



RIO GRANDE SUN



Volume 60, Number 17

Española, New Mexico 87532

Thursday, January 26, 2017

38 pages, 4 sections 50 cents

AG Raids Commissioner's House

School District lobbyist's house also searched

By Wheeler Cowperthwaite
SUN Staff Writer

Investigators with the Attorney General's Office raided the houses of County Commissioner Barney Trujillo and a lobbyist with the Española School District, Jan. 20.

Investigators were armed with search warrants for Trujillo's Chimayó home and Joseph Torres's house off McCurdy Road.

A public records request for both search warrants has been pending with the Office since Monday.

Trujillo did not respond to emails, voicemails and text messages left for him, requesting comment and information, between Jan. 20 and Tuesday.

Torres wrote in a text message

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Attorney General's Office Investigator Jon Bergevin (left) turns on an audio recorder, Jan. 24, while approaching a *Rio Grande SUN* reporter with two armed State Police officers, acting as security. Bergevin was serving a search warrant on Rio Arriba County Commissioner Barney Trujillo's house in Chimayó.

(SUNphoto by Wheeler Cowperthwaite)

Police Search for Armed Robber

By Wheeler Cowperthwaite
SUN Staff Writer

Española Police Department detectives are trying to identify the two men who, on Sunday, robbed the Giant gas station on Paseo de Oñate.

One man, described as being 6-feet tall, acted as a lookout, staying by the entrance to the store while another man, wearing a bandana over the bottom half of his face, threatened clerks Eva Sanchez and Jerry Salazar with a semi-automatic pistol. Both suspects are described as being heavy set.

The man with the gun entered the store first, followed by the lookout, 10 seconds later, Det. George Martinez said in an interview, Monday.

In surveillance footage, the pistol appears to have a silver slide, or top half. Although the man is wearing a bandana on the lower half of his face, the

upper half is still visible.

Martinez is asking for anyone with information on the identity of the robbers, to call him at 747-6003, and leave a message.

"Of course, they can remain anonymous," Martinez said.

He said the man with the gun approached Sanchez and demanded she open the register.

"She freaked out and started screaming," Martinez said. "Jerry was in the back room and the male suspect, the culprit, hears Jerry and rushes to the back."

Salazar tried to close the back door, but the armed man overpowered him and forced him, at gunpoint, to the register. He had Salazar open the register.

The robber took the \$115 in the cash register, then stole a

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District Legal Fees Skyrocket

By Barron Jones
SUN Staff Writer

Using lawyers to handle routine matters and avoid court battles has put the Española School District on pace to surpass what it spent on legal expenses in recent years.

The Santa Fe law firm of Ortiz and Zamora has already billed the District \$105,484 for the legal services it provided for the seven months between May 1 and Dec. 31, 2016.

That timeframe represents the beginning of the ongoing Richard Martinez employment dispute. Dealing with that and licensure issues has cost the District roughly \$8,590.77.

Even if you subtract the \$23,331.82 in legal services the firm provided during the months of May and June 2016, the remaining \$82,152 in expenses accrued puts the District on pace to surpass the \$190,295 spent all of Fiscal Year 2016.

The bills are important because they provide insight into the challenges the administration faces, while carrying out its duty of educating the District's more than 3,500 students.

In response to an earlier request, the 26 pages that represent

the July through September invoices were almost completely redacted, or blacked out, with a few discernible exceptions.

Those exceptions include a few lines that detailed some of the work the firm did on the Inspection of Public Records Act lawsuit the District recently settled with the *Rio Grande SUN* to bring the School Board into compliance with the state's Open Meetings Act.

District Records Custodian Crystal Garcia also did not redact the expenses, which contained several entries for court filing fees and mileage from Santa Fe to the Española Middle School, to attend Board meetings.

Zamora stood by the redactions, up until Jan. 13, and said the information is redacted in accordance with the law.

Following a strongly worded letter from *Rio Grande SUN* attorney Matthew Hoyt, of Albuquerque's Peifer, Hanson and Mullins Law firm, Zamora released, on Jan. 13, the legal bills from May through November 2016, completely unredacted.

The invoices show the District paid Ortiz and Zamora approximately \$37,158 to fight the

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County Tightens GRT Purse Strings

By Austin Fisher
SUN Staff Writer

The North Central Solid Waste Authority is facing a \$300,000 shortfall for the current fiscal year, and its director wants Rio Arriba County to help. However, County officials have their own finances to worry about.

Authority Manager Gino Romero said the Authority's Board of Directors learned, Jan. 17, that the County will not give the Authority a \$100,000 subsidy they were expecting in the form of revenue from Environmental Services Gross Receipts Taxes.

County Manager Tomas Campos agreed to pay an annual \$250,000 subsidy during a special Board meeting in May 2015. Then in November 2015, Romero said the County sent him \$50,000, but it wasn't enough.

Romero said on Jan. 19, the Authority needs the subsidy because fewer than 40 percent of customers pay for trash services on time. Also, the Authority has to cover the cost of poly carts for customers in the County, because County officials do not pay for them. The city pays for customers' carts in the city limits.

Romero said the subsidy, provided by the County, and the city of Española, was previously intercepted by the state and distributed to the Authority.

However, Board member and City Councilor Pedro Valdez said



(SUNphoto by Austin Fisher)

North Central Solid Waste Authority Manager Gino Romero addresses a question by a member of the Authority's Board of Directors, July 18, 2016, at the Rio Arriba County offices in Española. Romero has expressed dissatisfaction with County officials not contributing tax revenue for the Authority's operations.

city officials use the Environmental Services Gross Receipts Tax to pay County officials \$25,000 each quarter, to cover the city's obligation to the Alcalde Transfer Station project.

County officials have committed all the Environmental Services Gross Receipts Tax to paying off the loan, Deputy County Manager David Trujillo said Monday, so that money cannot

go into the Authority's operating expenses. Trujillo and County Commissioner Danny Garcia are the County's two voting members on the Board.

Construction crews built the County's approximately \$3.3 million waste transfer station on land the Commission acquired from the federal government in 2007. The project was paid for and equipped by selling bonds.

"The Commission entered into a Bond Purchase Agreement on its own and sole behalf with Capital One Public Funding, LLC in the amount of \$5 million on July 13, 2013 to construct and equip the Alcalde Transfer and Recycling Facility and is solely responsible for the repayment of the said bond purchase agreement," the project resolution states.

The County generates \$200,000 in Environmental Services Gross Receipts Tax each year, while the city generates \$100,000, Trujillo said.

"All of our EGRT is committed toward making that payment," Trujillo said. "We don't have enough to pay it. We're \$40,000 in the red on the loan payments, and that ends up coming out of our general fund."

The Authority's Joint Powers Agreement states that the member entities intend for the Authority to become self-sufficient so

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Despite Meeting, No Action on Superintendent's Evaluation

By Wheeler Cowperthwaite
SUN Staff Writer

A 40-minute meeting by the Española School Board, to evaluate Superintendent Eric Martinez, cost at least \$713, and the evaluation isn't even complete.

Board President Pablo Lujan called the meeting on Jan. 19, exclusively to go into a closed session to discuss Martinez's performance, but Board Member Yolanda Salazar was not there, so they will have to hold another meeting.

When the Board members

came back from the executive session, Board Vice-President Lucas Fresquez moved to table action on the evaluation — a motion that passed. Lujan then ended the meeting.

"Oh yeah, that's not the first time it's happened," Salazar said in a Tuesday phone interview, referring to meetings scheduled for times she would be unable to attend. "They did the same thing when the (superintendent) was selected."

She said she notified the Board, during the Jan. 11 meeting, that she was going to be out

of town on Jan. 19.

"It's just another paycheck," Salazar said.

Board members are paid \$95 per meeting, which means that four of the five members attending, will run the District \$380.

The district's lawyer, Gino Zamora, attended the meeting, as well. He charges an across-the-board rate of \$200 an hour, regardless of whether it's travel time, sitting in a meeting or writing a legal document.

At an estimated 30-minute commute each way from Santa Fe to Española, in addition to

the 40-minute meeting, Zamora will charge the District at least \$333 for the meeting.

Lujan said in an interview, after the meeting, that the discussion started out with what form should be used to conduct the evaluation.

The form will include a point system, for each Board member to rank Martinez's performance. Martinez is on a two-year contract.

Lujan said the evaluation could only go so far because Salazar was missing.

Board Member Ruben Archu-

leta said in a Tuesday telephone interview, that the evaluation was supposed to be done by Dec. 18.

"It bothers me that we have so many meetings, with such a waste of taxpayer dollars, when something could be done in just one meeting," he said.

Salazar said the superintendent's evaluation was only supposed to be on the agenda for the regular Board meeting on Wednesday (1/25). It is still scheduled for that meeting's executive session, along with updates on three lawsuits.

She said she has a variety of concerns she wants to address with Eric Martinez, including those centered around security, the search warrant served by the Attorney General's Office on Jan. 13, and the rehiring of coach Richard Martinez, among others.

Salazar said the contention around Richard Martinez is especially concerning.

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