

ELDORADO VISTAS

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 4

April 2006

IN THIS ISSUE

Food for Thought	2
Times Change.....	3
RV Screening	3
In the Community	4-5
Johnny D. Boggs.....	6
Greater RoadRunner	7
Family Getaway	7

Monthly Newsletter of the Eldorado Community Improvement Association

1 La Hacienda Loop, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87508 ▼ (505) 466-4248 ▼ www.eldoradocommunity.org

Your Community Resource!

DO YOU KNOW THAT THE VISTA Grande Public Library (VGPL) serves over 34 communities in Southeastern Santa Fe County and has more than 60 dedicated volunteers working at the library each week? Are you aware that the library is open 28 hours a week, including some evening and weekend hours? Have you stopped by to attend a local author's talk, to borrow a DVD or audio book, or to register your child in the after-school reading program?

Get to know the Vista Grande Public Library!

A HISTORY OF RAPID GROWTH

The 34+ communities served by VGPL include Eldorado and surrounding subdivisions, Lamy, Galisteo, Cañoncito, and Glorieta. Eldorado residents, however, make up 79% of the library's registered patrons. The library is just under five years old, and has experienced rapid growth. In April 2001, it opened with only 5,000 items in circulation. Today, the library is home to more than 27,000 items, with new materials being processed daily. The physical space was expanded to accommodate the increase in circulation items, a separate children's room was added for our community's youngest readers, and public hours were increased to provide evening access to patrons. This was achieved, in part, through the generosity of two Eldorado families and countless volunteer hours.

As the library continues to grow, in both the number of patrons and volume of materials, it is apparent that another addition is needed. In recognition of the library's invaluable service to the southeastern corridor of Santa Fe County, the 2005 and 2006 New Mexico State Legislatures appropriated funds to begin a library expansion planning process. This is great news for all served by VGPL!

SERVING YOUR COMMUNITY

While the VGPL is open to the public for 28 hours each week, it is also available for use during non-public hours. In the evening, the library holds adult programs such as talks by artists and authors, and serves as a meeting location for book clubs and La Cañada (the non-profit wireless VGPL provider).

Youth programs include story hours and after-school and summer reading programs. VGPL also hosts and sponsors a trophy-winning youth chess team! In short, VGPL is the home for a variety of services and activities that significantly increase the quality of life in Eldorado and the surrounding communities.

In addition to serving as a meeting space and hosting adult and youth programming, VGPL provides a multitude of traditional library services to its communities. These include borrowing privileges for books, periodicals, audio books, movies, and music. The library also provides patrons with access to the latest technology, including new computers with a high-speed broadband Internet connection. You can even access the electronic card catalog from home via the web.

FIND OUT FOR YOURSELF

Stop by often, or register with the library and get regular announcements of upcoming events, schedule updates, and information on new materials. The library is also planning festivities to celebrate our 5th anniversary in April. Watch for details.

Although VGPL does receive some restricted monies from Santa Fe County and the New Mexico State Library, almost all of the operating funds come from individual donations, local businesses, and events such as book sales and the annual Ice Cream Social and Silent Auction. Show your support! In addition to becoming a regular library patron, be sure to attend these and other public events. If you would like to get even more involved, consider becoming a library volunteer.

*ECIA Board
Work Study
Meeting,
Community
Center, Mon.,
April 17, 7 pm*

Library Hours

Sun/Mon: Closed
Tues/Thurs: 1-6 pm
Wed: 1-9 pm
Fri/Sat: 12-5 pm

Anna Stucky, Max Van Domselaar and Tom Van Domselaar enjoying the library's reading program.



PHOTO BY CHUCKWESTPHOTOGRAPHER.COM

Share your comments with us!

For policy and
deadline, see
below

Editorial Policy

Vistas invites opinions, ideas, stories, photos, and art from the community at large. Please include contact numbers for fact checking purposes. The newsletter will not publish unsigned letters or material deemed inflammatory. Material will be printed at the discretion of the editors. Letters over 150 words will be edited for fit. Community announcements are welcome; accompanying photos are welcome, too. **DEADLINE:** Newsletter deadline is the 3rd day of each month. Submissions can be dropped off or mailed to the ECIA office or emailed to info@eldoradocommunity.org. Please include "Attn: *Vistas*" in your message.

Mission Statement

The mission of *Vistas*, the monthly newsletter of the ECIA, is to inform the Eldorado community about issues before the ECIA Board and the membership at large. By so doing, the publication seeks to foster increased neighborhood pride and community participation in the decision making process.

Prepare for Long Fire Season

WINTER HAS BEEN DRY WITH above normal temperatures, and these conditions are predicted to continue through summer. This means one thing: an intense and prolonged brush fire season. Consider the recommendations below from El Dorado Fire and Rescue Service (EFRS) and other sources for keeping safe our families, our homes and our community.

- ▼ Stack firewood and anything flammable well away from your home, fences and outbuildings. Coyote and other wooden fences could provide a path to lead flames right up to your house!
- ▼ Keep garden hoses with sufficient length to cover your whole house, and keep them connected to your hose bibs at all times.
- ▼ Create a safety zone of at least 30 feet around your home by clearing all flammable vegetation, including around the bases of junipers and other trees.
- ▼ Never burn brush or trash outdoors—it is dangerous and illegal! Call 955-2250 for information regarding waste disposal at the nearby county waste transfer station.

▼ Be extra careful with any fire outdoors including smoking, barbecues, or cutting wood with a gas-powered chainsaw (which can create sparks), etc.

- ▼ All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) or other powered vehicles can cause a fire and are not allowed in greenbelts or other off-road areas.
- ▼ Do not endanger your property or that of your neighbors by using any type of fireworks.

Eldorado residents can also help protect our community by volunteering with the EFRS. About 30 volunteers now perform all of the work. Volunteers are given comprehensive training, and sessions are held every Wednesday night at the main fire station. New volunteers are always needed as administrators, fire fighters and paramedics. To learn more, call 466-1204.

—Dan Drobnis



Meet Your Neighbors

A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO, members of three households got together for a Neighborhood Watch meeting. Soon after, one member of the group noticed that an automobile cruised their street every day, its occupants stopping and knocking on a neighbor's door. This member knew, because of the meeting, that that home's occupants were gone during the day at jobs in Santa Fe. When the same car returned the following day, the Neighborhood Watch member decided to call the Sheriff's Department at 986-2402 and make a report of suspicious activity in the neighborhood.

With the license number from the watch member, the Sheriff's Department opened a file, ran it through national and state databases and hit a home run. The car belonged to a known burglar whose method of operation was to cruise neighborhoods checking for unoccupied houses that could be easily broken into and burglarized. Our Sheriff's Department picked up the suspect before he could harm his intended victims and placed him under arrest for earlier charges involving the same M.O.

Get to know the folks next door and down the street. Get a Neighborhood Watch going in your neighborhood by going to eldoradocommunity.org and clicking on Neighborhood Watch.

—Frank Schober

EAW&SD Tips

WITH THE DRY AND WARM weather this winter, water conservation is even more important than usual. The following tips can help you reduce water use outdoors:

- ▼ If you plant any new vegetation this year, plant primarily xeric landscaping. New plants require "extra" water the first year to become established, so be selective and, if possible, keep new plantings to a minimum.
- ▼ Evaporation is always an issue in our area, so mulch trees, shrubs, and flowers heavily. Even small gravel can help. Put berms around larger plants or beds to avoid runoff.
- ▼ Practice soaking on an infrequent basis for watering plants. Avoid spraying. Try to always water late in the evening or early in the morning.
- ▼ Use rain barrels, cisterns, or other containers to capture roof runoff for irrigating plants.
- ▼ If you have a water softener, check that it is recycling on volume and not time-of-day.
- ▼ Look for leaks, even with your yard faucets. At this time of year a "typical" one-person household will use less than 2,700 gallons per month; a two-person household, less than 4,500 gallons per month; a four-person household, less than 7,800 gallons per month; etc. Usage higher than these averages could indicate a leak.

—EAW&SD

From the President

TIMES CHANGE; THE ECIA BOARD changes. However, each member, new or old, has as a continuing goal to be civil with all that pertains to the needs/concerns of the residents. So, when I read in the March *Vistas* that residents had researched and presented information about a dog park to the Board and had been "brushed off," I became concerned. I went into action. I talked to staff, emailed a former Board member who served at that time and, finally, talked to **Nancy Ormsbee**, one of the authors of the letter to the editor. The following is what I found out:

From staff: There is no file on the issue of a dog park in the Association office. Staff did call our insurance broker and found that a dog park may not impact our insurance premiums a great deal.

From the Board member: A location on community-owned land that would not impact neighbors was an issue, but may be worth investigating again. Also of concern to the Board at the time was a method for keeping the area clean. A "pooper-scooper" patrol would be needed.

From Nancy Ormsbee: The committee of residents interested in establishing a dog park and the group that presented the information to the Board worked about nine years ago. They did a lot of work and believed they had a comprehensive plan. They had determined about an acre would suffice at first. They researched fencing possibilities and went online to determine how other dog parks were regulated. They even thought about benches and shade-cover for residents while their pets played.

In defense of the previous Board, I have to say that sometimes issues brought forth can get dropped when the Board's attention is diverted to another, more pressing concern. I understand that, but now may be the time for investigation into the possibility of a dog park. Times change; there are more residents and most of them have a canine pet or two that need to run and play off leash.

I will put the dog park on the March work session agenda for the Board to determine if they are interested in pursuing the idea. If you are interested, call the Association office or me. We will not give you the "brush off"!

—Jeanne Klein

Blending In RV SCREENING/PROTECTION

You have a large investment in your motor home, travel trailer, fifth-wheel or other RV. Your RV may sit for weeks, maybe even months, exposed to elements including wind-driven dirt and dust, snow, bird droppings and tree sap. Especially harmful are the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays that can cause paint and interior surfaces to fade, while vinyl, rubber, leather and fabrics can dry, crack and deteriorate.

The least expensive protection for your RV is an RV cover. While there are different cover designs and materials available, the most important considerations are ease of use, quality and guideline compliance. So it is important to find an earth tone RV cover that is easy to handle, yet strong and durable.

Custom-fit covers made for a particular RV provide better protection than universal or ready-fit covers because they follow the exact contours of the vehicle. These covers will also usually have openings for doors so you can go into and out of the vehicle without going through the hassle of removing the cover.

Remember, the objective of the RV Screening Guideline is to make RVs less conspicuous and more congruous with the environment.

STUCCO COLORS

Before you apply a new stucco color coat, please verify the color is on the approved list of exterior colors in Section 9 of the October 20, 2005 *Guidelines for Protective Covenants and Building Restrictions for Eldorado at Santa Fe*. If you are considering a color that is not on the approved list, you must fill-out an Architectural Application Submission and a Variance Request form before you apply the stucco.

I want to thank everyone for your support and efforts in making Eldorado a place to enjoy all of the great New Mexico "enchanted views." Suggestion... try compliance, first!

—Charles Smith, the ECIA CCR



Tan RV Cover with doorway
Photo from www.adcoprod.com

ECIA OFFICE

#1 La Hacienda Loop
Santa Fe, NM 87508
466-4248, 466-4249
info@eldoradocommunity.org
www.eldoradocommunity.org

General Manager
Vacant

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President

Jeanne Klein
466-2466
Jpkeducate@aol.com

Treasurer

Dan Drobnis
466-4781
Drobnisd@sdsc.edu

Director

Sandy MacGregor
466-0882
s.macg@earthlink.net

Director

Johnny Martinez
466-0696
Jmartinez54@comcast.net

Director

Andrea Cohen
466-2541
acmb@cybermesa.com

Director

Ed Benrock
466-2088
Francesed@msn.com

Director

Philip Balcombe
466-2982
pgbalcombe@cybermesa.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Finance: Gisela Knight
Architecture: Bill Schwent
Conservation: Steve Wust
Stable: Dina Sassone
466-2516
Election: Vacant
Road: Ed Benrock
Information: Ken McPherson
Neighborhood Watch:
Sandra Vreeland

VISTAS NEWSLETTER

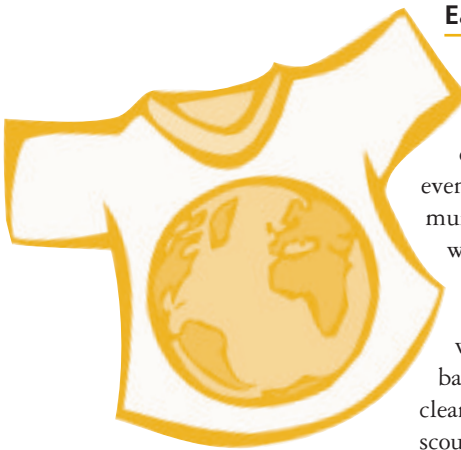
Editor:
Ken McPherson
466-4161
kenzwork@hubwest.com
Designer:
Hope O. Kiah
hope@webdesignbyhope.com
Editorial Assistants:
Lynn McPherson
Debby Padilla
466-4248

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Vista Grande Library
466-READ
Security
204-2945
Fire and Rescue
466-1204
Animal Control
992-1621

IN THE COMMUNITY

Earth Day



April 22 is Earth Day, and the Eldorado Community Improvement Association (ECIA) would like the members of the community to participate in this important event. We plan to pick up trash along our community's main roads. We hope that residents will volunteer in groups or alone to spend a little time that Saturday morning and join in on this community-minded event. We will supply you with safety vests and plastic bags. We hope that different groups will help clean up our roadways, like the soccer club, boy scouts, girl scouts, moms club, ERA, and any other group that is civic minded and wants to help. The ECIA will help, and we'll pick up the full trash bags you leave along the main roads. We will also have hot-dogs and soda for everyone at the Community Center when we are finished. Please come out and meet your neighbors while doing your community a service. For information, call the ECIA office at 466-4248.

Stroll the Stables

You are welcome to stroll through the stables. Just ask any one of us you find; we will probably talk your ear off about horses. But, please, please do not feed the horses at the stables. Many horses are on special diets, and can get colic and become ill or even die if given the wrong food. Thank you.

Water Festival

As part of Earth Day in Eldorado, the Water District is sponsoring a Community Water Fair to be held at the El Dorado Elementary School on Saturday, April 22 (not April 29). There will be lots of great information on water conservation techniques. Special tips on xeriscape gardening in the 285 area will also be available. We are planning activities for all ages. To volunteer and help with the Fair, contact **Mary Ann Hale** at 466-0610.

First Bird Walk

After the great response from the March issue of *Vistas*, we are going forward with planned bird walks. Our first one will be on Saturday, April 1, at 8:30 am. We will meet at the Community Center. For more information, please call **Ron Duffy** at 982-2890.

Moon Phases for A



Love in a Dry Land

On Thursday, April 20, from 7-9 pm, there will be a poetry reading at the Vista Grande Public Library by poets **Ellen Andolsek**, **Melissa Hopf Duran**, and **Kathryn Ugoretz** entitled, "How do our intimate relationships reflect the landscape where they occur?"

The poems assembled by these prize-winning poets explore the tensions between romantic and nonromantic love and the experience of living in New Mexico's high desert climate. Desert, mesa, and conifer forests permeate writing that examines our human attachments and the land where we live.

Annual ERA Meeting

The Eldorado Residents Association will hold its Annual Meeting on April 10th beginning at 7 pm at the Community Center. Two ERA Board members are up for re-election: **Pat Kuhlhoff** and **Bert Warren**. There are three other positions open on the Board. Anyone interested in participating on the Board should call Pat Kuhlhoff at 466-4877. Terms are for two years.

This year's guest speaker will be **Guy Monroe**, Captain of the El Dorado Fire and Rescue Department. Because of our continued drought concerns, he will be speaking about fire prevention in Eldorado.

The big Flea Market is scheduled for May 14 at the Community Center. Watch for details in May's *Vistas*. For information, call 466-4877.

Artisans Presents

The Eldorado Arts and Crafts Association's April meeting features the popular art store Artisans. This is an annual presentation by the folks from Artisans where they show the newest items available at their store. The program will be held April 27 at the El Dorado Fire Station on Ave. Vista Grande at 7 pm. Free and open to the public. For information, call 466-6245.

May Studio Tour Coming Soon

The 15th Annual Eldorado Studio Tour is well into the planning stage with 94 artists planning to show their work at 60 studios throughout the community. The tour will be Saturday and Sunday, May 20 and 21, from 10 am to 5 pm.

PHOTO BY KEN MCPHERSON





Astronomy Corner

Stellar Evolution

Stars shine, "burning" the stuff they are made of (hydrogen and helium mainly), converting these elements into heavier elements. The term "burning" refers not to a chemical burning but a nuclear burning. This process maintains a balance between the pressure of the stellar interior against the force of gravity, which tries to contract it. Eventually the star will use its nuclear fuel, and many things can happen depending on its original mass.

Stars with less than eight solar masses will form planetary nebulae and white dwarfs.

Stars with masses greater than eight solar masses will end as supernovae. The stellar remnants are neutron stars or black holes.

April Sky:

Saturn, magnificent in a telescope after evening twilight in ENE; **Venus**, high over the horizon before the sun; **Mars**, high and dimmer in SSE; **Jupiter** rises about midnight in SE; the **Lyrid meteor shower** will occur between April 20 and 22 in the early hours.

Next time: Star Brightness

—Juan Alvarez
Jalva88610@aol.com

May's *Vistas* will have details, or for information, call 466-6245 or 466-3256 or 466-4534.

Life Savers

The swimming pool opens May 27 this year. We are looking for life-guards for the season. You must have current lifeguard certification and a current CPR certificate. Anyone interested, please contact **Bill Donohue** at the ECIA office at 466-4248.

April Events

Left out? Help us compile a comprehensive events listing.

Email info@eldoradocommunity.org with your meeting/event information, or bring it to the ECIA office by the 8th of the month for publication in the following month's *Vistas*. Please include "Attn: Vistas" and be sure to indicate:



1. **Type of Event**
2. **Location**
3. **Date & Time**
4. **A Resource Person** (one who can answer questions both about the event and the sponsoring organization) and his/her telephone number.

Photographs (digital or snapshots) are encouraged!

Note: All meetings are at the Community Center, unless otherwise noted.

LR=Living Room, F=Foyer, CFR=Conference Room, CR=Class Room, RR=Railroad, K=Kitchen

APRIL SPECIAL EVENTS

ERA Quarterly Meeting	Mon., Apr. 10, 7-9 pm		
Earth Day	Sat., Apr. 22	Help clean our roads	466-42428

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Road Committee	Mon., Apr. 3, 6-7 pm	Ed Benrock	466-2088	CFR
Neighborhood Watch	Mon., Apr. 3, 7-9 pm	Sandra Vreeland	466-6079	LR
Perform. Arts Assoc.	Tues., Apr. 4, 7 pm	Bruce Blossman		RR
Conservation Committee	Tues., Apr. 4, 7-9 pm	Stephen Wust	466-0436	LR
EAW&SD*	Tues., Apr. 4, 7-9 pm		466-2411	RR
285 Coalition	Wed., Apr. 5, 7-9 pm	Kathy Pilnock	466-1598	CFR
Architectural Committee	Tues., Apr. 11, 7-9 pm	Bill Schwent	466-7708	CFR
Finance Committee	Wed., Apr. 12, 10-noon	Gisela Knight	466-2568	CFR
Board Work Study	Mon., Apr. 17, 7-9 pm	ECIA	466-4248	CFR
EAW&SD*	Tues., Apr. 18, 7-9 pm		466-2411	RR
ECIA Board	Thurs., Apr. 20, 7-9 pm	ECIA	466-4248	CR
Information Committee	Mon., Apr. 24, 7-8 pm	Ken McPherson	466-4161	F
Architectural Committee	Tues., Apr. 25, 7-9 pm	Bill Schwent	466-7708	CFR
Stable Committee	Tues., Apr. 25, 7-9 pm	Dina Sassone	466-2516	LR

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Book Club	Sat., Apr. 8, 9-10:30 am	Joan Lamarque	466-6000	
Book Club/Pot Luck	call for date and time	Ken Fischer	466-2537	
Library Book Group	3rd Mon., 7-9 pm	Shelley Moore	466-9636	VGPL
ERA Coffee Social	Tues., Apr. 4, 10-11 am	Joe Auburg	466-1484	F, K
Search & Rescue	Thurs., Apr. 13, 6:30-9:30 pm	Dave Burdett	466-9765	CR
Troop 414 Committee	1st Wed., 7:30-9 pm	Bruce Blossman	955-0880	CR
Venturing Crew 414	2nd & 4th Wed., 7-9 pm	Vera Hayduk	466-1726	C
Cub Scout Pack 414	4th Tues., 7-9 pm	Ty Ransdell	466-2579	Sm Gym
La Canada Wireless	Mon., Apr. 10, 7-9	lcwireless.org		LR
MOMS Club	Call for date and time	M. van Domselaar	466-3864	
ERA Coffee Social	Tues., Apr. 18, 10-11 am	Joe Auburg	466-1484	F, K
Shakespeare Group	Tues., Apr. 18	Mary Denison	466-6657	CFR

WEEKLY MEETINGS

AA	Tuesdays, 5:30-6:50 pm			LR
AA	Wed., 10:30-11:30 am			RR
AA	Fridays, 6-7 pm			CFR
AA	Sat., 10:45-11:45 am			LR
AA	Sun., 5:15-6:15 pm			CFR
Boy Scout Troop 414	Wednesdays, 7-9 pm	Paul Tuck	466-4815	RR
Bridge	1st & 3rd Fri., 1-4:30 pm			CR, LR
Bridge	2nd & 4th Fri., 1-4:30 pm	Pat Lavengood	466-9765	CR, LR
Bridge	Wednesdays, 9-noon	Nancy Rost	466-2832	LR
Community Band	Thursdays, 6-8 pm	Joel Hopko	466-8412	
Fire & Rescue Training	Wednesdays, 7-9 pm	Fire Station Office	466-1204	Station
Fire & Rescue Work Duty	Saturdays, Call for time	Fire Station Office	466-1204	Station
Senior Lunch**	Wednesdays, 12-1 pm	Therese Janowski	466-1397	CR
Knitting Club	Tues., 10 am-noon	Joyce Hanmer	466-3018	LR
Adult Volleyball	Wed., 7-9 pm	Arlene Mayer	466-6641	School

*Eldorado Area Water and Sanitation District

**Reservations Required

VISIT OUR WEBSITE: www.eldoradocommunity.org

A Passion for Westerns



Johnny D. Boggs
at a book signing.

MY ASSIGNMENT WAS TO interview a professional writer, Johnny D. Boggs, an Eldorado resident whom many on the *Vistas* staff felt would be an interesting subject for a feature article. The key facts relating to his career can be easily obtained with a Google search, which shows his output of published works to be immense. I felt, however, that I needed to see him in person and get to know something more about the man behind the website, www.johnnydboggs.com.

We met at the Las Chivas coffee shop on a busy Friday morning. He had just dropped his son off at the Montessori School and was waiting for me. He was easily identifiable, dressed in what I would describe as up-scale western clothing. He is tall, with a light beard that doesn't hide his pleasant features. He is soft-spoken with a barely perceptible drawl, the latter obviously from his roots in rural South Carolina.

I was amused when Boggs informed me, perhaps in jest, that his high-school typing teacher influenced him more than any of his teachers since she had given him an invaluable skill that sustains his work today. Later in the interview, speaking of his earliest attempts at writing, he revealed that his third-grade teacher had required his class to write a

page of fiction... "to just make something up." Boggs's story was so interesting that his classmates urged him to write stories for them. He remembers that he received early "royalties" of 5 and 10 cents for those first works.

Following college, Johnny began his writing career as a journalist, and became a sports writer for newspapers in Dallas and Ft. Worth, Texas. When I asked him about his experience in those jobs, he stressed the value to every writer of having a good editor. Reminiscent of his experience as a journalist, he also proudly informed me that he "never misses a deadline."

Boggs's work as a reporter did not deter him from the writing of fiction. At last count, he had published 27 books and a score of short stories, most of them with western themes. Asked about the roots of the popular western, he answered that to understand the western one has to know and understand both the American Revolution and the Civil War. The values of fortitude, self-reliance and honesty that most of us feel are still the base course of the American way were stated and repeated in those events. To make the experiences he transmits to his readers live in their hearts and minds, Boggs stresses that he must make his characters and their surroundings not only real but accurate. To do this, he says, he follows William Faulkner's advice to writers. He reads, and when asked how much, he replies, "A lot—every day."

Asked about editors and editing and whether or not galley proofs are still major factors, Boggs was quick to give his assent that they are. His wife Lisa, he says, is both his first and best editor and his most thorough critic. He also places much emphasis on working with editors assigned by his publishers. "I depend on them; not only for suggestions relating to spelling, usage and style but also for suggestions that will improve the story I am telling." He laughed when I suggested something that all in the business of writing would agree with: "Depending on spell-check alone won't save you if you haven't been careful about your proofreading."

Johnny D. Boggs is easy to spot if you happen to see him at Las Chivas or anywhere else in town. He is likely to be the best, (western) dressed person in any venue. I don't think I'm one to indulge in spurious flights of fancy, but he has a distinct aura about him that states "Craftsman-Westerns-Thoughtful." If you do see him some day, you may agree with me. In the meantime, having neglected reading any westerns since I read those of Zane Grey in high school, I'm going to start reading Johnny D. Boggs.

—Frank Schober

Greater Roadrunner

I AM ALWAYS STARTLED BY THE SIZE of this bird as it passes near my window and stops for a drink of water. The Greater Roadrunner (RR) is resident year round although not frequently seen. The RR is 23 inches long, much of that made up of a very long tail. Their wingspan is 22 inches, although the RR prefers to run rather than fly. Males and females are similar, having a long down-curved bill, a streaked, shaggy brown back, a blue eye line ending in a red spot and a slight crest that can be raised. The birds are found in the southern U.S., west of the Mississippi, in dry, open, rocky desert and grasslands.

Pairs seem to be permanent and both birds defend their territory. Males court by holding their head high and stiff, with wings and tail dropped, crest raised, and with bows and a spread tail. Four to six eggs are incubated mostly by the male for 20 days in a crude, low stick-nest lined by grasses, feathers and even snakeskin. The eggs hatch asynchronously. The young fledge in 18 days and are catching their own food in 21 days. Food includes

snakes, lizards, insects, rodents, birds (especially small perching birds) and some fruit and seeds. Asynchronous hatching means that later hatchlings will quickly die during food shortages, ensuring that the first hatched will survive.

RRs can lower their body temperature to 91° F and can run 15 mph. Pairs of RRs hunt rattlesnakes cooperatively, trying to grab the head and then killing the snake by bashing its head against a rock.

The RR is seldom heard—I have heard them just once and recognized their call as a member of the cuckoo family (www.naturesongs.com/grro2.wav).

The RR is well known as having a flippant personality, mostly from the RR cartoon character created in 1949 (along with Wile E. Coyote) by Chuck Jones. The idea for the character came from films based on the Mark Twain book, *Roughing It*.

The RR is the official State Bird of New Mexico.

—Pam Henline



PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER

Family Getaway

DESPITE MY JOY OVER THE EARLY unfolding of this year's first daffodil, I have a deep need to frolic in rolling whitened plains. It's no wonder, considering our remarkable lack of snow this winter. But while I crave cold and moisture—a true winter—I delight in the sunshine. Ditto, the children. Our house echoes with the sounds of four of them, and they are impatient to throw off the shackles of cold weather wear. No better way to find freedom this spring than to visit the spot my oldest son told me is the best place he's ever been: White Sands National Monument.

White Sands lies fifteen miles southwest of Alamogordo. On a satellite image it looks like a white smudge of surging water flanked by mountains and desert. Waves of foam appear to churn onto dry land.

This isn't far from the truth. The gypsum dunes are the largest of their kind in the world. Covering roughly 275 square miles, they are always in motion as they are pushed across the dry scrub plains by the wind. Plants and animals either adapt to the constantly changing environment or they're buried. And one word of caution to human visitors—it isn't hard to become disoriented in this world of white. Always travel out from a focal point and keep the kids in sight.

This might prove difficult considering the fun to

be had! There is excellent sledding, for those who aren't too heavy (most adults are too heavy). My kids also had a lot of fun catching air over the tops of the dunes while I stood below with my camera poised. Photographic opportunities abound—the horizon is ever

changing! Take water to drink and wear sunscreen and sunglasses. The dunes can be blinding in full sun. Also, make sure you pack warm clothes if you're planning to go before the temperatures skyrocket. Storms can whip up in a flash, so be prepared to shield yourself from blowing sand.

For more information and directions, go to the page on the National Park Service's website at <http://www.nps.gov/whsa/index.htm>. Total mileage from Santa Fe to the Monument: 241.

—Ana June



PHOTO BY ANA JUNE

Soren June catching "fat air."

Security
204-2945

Students Making News

The December 2005 issue of *Vistas* had an article on the journalism club at El Dorado Elementary School. We thought it commendable that they wanted to put out a newsletter. Just this past March they published their first edition. The photos, layout and writing are all top-notch and interesting. There are articles on nutrition, exercise, dragons, an interview and more. As the newsletter says, it is "written by students, for students."

If you would like to see this impressive maiden effort, email Jeryl Spear (the parent/volunteer who helped the students) at eldoradoeagles1@aol.com and request an Adobe Acrobat PDF of the newsletter to be emailed to you.

