

## Jennifer Hits the Right Note at El Morro Theatre

Written by By Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent  
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Jennifer Lazarz (pronounced easily in two languages: the article le in French; and tsars in Russian) is probably better known in the Gallup area for her ability to hit the right notes, since she served with the Land of Enchantment Opera last summer.

Besides using her musical talents to a high degree, she was also named the Director of El Morro Theatre about eight weeks ago. Theater is just part of her passion, though an important one. She also has a great deal of experience with film, and a love of all art that cannot be diminished.

“I am a pragmatist, not an idealist,” Jennifer said in opening the interview. “I want to institute procedures to make everything more community friendly, such as family programming on Sundays. I just need time to get things running more efficiently.”

El Morro has had a recent share of inefficiency, some would say waste, in the daily operation of the cultural landmark in downtown Gallup. The city, which owns the property, decided not to work with one previous manager, then went through two more selected individuals in a very short time. Neither of the latter two helped in the operation except for convincing the city to purchase some updated and necessary equipment.

In addition, the city also constructed the Second Street Event Center and connected it to El Morro so that the two entities may be easily used in conjunction with the other, as needed.

The website for the theater is now open – a project that was completed in two weeks – and

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Face Book is also available. Grinch week was Dec. 12-19 and the activities include Arts, Crafts, and Coffee with free kids' popcorn on Dec. 19-20.

The Event Center consists of an open area that can be divided into two rooms with a total capacity of 120, but it is not wired for movies, though projectors may be used. The center is available on a first come, first served basis and even the city must make a timely appointment to reserve space.

The much larger venue inside El Morro is more strictly regulated by Lazarz. Another of her responsibilities is the "shadow gallery" next door to the theater but part of the building. The walk-by space it provides is complimentary to the artistic venue desired by downtown leaders, and the use of this small space is an attraction to the building.

"I ran two ballroom dance studios for three years," Lazarz said.

It's nice to know that she is more of a complete person than most; she sings, she dances, and she has a brain!

That brain of hers was developed at Augustana College in Illinois for her undergraduate work and further enhanced at the University of North Carolina – School of Arts for her Master's work. (Side note: the mascot for the latter school is a pickle, really) Both degrees are in Music Performance in Voice, though she does admit to playing the piano, badly according to her. The 33-year-old mezzo soprano list Gianni Schicchi as her favorite opera, but has participated in 15-20 since, and including, her college years. She is slated to play the witch in a performance of Hansel and Gretel in Lynchburg, VA next month.

"I am a problem solver," Lazarz said. "El Morro has been a neglected asset, but I look forward to the challenge."

A lot of work lies ahead for this young lady, but that aspect of her job does not seem to slow her down. She has lived in other areas of the country where art was important, but none as small as Gallup with so many varied artists to choose from. She would like to be the one to bring them all

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together in force, perhaps even inspire Arts Crawl to a weekly event. And at the same time, hit all the right notes and stay in character for the duration of the performance.