

PRESIDENT'S WEEKLY PERSPECTIVE



May 13, 2024

Good afternoon, Lobos --

I would like to share [an incredibly touching story that exemplifies the profound impact our employees make, both within and beyond the walls of our hospital](#). Olivia Peña, RN, a nurse at The University of New Mexico Children's Hospital, found her life's calling extended beyond her role as a caregiver the day she was asked to care for a newborn, not just as a nurse, but as a mother. Olivia, who had been a foster mom for many years, received a call from the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department asking if she would be interested in fostering a premature baby girl, Addison, who was in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) just one floor away. Despite the challenges ahead, Olivia, along with her family, wholeheartedly welcomed Addison into their lives. What followed was a journey of love, resilience, and unwavering dedication as Olivia navigated the complexities of caring for Addison, who faced numerous medical complications. Olivia's bond with Addison led to a remarkable turning point when Addison's biological mother made the heartfelt decision for Olivia to adopt her.

Today, as Olivia reflects on their journey, she sees a vibrant, happy Addison who continues to thrive despite the challenges she has overcome. Olivia's commitment to caring for Addison, and countless other foster children before her, is a testament to the profound impact one person can make on the lives of others. As we celebrate Olivia's extraordinary journey, let us also recognize the countless nurses, caregivers, and staff who demonstrate unwavering dedication to their patients and community every day.

Miniature Backpacks Uncover the World's Largest Hummingbird Species

Research bridges diverse ideas and people across disciplines and communities, driving us to pose new questions that sometimes end up revealing remarkable discoveries. Recently, [a groundbreaking eight-year study conducted by our researchers at UNM's Museum of Southwestern Biology \(MSB\)](#) and published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, has unraveled the extraordinary migratory journey of giant hummingbirds for the first time. They've found that these birds, which are eight times the size of Black-chinned hummingbirds, breed along the Pacific Coasts of central Chile but disappear after breeding, a mystery dating back to Charles Darwin's observations in the 19th century. By affixing miniature tracking devices to the birds, the team revealed that they made a roundtrip migratory journey spanning over 5,200 miles, ascending to elevations exceeding 13,000 feet in the high Andes. The research also led to the identification of a new species of hummingbird, named *Patagona chaski*, marking a significant milestone in evolutionary science. This work highlights the importance of international collaboration and the invaluable contributions of natural history collections. Congratulations to Dr. Jessie Williamson and her advisor Dr. Christopher Witt, UNM Ph.D. candidate Ethan Gyllenhaal, and the entire team for their dedication and pioneering spirit in advancing our understanding of the natural world.

\$3 Million Grant Awarded to Enhance Communication Outcomes for Children

UNM's research mission is also committed to transformative community impact. A partnership between UNM's Speech & Hearing Sciences Professor Cathy Binger and the University of Central Florida's Assistive

Technology Center Founder and Professor Jennifer Kent-Walsh has [secured a \\$3 million National Institutes of Health \(NIH\) grant for their collaborative Augmentative and Alternative Communication \(AAC\) Labs and related research](#). This funding will support the development of interventions in the AAC field, focusing on communication technologies and building language skills. Their innovative approach, using tools such as tablet apps with iconic children's book imagery, aims to enhance language outcomes for children with speech impairments, including those with conditions such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and autism spectrum disorder.

Statewide Space Community United by Sustainable Space Research Team

The inspiring efforts of the University of New Mexico's Sustainable Space Research Grand Challenge team are establishing UNM as a hub of excellence in space science exploration. Last month, [the team organized a dynamic event at the Student Union Building, bringing together industry leaders, lab experts, faculty from diverse disciplines, and community partners to showcase New Mexico's vibrant space-related initiatives](#). Through 15 engaging presentations covering topics from space agriculture to innovative construction materials, attendees explored UNM's contributions alongside statewide endeavors, fostering connections and sparking collaborations across various fields of space research. With a concerted focus on sustainable and holistic approaches, our grand challenge team aims to propel New Mexico to the forefront of space research, attracting substantial funding and investment for a prosperous future in space exploration.

First Adaptive Sports Day Champions Equity in Sports

I am delighted to share the success of our [first-ever Adaptive Sports Day](#), hosted by the UNM College of Education & Human Sciences' Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) program in collaboration with Sandia Prep. This event brought together middle schoolers, community members, and UNM students to celebrate and engage in adaptive sports show-casing activities like wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, bocchia ball, and goalball. Spearheaded by Assistant Professor Victoria Shiver and motivated by Travis Davis, a local advocate born with cerebral palsy, the event emphasized inclusion and provided a hands-on learning experience for all participants. With support from the Jennifer Riordan Foundation and the Carrie Tingley Hospital Foundation, Adaptive Sports Day underscores our dedication to inclusivity and prepares future educators to embrace and promote accessibility in physical education.

Honoring Patriotism, Commitment and Valor

Next Monday, May 27, is Memorial Day, a time to reflect on, commemorate, and express our gratitude for those who have given their lives in service to our country. As someone who grew up in a military family and whose extended family includes several retired and active duty military service members, Memorial Day is a matter of personal significance. "Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid," wrote Harry S. Truman. "They have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices." Let us always remember the sacrifices, patriotism, and courage of our fallen soldiers, their families, and their friends. We honor those who have served and those who continue to serve in the name of our nation, our freedom, and our liberty.

Please enjoy the extra time away from the office and campus; to those employees who work in critical areas, I appreciate your continued hard work and dedication to our institution and your role in continuing our mission of excellence. I will resume my weekly message on June 3.

Coming Up on This Week's Podcast . . .

Ozempic and Wegovy have exploded in popularity for their ability to help people lose weight. Now, Poison Control Centers around the country are sounding the alarm over a growing trend of semaglutide overdoses and incorrect use. The next episode of *[It's \(Probably\) Not Rocket Science](#)* explores the problem and what consumers should know with Dr. Joseph Lambson, director of the New Mexico Poison and Drug Information Center. As always, you can listen to our podcast on our [website](#), or wherever you get your podcasts.

Have a great week, and let's go, Lobos!

Garnett S. Stokes
President