

## gallup ARTS leading charge for WPA website

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 30 September 2016 07:05

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**Group seeks grant; WPA art widespread in McKinley County**

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McKinley County Attorney Doug Decker decided several years ago that the Works Progress Administration art that hangs in the Old McKinley County Courthouse at 201 W. Hill Ave. is there to stay — as is the art in the new courthouse at the same address.

The WPA art collection that hangs in both court houses is part of what Decker says may be one of the largest WPA collections in New Mexico.

“I don’t have a lot of concrete facts on it, but I have heard that [McKinley County has] about as much WPA hanging on some of our walls as any other county in New Mexico,” Decker said. “The pieces that we have at the county are some very nice ones.”

The Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration was part of the New Deal cultural program instituted by then-president Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It funded visual arts in the U.S. and was a relief measure to employ artists. Artists from around the country were commissioned under the program to do a specified number of paintings.

One of those artists was the prolific Lloyd Moylan, who would travel Arizona and New Mexico to sketch and paint Native American and Hispanic peoples during the early 1900s.

On Sept. 7, the McKinley County Board of Commissioners approved a letter of support for GallupArts’ proposed National Endowment of the Humanities grant to create a website featuring Gallup’s collection of WPA-era art. The resolution received the full support of the Board of Commissioners.

The letter of support followed a similar letter from the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce.

“The Chamber is in support of what GallupArts wants to do,” Chamber CEO Bill Lee said. “We’re talking about rare art. Gallup has its share of it. As soon as I heard what they were doing, I knew it was a very worthwhile idea.”

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Created a couple of years ago, GallupArts is an entity that focuses on creativity and development for artists.

Rose Eason, the executive director of GallupArts, told commissioners that a letter of support is crucial to grant approval. She said the support letters, which she's sought from governmental entities like the city of Gallup, are part of the process of obtaining the grant.

"This is just one step in that process," Eason said of the letters. "There is still a lot of paperwork yet to do."

Eason, who was named GallupArts' executive director several months ago, told the commissioners there are quite a few WPA pieces on the second floor of the courthouse. Like Decker, Eason said she's heard Gallup may have New Mexico's largest such collection.

"The [ultimate] exhibit will bring together all of Gallup and McKinley County's WPA art collection," Eason said. "I think this is a really unique thing."

In 2011, a WPA painting was discovered inside the roof of Gallup City Hall. At that time, Mayor Harry Mendoza said someone may have hidden the art in the roof area in an effort to steal it. Workers turned the art over to city officials, and the piece was hung inside the city manager and mayor's office at City Hall.

McKinley County Commission Chairman Tony Tanner said the WPA art in the county's possession is indeed rare.

"I think [the grant for a website] is a very good idea," Tanner said. "That art is rare, no matter where you're talking about. For us to have some of it is a big plus."

Both Tanner and Lee noted the collection could boost tourism around McKinley County, and both said they're committed to assisting Eason and GallupArts in the coordination of the website.

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“Whatever kind of help they need, the Chamber and county are all in,” Lee, a former McKinley County manager, said.

Martin Link, a local historian and former professor at the University of New Mexico-Gallup, archived the WPA art that is housed at the old and new McKinley County courthouses. He said late city Librarian Octavia Fellin is the primary reason why there’s so much WPA art around Gallup and McKinley County.

Fellin was the library’s director from 1947 to 1990, and upon her retirement, the library was named in her honor. She was instrumental in getting WPA art to Gallup, Link said.

The Old Courthouse and the Larry B. Mitchell Recreation Center along east Montoya Boulevard are considered WPA edifices. Both buildings were constructed through WPA-oriented labor, Link said.

“Gallup definitely has one of the largest, if not the largest, WPA art collections in New Mexico,” Link said. “That is an undisputed fact.”