

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL



BUSINESS OUTLOOK

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CHANGE IS HARD

BUSINESSES STRUGGLE WITH THE LANDLINE'S DEMISE

PAGE 10



One-on-One with Kendra Yevoli, executive director of the Ventana Fund **PAGE 3**



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One-on-One

KENDRA YEVOLI — EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE VENTANA FUND

THE BASICS: Kendra Yevoli, 61, born to an Air Force military family in Dayton, Ohio; married to Wayne Yevoli, 41 years; son, Devon, daughter-in-law, Natalie, three grandchildren, Colin, Ethan and Lucy; daughter, Lauren; rottweiler boxer, Cinnamon; legal secretarial diploma, Parks Business College, 1983.

POSITIONS: Ventana Fund executive director, June to present; executive director, Commercial Association of Realtors NM, 2008 — 2023; Certified Commercial Investment Member New Mexico administrator, 2008 — 2023; executive director, New Mexico Society of Professional Engineers, 2014 — 2016

OTHER: City of Albuquerque Affordable Housing Committee member; church volunteer.



JESSICA BACA/JOURNAL

Kendra Yevoli, the executive director of the Ventana Fund, started at the organization last year.

BY RYAN BOETEL
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Kendra Yevoli wants to turn New Mexico's economy around. Yevoli, the executive director of the Ventana Fund, has two children and three grandchildren who live in Colorado.

"That's part of why I'm in this [career], because my kids don't want to be here. They don't feel like they have places to have jobs to thrive and grow," she said. "So I'd love to change that."

That's where the Ventana Fund comes in. Yevoli said the fund is working to create more affordable housing options throughout the state, which she described as a "ground up" approach to economic development.

Ventana Fund is a non-profit Community Development Financial Institution headquartered in New Mexico. It was started in 2014 by concerned business leaders and others who worked in affordable housing. The fund provides low-interest loans to develop affordable housing projects.

"They are very involved and very passionate," she said of the organization's board of directors. More than 1,300 apartment units have been created through the fund.

Yevoli joined the organization last year as executive director. It recently moved into a new and larger location in Downtown Albuquerque. She has worked in association management for 35 years.

When it comes to affordable housing in Albuquerque, what are the biggest issues?

"Shortage. There's an incredible shortage of housing. That's why everyone's talking about it and that's why we were involved in helping with the (Accessory Dwelling Units) law change that got passed last fall. This is a problem statewide. We consider ourselves to be a small, local lender for New Mexicans. So we're locals for locals."

Why did you want to come work here?

"When you work for an association, you're helping them do all of their processes and projects and events. And so it makes each member do their job better. And that's a worthy, lofty goal. We're mission driven. We're trying to

ONE-ON-ONE >>

From PAGE 3

provide affordable housing that is so needed and it's an incredible opportunity. I really love it."

Why does one get into affordable housing as a professional career?

"I think there's a whole niche of people that want to make New Mexico Mexico better. And if we don't work on affordable housing, it's not going to get better. It's between jobs and housing. So I think they get involved because they genuinely have an interest. Many of these people have multiple projects, and they're keeping them, they're not selling them. The vast majority of them keep (the housing units) because it's an investment. They're still making money on it. It's a business, and it's also a mission.

How does affordable housing options affect the local economy?

"We've been hosting housing summits in a variety of different cities. We've been in Española, Las Vegas, Albuquerque. We're going to Hobbs later this year. We work with locals, whether they're politicians or public figures, whoever they are, to see what are the needs in their community so that everyone thrives. Part of the housing dilemma is that people are getting priced out of the market, no matter whether it's a single-family home or multifamily unit. People are getting priced out. And so unless we create more for the bottom, it's not going to free up (places to live). And so that really improves the economy."

You want to improve the state's economy.

"I would love to change that. Yeah, I don't like seeing anybody leave New Mexico, I love New Mexico. Or else I wouldn't be fighting so hard for it."

What do you think is needed to improve the state's economy?

"I think you have to get involved in policy. We have one of the hardest states for businesses to come, and small businesses are getting crowded out. And unless we make policy more friendly to small business, we're going to lose out. That's part of it. The entire Legislature is up (for election) this year. And so it would be interesting to find out if we could get people working together and not working for their own purpose."

What do you love about New Mexico?

"It's an outdoorsy place, where you can go biking and hiking. There's lots of outdoor activities. You can see all the way across town to Mount Taylor. And I think there's a lot of hope. For me, I don't give up very easily. And we've built a community here. I don't want to leave my community, even though I'd love to be near my kids."

What are your hobbies?

"Other than hiking and biking, I do altered books, which maybe you've never heard of. It's creating art out of books. And I am very committed to my church."

Why is the Ventana Fund located in Downtown Albuquerque?

"It's a central location as far as that goes. But I think more importantly than that, we want to support the (mayoral) administration and the fact that it's trying to renovate Downtown, and everyone can relate to Downtown. It's kind of a common meeting place. In fact, we just moved to this location from another Downtown location we were at. And we just have grit. And so we're here now, until we grow again, because we're growing so fast. But I believe we'll be staying Downtown."

What are your pet peeves?

"When people don't communicate. I'm a huge communicator, which is why I like this job, too. We interface with a lot of different people."

What's something difficult in your life that you've had to overcome?

"I lost my mother when I was 20 years old, that was one of the biggest things that I've gone through, personally. In the professional world, I have helped several associations recover from embezzlement. Do you know small businesses are at the highest risk for such unfortunate behavior? So it's been a real privilege to help them turn around."

What's something that people who know you would be surprised to find out?

"I was called a laughing hyena in high school. I laughed a lot and I laughed out loud. I'm not a quiet person."

What are the key attributes of a leader of an office or team?

"I think you have to be visionary. They need to be a handyman. I think the attitude is really important. I think professionalism is really important, and that's a fine balance. And I think they're not afraid."