



April 1, 2022

THE CONEJOS COUNTY MESSENGER

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In this issue:

- Feature Article—Rodney King, Emergency Mgr. of the Year
- Road & Bridge Retiring Employees
- Everbridge Notification System
- Sales Tax Updates in Commissioner and Land Use Articles

Welcome to our **second year** of the Conejos County Newsletter! As elected officials and county department directors, our goal is to inform our citizens of news stories, information and data through the periodic publication of a newsletter. The previous editions of newsletters are archived on the county website, www.conejoscounty.org.

In an effort to gain more exposure, we are posting this same file on Facebook, the Citizens for a Better Conejos County page.

Scan QR code with your smartphone



Rodney King Awarded Regional Emergency Manager of the Year

Congratulations to Rodney King, Conejos County Emergency Manager, from all his co-employees at Conejos County! At the 2022 Colorado Emergency Management Conference in Loveland, Colorado on Feb. 22-25, Rodney King was “awarded the coveted regional Emergency Manager of the Year Award from the Colorado Emergency Management Association (CEMA) and his peers. This was his second time receiving this award for his outstanding leadership, professionalism and commitment to his communities that he daily demonstrates. King has been a mentor to many leading the way for emergency management in the future. He may be one of the longest serving Emergency Management professionals in the State of Colorado.”



Steve Sorensen and Rodney King Honored

During Ambulance Director Ernest Abeyta’s monthly report to the Board of County Commissioners at the February 17 meeting, he presented Steve Sorensen and Rodney King with a plaque for their years of service to the Conejos County Ambulance Service. Engraved on each plaque were the following words, “In Grateful Appreciation of your Years of Service to Conejos County EMS and your Commitment and Devotion to the People of Conejos County.” All of us here at Conejos County also thank and are grateful for the years of service Mr. Sorensen and Mr. King contributed to the citizens of the county.



The bridge with the cement pumper truck is on county road V . The wood plank bridge is on county road 11 just north of county road H.



Hwy. 21, North of Sanford. We installed a new culvert and plans are to re-pave this road and install guard rails.

Road & Bridge Dept.

First of all, I would like to thank and congratulate **Alex Rusty Atencio** and **Mike Lucero** for their years of hard work and service to our County and all their accomplishments. Alex and Mike will retire from Conejos County Road and Bridge at the end of March, 2022. Both Alex and Mike are employees that will leave big shoes to fill and we will miss them both.

Happy Retirement Alex

Alex Atencio has been with Conejos County Road and Bridge for 40 years and has worked in all aspects of the job. Alex was a backup supervisor, he operated all county equipment and mastered the road grader. Alex was always grateful for his position and it showed in the work he did. Alex did an outstanding job for our county and community.

Happy Retirement Mike

Mike Lucero was with our county for a very quick 5 years. Mike was hired as a mechanic and came with some incredible mechanical, welding and fabricating skills. Mike could fix and service just about anything we asked him to do. Mike has a knowledge of just about everything and it showed in the work that he did. Mike did an outstanding job for our county and community.

We have had a few snow storms that required snow removal but not the typical years where snow accumulations were more than 1-3 inches of snow. During the lighter snow storms we cleared, sanded and salted the asphalt roads throughout the county. As Spring sets in and temperatures warm, we try to leave the snow on our gravel roads, by doing so it provides much needed moisture to help keep them in shape during the dryer months. We will remove drifts and deep snow as usual but experience prove that letting the snow melt on the dirt roads enables us to grade them soon after drying which allows us to remove the wash boards.

In this first quarter of 2022 our crews have been busy We have installed 13 culverts throughout the county. One culvert install replaced an old wood plank bridge with a longer lasting and less maintenance culvert crossing. There is a very short window between the frost leaving the ground and making it possible to excavate and the spring runoff to get bridges repaired and culverts installed before the irrigation season begins. (Continued on next page)

We removed the old wooden bridge on county road 11 and poured concrete footers for the new bridge. Our plans are to rebuild this bridge using concrete footers and walls with steel supports and deck. We are doing this across the county in order to cut maintenance time and costs.

During the first quarter of 2022 we graded roads as usual and crushed a few thousand tons of material to a class 6 gravel specification and will use the material on our most troublesome gravel roads. We then hauled this material to Road 6, covering a stretch of one mile.

Some of our Spring and Summer plans are to complete bridge and culver crossings, fill in potholes, and asphalt overlay. Annually, we spend a week grading Forest Service Roads 250 and 103 in order to get them ready for the summer season. 2022 will be a very busy year.

Donnie Martinez, Road & Bridge Director



CONEJOS COUNTY EVERBRIDGE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

The Everbridge System is a mass notification system that is used by Conejos County Administration to provide you with messages regarding Conejos County. These messages are authorized by only the County Commissioners.

The Everbridge System uses a recording that is sent to you by telephone (landline and/or cell) email, or text message. Conejos County will not give or sell your telephone numbers or email addresses.

Registering is easy and you can complete our on-line form to add you to the system by using the link below:

<https://forms.gle/gc2AsNPNdF1HbVhK7>

If you are unable to register online or if you have questions then you please contact one of our Everbridge Administrators. If you are unable to register online, a hard copy of the sign up form is available at the Conejos County Courthouse, Administration Office. We recommend you fill in the form there and leave it and the administrators will register you.

Everbridge Administrators

- Connie Ricci, cricci@co.conejos.co.us (719-376-6799)
- Linda DeHerrera, linda@co.conejos.co.us (719- 376-2014)

We are also able to send out mass notifications for Conejos County Offices and for our local municipalities.

Here are some general guidelines of what we can post:

- ◆ Office Closures
- ◆ County, Municipality, or Community Events
- ◆ Road Closures
- ◆ Water/Sewer Outages

We cannot post:

- ◆ Any Political Campaigning
- ◆ Personal Use or Profit making notifications



CONEJOS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Greetings,

This quarter CCDSS would like to spotlight two new programs to DSS.

The first is our State AND (Aid to Needy Disabled) Navigator program. This program assists clients who are applying for or receiving State AND in filing for their SSI (Supplemental Security Income) application with the Social Security Office.

The second is our CW (Colorado Works) Step program. This program will work with our TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) participants and local employers. CCDSS will subsidize the wages of our participants for a certain period of time to assist them in their goal of re-entering the workforce.

Both programs are contracted with Rocky Mountain SER and we look forward to how these programs can assist both our clients and our local businesses.

Graduating seniors, please apply for the Conejos County DSS scholarship which is due 4/30/2022. You can contact the Department of Social Services with questions regarding the application process.

Recently the state implemented an excessive EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) card replacement policy. This policy requires that our local office issue no more than four EBT cards per year per client. It is important to safeguard your card just like you do your Debit/Credit card. If you would like to make a report of fraudulent EBT use or trafficking of benefits you can call our local office at (719) 376-5455.

April is also Child Abuse Prevention Month. You can do your part and report suspected abuse to the number below.

Nicholas Barela, Dept. of Social Services Director

They can't.
You can.
Be their voice Make the call.
1-844-CO-4-KIDS
1-844-264-6437



Assessor's Office

Tax notices have gone out with a protest form since this year is an intervening year. The value on your tax notice is the value of your property for 2022 taxes which will be due in 2023 unless you receive a Notice of Valuation from our office in May, 2022. During the month of May is the time allowed that one can protest your value or classification of property. One cannot protest the amount of tax paid on your property.

The Assessor's office only values property and the tax entities present us with mill levies which are used to calculate your taxes. If you have a valid reason to protest your property valuation, you can call the Assessor's office, mail in or fax in your protest or come into our office to provide documentation for your protest.

For any person(s) or entity that owns or operates a business, April is the time that Personal Property declarations need to be returned to the Assessor's office. If these are not returned to our office by April 15, 2022 a penalty can be assessed.

Naomi Keys, Conejos County Assessor

Conejos County Public Health Dept. CCPH)

Spring has officially sprung! As we anxiously await

warmer weather, let us reflect on the changes we are already seeing. While January yielded the largest amount of COVID cases to date in Conejos County, we at Public Health are happy to announce that our case numbers are almost non-existent. As of March 23rd, we have zero active cases! We had not been without a COVID case since May of 2020.

What does this mean? It does NOT mean that COVID is over. COVID 19 continues to evolve and change and new variants are expected to present themselves. However, by continuing to engage in proactive protective measures such as mask wearing, staying home when sick, getting tested for COVID when ill and getting immunized; we can work on keeping each other healthy. Our hope is to keep COVID infections at bay and lower the amount of illness and transmission going forward. CCPH continues to offer COVID immunizations at our office as well as promote the CDPHE vaccine buses which will continue to be present in the San Luis Valley, including Conejos County, through the end of July. Free COVID testing continues every Thursday at the Antonito Town Hall from 9:00am-11:00am and La Jara Town Hall from 12:00pm – 4:00pm.

Because our case numbers have dropped so much, we are finally able to resume some of our other core services. CCPH nurses are working closely with our local schools to provide childhood immunizations. These immunizations are mostly provided onsite at schools, (with parental consent of course). We are excited to be able to be conducting these types of services which Public Health has historically provided.

Through our collaboration with local schools, we have been made aware of the increase of youth vaping in our communities and the need to address the danger of it. CCPH staff are providing educational presentations on vaping and tobacco use in our local school districts to junior high and high school students. It is important for parents, school personnel, businesses and community members to know that a person must be 21 years old to obtain vaping materials. It is illegal to sell these to or purchase these items for a person under 21. **Additionally, in Colorado, "Use of tobacco products is prohibited on school property and vehicles, including those of day care, early learning and K-12 schools." [Colo. Rev. Stat. § 25-14-103.5 \(2021\)](#)** A common misconception is that tobacco is less harmful than vaping. CCPH strongly discourages the use of either as well as the use of marijuana, alcohol or other drugs.

Lastly, Isolation and Quarantine guidelines have also changed. Those who have tested positive for COVID must still continue to isolate for 5 days. Vaccinated individuals who were exposed to COVID do not need to quarantine. Unvaccinated exposed individuals only need to quarantine for 5 days if they have had a household exposure. For further clarification or questions, please call Public Health at 719-274-4307; we will be happy to assist.

Please follow us on Facebook for updates and other information.

Denise Jiron, Conejos County Public Health Director



Conejos County Sheriff's Office
14044 Crd G.5
Po Box 37
Conejos Co. 81129
PH# 719-376-2196

The Conejos County Sheriff's Office is in the process of implementing a new project to help with communication between the citizens of the county and the Sheriff's Office. Sheriff Crowther came up with the idea of forming a committee of five to six people from around the county to assist with our open door policy. Once the committee is in place, it will be announced so everyone knows who these people are. The plan is to have the committee meet once a quarter and bring the concerns of the community with them to discuss and address. We would like to have the public's input and ideas to help make our community a better and safer place to live. The idea is to give everyone a voice and a place to have questions and concerns answered. It will also give insight as to why the Sheriff's Office operates the way it does. Sometimes decisions are made by law enforcement that are not the most popular, but are required to be done in a certain way by law. With our open door policy and with the help from the committee, we feel that concerns will be heard and addressed on a more personal level. This will give our citizens an opportunity to ask and receive more individualized answers to their questions and concerns.

We want to hear from the community on how we are doing and how we can do better. Our goal is to give the best service possible to the residents of Conejos County and make it better place to live and raise a family. We feel that having a more direct line of communication and being more in tune with the community is paramount in reaching our objectives.

Sheriff Crowther has implemented the motto "Step It Up" for the sheriff's office employees for the year 2022. From the highest ranking to the newest employee, and everyone in between we are stepping things up and working on improving the services that are given to the community each and every day.

Garth Crowther, Conejos County Sheriff

Treasurer's Office

Greetings from the Conejos County Treasurer's Office. Here's an update for Spring 2022. Our office mailed out the 2021 tax notices on January 14, 2022. Full payments are due by April 30, 2022 and 2nd half tax payments are due by June 15, 2022. If you would like a mailed tax receipt, please provide a self-addressed stamped envelope with your payment. Otherwise, your mailed-in check will serve as your receipt. Please note you can either mail your payment to: PO Box 97, Conejos, CO 81129, or pay online at: conejoscounty.org or call our office to make a payment over the phone.

If you have specific questions regarding the Senior Property Tax Exemption please contact the County Assessor's Office at (719) 376-5585. For questions on the Disabled Veterans' Exemption please contact our County Veterans' Office at (719) 376-6725.

For your information our office will be transferring to a new computer software company later in the year. Our current system with Pueblo County Shared Services has served us well but will no longer be providing those services. We look forward to our new computer vendor soon!

If we can be of further assistance in the Treasurer's Office, please contact our office at (719) 376-5919. **HAPPY EASTER!**

Mack Crowther, Conejos County Treasurer

Commissioners

As of March 30, 2022, the county has received \$125,342.48 of sales tax revenue generated from retail sales in the county during the month of January of 2022 and

\$790.02 collected by the Land Use Dept. Throughout the year, we will continue to update the revenues as we have learned the county will receive monthly, quarterly, and some businesses will open seasonally and report the taxes collected while they are open. In regards to the use of the sales tax funds, the commissioners approved salary increases for both the Sheriff's Office and Ambulance Service. The commissioners also approved the purchase of new vehicles for the Sheriff's Department, reinstating the hiring of a patrol deputy position, the hiring of a part-time nurse in order to meet jail regulations, and support services for officers in the area of additional expenses in updating county law enforcement policies. The commissioners supported the ambulance service in implementing a full-time schedule for secondary calls, reinstating a primary service employee position, and initial costs such as architectural and engineering costs for a new ambulance base. Once again, sales tax revenue can only be used in these two departments and we anticipate inflationary increases in fuel costs, insurances, medical supplies and other necessary operating expenses.

At the March 17, 2022 meeting the Board of County Commissioners appointed a six-member Redistricting Commission. The Commission consists of the 3 commissioners, a member of the Republican and Democratic Parties, and an unaffiliated registered voter of the county. Assisting in the process is the county attorney, Nick Sarmiento, Pete Magee, San Luis Valley GIS/GPS Authority, Nathan Ruybal, County Clerk & Recorder, and Tressesa Martinez, County Administrator. At the county level, the three county commissioner districts will be reapportioned to balance the districts based on new 2020 population data. As per state statute, once the deviation in the 10-year county population is greater than 5%, whether negative or positive, commissioner districts must be adjusted to reflect an ideal population per district. [The 2020 Census showed Conejos County's 10-year actual population decreased by 795 residents.](#)

The Commission has until September 30, 2023 to complete the redistricting of commissioner districts; however, the Commission has met once and set a target completion date of Jan. 31, 2023. During the process, the work done during the commission planning meetings will be to present a minimum of **two** plans that citizens of the county will then have the opportunity to review and comment at public work session and/or review and comment on the county website. The last time Commissioner Districts were reapportioned was after the 2010 census with the reapportioned districts being approved in 2011. [We will be posting meeting and website postings on the county website, in the Valley Courier and the Facebook page, Citizens for a Better Conejos County.](#)

[The Board of Commissioners, Administration, Nick Sarmiento—county attorney, and Ernest Abeyta—County Ambulance Director have been working with Zach Weiderspon, Conejos County Hospital Administrator in working on a site, close to the hospital, for a new Conejos County Ambulance Service base.](#) In addition, the county will be pursuing a DOLA (Dept. of Local Affairs) grant and other sources of funding to build the new ambulance base. We will be updating citizens of the county as final details are worked out.

The commissioners were asked by Larry Brown, CSU Extension Director for office space for a second 4-H position, of which the posting and interviews have begun. We found office space and are thrilled to have this agent located in the southern part of the SLV. Once hired, this agent will concentrate on implementing a brand new program called Juntos 4-H. The goal of the program is to work with underprivileged youth who are not finishing high school on schedule and to work with these youth in some sort of post secondary education. [The new agent will also work with the other agent throughout the SLV in the traditional 4-H program.](#)

Commissioners Baroz, Garcia, and Jarvies

Emergency Management



The Conejos County Office of Emergency Management has been very active this year. We were the first in the region to complete the State Colorado Emergency Preparedness Assessment (CEPA). This Assessment will guide us in our planning and risk assessment mitigation work for the next 3 years.

We have completed our first of two required Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) group meetings. These meetings bring all the first responders and county departments together along with our SLV Regional, Rio Grande National Forest and Colorado State partners. During the February 10th meeting we reviewed the Conejos County and Colorado Division of Fire Protection and Control Operating Plan for Wildfires and Mutual Aid. We held a Thomas Ranch Fire Table Top Exercise and established some objectives to work on.

We used this time for discussions and conversations involving the Conejos County Hazard Mitigation Plan that will be worked on this year and finished in 2023. The last plan was developed in 2016 and finished in 2017. All six counties will coordinate and work on their individual plans as the SLV Region. We have combined our efforts and funds to obtain a FEMA Grant to pay for 75% of the cost of the plan (\$78,000); the balance will be shared by the 6 counties.

Conejos County will work with all 5 towns in the county and other population centers on the Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan update. We will be seeking input and suggestions from all the county citizens. There will be several public/zoom meetings in the county to discuss our hazard and mitigation needs. Times and dates will be posted on our web site and various other locations.

Fire Concerns –

We used to have a “Fire Season” but with the recent fires in Colorado this “season” has been extended – year round. We have learned with the Marshall Fire near Boulder, CO and the recent grass fires throughout Colorado, we should be prepared to respond to wildfires all 12 months of the year. The spring season was at one time our prevalent high wind advisory or “Red Flag” season. But, with the extreme drought the West is experiencing over the past few years and with the expectation of continued drought, this “Red Flag Warning” is happening throughout the Year. The “Red Flag Warnings” are mostly due to high wind advisory coupled with dry conditions and minimal moisture. These warnings are issued by the National Weather Service for our area. PLEASE, check these warnings BEFORE burning outdoors. Conejos has an automatic fire ban during all Red Flag days to protect our county.

Rodney King, Conejos County Emergency Manager

Land Use Department

Welcome landowners of Conejos County. We are here to help you with any questions regarding development of your property. Your home and property are one of the largest investments you will make in your lifetime. We can help you with development regulations and subdivision guidelines.

COUNTY USE TAX ON CONSTRUCTION & BUILDING MATERIALS – The use tax on construction and building materials for any structure built or modified in Conejos County can either be paid at the time a permit is obtained and a voucher will be issued to the applicant to take to a retailer as evidence of paying the tax, or the applicant can fill out an affidavit indicating building materials will be purchased at retailers in the county. As you plan your construction project, if you are buying your materials outside of the county, plan to pay the 2% use tax based on your contractor estimates. If you would like assistance with the calculations, contact our office for information and calculators we have that the State of Colorado has provided our office with.

LAND USE CODE AMENDMENTS PROPOSED - The proposed code amendments to Conejos County Kennel Regulations, Short-Term Rentals, Land Use Construction Permits, and the Land Use Fee Schedule are on the second phase of the review and comment period. The Conejos County Planning Commission completed their review on March 17th and made a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners for approval. The Board of County Commissioners are scheduled to review these amendments on Thursday, April 7, 2022, at 9:30 AM. You can still review the proposed amendments as they are available for your review on the county website – Land Use Department. Please submit your comments by Wednesday, April 6, 2022, by end of business at 4:30 PM.

CONEJOS COUNTY IS ZONED – PERMITS ARE REQUIRED - Do you know how your property is zoned and what that should mean to you? Every property in Conejos County is zoned – rural, agriculture, residential, community town site, commercial or industrial. Each zone district establishes minimum requirements for buildings and structures, and how your property can be used. Do you know how your land is zoned? We want to help you understand zoning. Call our office with your questions.

BUILDING CODE – The land use staff are proposing the adoption of the 2018 International Building Code/2018 International Residential Code. We need to hear your comments. Send an email to the land use office at landuse@co.conejos.co.us to share your thoughts. The Planning Commission will be discussing the adoption of building codes at the April 20th and May 18th meetings. You are welcome to attend those meetings, or you can find more information on the county website – Land Use Department.

Linda DeHerrera – Administrator
Chris DeHerrera – Inspector/Enforcement Officer
Michelle Bradford – Clerical Support
Phone 719-376-2014
Email: landuse@co.conejos.co.us

*Wishing all Conejos County Residents a
Happy and Family Fun Easter Weekend,
From Conejos County Employees!*

OUR BEAUTIFUL CONEJOS COUNTY



County Road J and 18



Rio Grande River

The latest and most updated news stories can be found on the county website: <https://conejoscounty.org> All offices and departments have a link to their individual web page and some have a Facebook page with very useful information.

Source used in this edition: www.alamosactitizen.com March 11, 2022 article