitely helping me out. "

Another local vendor excited about this year's craft fair is Don Young and Linda Foster with Tijuana Jim's Gourmet Salsa.

"This is our first one here, we usually do other local shows around town, but so far I'm impressed ... really impressed. We weren't sure how it would be in the mall, but we're doing some great sales with our different types of salsa," said Young.

Geneva and Bethany from Crafty Crafters said, "There were so many people here and so much crafts that it was good to see it and the support from the community was awesome!"

## **Rio West Mall and the Gallup community**

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Though Rio West Mall is often stigmatized as a “shoe mall” with not much going on, Mangum says this could be no further from the truth.

“People think the mall is empty, but we’re really not. Ninety-five percent of the mall is occupied, which is amazing and really good for this area,” she said.

Mangum adds, “We are part of the community and we do a lot of behind the scenes things for non-profits. If you haven’t been to the mall, come check us out. It’s really changed, it’s different, and we almost have something going on every weekend.”

Aside from the craft show, the mall was bustling with other events taking place: the Golden Angel Tree, Cupcake Walk, Turkey Trot, Zumba, and College/Career Fair.

Mangum explained the significance of the Golden Angel Tree project, which is a partnership with iHeart Media to provide gifts to the residents of Red Rock Care Center. Visitors can choose an angel from the tree any time before Dec. 19. On the back of the angel is a wish list of items for that resident.

Gifts on the wish lists are usually small and include things like socks, clothes and puzzles. Visitors will buy those gifts and bring them back to the mall. On Dec. 22, the gifts will be delivered to the residents, and a Christmas party will be thrown for them.

Red Rock Care Center has 102 residents and with the Cupcake walk, this ensures the gifts will be made available to the residents.

“We’re doing the cupcake walk so we can raise money in the event the public doesn’t get all the angels,” Mangum said. “We can then purchase what’s left for the residents so that all the residents at the care center can receive a gift.”

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Mall shoppers also took part in the Turkey Trot and Zumba, which was co-sponsored with the Navajo Nation Health Prevention Program as a part of the diabetes prevention program. Participants received a free T-shirt as they walked around the mall during this free event. A raffle was also held for turkeys and other prizes.

The Festival of Trees also began their selling of tickets, held by the Soroptimist International, an organization working to improve the lives of women and girls locally.

Raffle tickets are on sale for this event until Dec. 3. The winner will receive the tree, the decorations, and everything under the tree as well.

“The money raised goes to an organization called ‘Live Your Dream.’ It’s an amazing program and 100 percent of the proceeds go to that,” Mangum said.

Next month, the mall will be having an event called Christmas Carol Smackdown, where choirs can sign up and go head to head in a singing competition.

“We put everything on our website and we’re very active on our Facebook page, so please check it out and see what’s happening here at the Rio West Mall,” Mangum said.

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