

New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Program

*SEMINAR 3: Cultural and Social Issues Awareness
& Urban Ag*



*In this edition, you will find articles written by members of
Class 16 about our third seminar in ABQ.*



*The New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Program is committed to developing
knowledgeable, multicultural leaders within the food, agriculture, and natural
resource industries of New Mexico.*



Roadrunner Food Bank of New Mexico

By Katie Lara

Class 16 was welcomed by Katy Anderson, Vice President of Strategy, Partnerships and Advocacy to tour the Roadrunner Food Bank of New Mexico Roadrunner Food Bank (RRFB). A portion of RRFB mission states:

Roadrunner® Food Bank of New Mexico, a Feeding America member, is the largest non-profit dedicated to solving food insecurity in New Mexico. As a food distribution hub, we provide food to hundreds of affiliated member partners around the state including food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters and regional food banks. We also distribute food through specialized programs helping children, families and seniors at schools, low-income senior housing sites, senior centers and with and through health care partnerships. Every week, tens of thousands of hungry children, seniors and families are reached through this statewide hunger relief network. We are working together with our partners, volunteers and contributors to end food insecurity and hunger in New Mexico.

The building we toured spans 133,000 square feet and features two walk-in cooler units. Both units were equipped with automatic doors to facilitate forklifts and other machinery in the warehouse to move efficiently from area to area. The warehouse holds 2.5-3.0 million pounds of food, Katy shared with us. That amount of food lasts about one month. Within the warehouse, 175,000-275,000 pounds of food is moved daily. The inventory system helps workers find what they're looking for with corresponding bay numbers and counts of inventory in the system. Items that come in large commodity containers, such as beans and rice, are repacked by volunteers into one-pound bags making it easier to distribute to individuals.

The Roadrunner Food Bank delivers food to over 500 food pantries across the state of New Mexico. Katy mentioned they work with food pantries as far south as Animas, as far west as Jal and into the four corners. The program is set up in a hub and spoke model. The main hub being the Albuquerque location and spoke being Las Cruces. Everyday trucks are sent to Albuquerque and Las Cruces, where food

is further disseminated across the state from these locations. Food is tracked throughout the process, and RRFB has the capability to alert its partners if food has been recalled or an issue has been detected to ensure food safety.

Funding for the program comes from a combination of grants, state funding, United States Department of Agriculture Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and donations. Katy said, that 28% of the food in the warehouse is donated and the remaining food must be purchased by RRFB. They broker with food suppliers to get the best contract rates on food. They also have a contract with TEFAP which provides food assistance and funding for food banks. At times, truckloads of food will be donated by food manufacturers, but RRFB is responsible for paying the trucking freight to get the food to their warehouse. When purchasing food, a semi-truck load can vary in price depending on what

is being purchased. As an example, a truckload of protein only would cost about \$75,000.

The program relies heavily on its volunteers to serve about 350,000 unique New Mexicans per year. Katy estimated they serve about 10,000 people per week through their various programs and partners. This

is accomplished with 12,000-14,000 volunteers per year, working three shifts per day, Sunday through Friday, and about 108 full-time staff members. The full-time staff help with assisting volunteers, driving trucks, warehousing, and administrative duties needed by RRFB. Volunteers are used for the remaining tasks such as repackaging, packing boxes, and inventorying items. Many of the volunteers are traffic violators who, in exchange for not having to pay a fine for their minor traffic violation, decide to volunteer their time at RRFB. Katy said there is always a change in their attitude at the end of the day as compared to when they first get there. Katy said many come back again and become regular volunteers after their first experience.





Class 16 Explores Christianity

By Katelin Spradley

Class 16's third seminar focused on culture, social issues, and urban agriculture. As part of the seminar, we explored religions and faiths familiar and unfamiliar to the group. One of the religions we explored was Christianity with the help of Reverend Ross Whiteaker of the United Methodist Church.

Rev. Whiteaker was recently appointed as superintendent of the Albuquerque District of the United Methodist Church. In his role, he oversees pastors in his district. He explained a bit about the different roles in the church including bishop, elder, and deacon. Elders, as pastors, are sent to lead churches and to help those churches grow. They help others to find faith and liberation in Jesus Christ, considered by the church to be the Messiah and savior sent by God. These individuals complete a formal education, such as a Master of Divinity program of study, must be elected at the annual conference, and ordained.

Rev. Whiteaker touched on the foundations of the United Methodist Church. John Wesley and his brother Charles are credited with founding Methodism. Their mother, Susannah Wesley, married a pastor in the Church of England and because she did not like how the pastor in the local church was preaching, she took the initiative to lead others in prayer in her home. With this influence, John and Charles went to college and started a holy club. The members of the club soon received the name of "Methodists" because of the methodical way they looked at scriptures and worship. Today, the United Methodist Church ordains women to serve in ministry which I think is likely rooted in the influence of Susannah Wesley on her sons.

As a Christian and Methodist, I enjoyed our time with Rev. Whiteaker and learned a lot. He talked about his own journey becoming a leader

in the church when he didn't want to originally go down that path. I thought it was interesting to see how he found a connection between his interest in government and political science, which he studied at New Mexico State University, and his eventual path toward ordination. He was also very upfront with us about the challenges he had faced in his journey and how he shifted from paths that weren't meant for him. He also talked about his successes which we could see stemmed from his development as a leader.

Our time with Rev. Whiteaker also painted a picture of the views of the church. We discussed the impacts of COVID on churches and the discouragement pastors are facing as they try to increase participation and attendance in their communities. I saw some parallels in my own work because our volunteer leaders across the state have also struggled to activate members of their community. Inclusion was another point that stood out to me during our visit. Rev. Whiteaker shared about a church in the Albuquerque area that incorporated Native American culture and beliefs in worship. The church also requires a certain percentage of women and people of color to be professors at a seminary before accepting the degree of study. There is a need for women and people of color to serve in leadership positions in the church. We appreciate Rev. Whiteaker's time and his willingness to lead our group in a discussion about Christianity.



Rev Whiteaker with member of Class 16 and coordinator of NM Ag Leadership Program, Tina Wilson.



Understanding Modern Buddhism

By Julie M. Hughes

With the fast pace and high stress of modern life, many people are becoming interested in the peaceful philosophy of Buddhism. There is a very deep interest in learning how to meditate both to overcome stress and anxiety, and to deepen one's spiritual journey. In response to this growing interest, Kadampa Buddhism offers many ways of learning about Buddhism and practicing meditation.

New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Class 16 visited the Kadampa Meditation Center New Mexico in Albuquerque during the third seminar and participated in a guided meditation. We were welcomed and guided by Gen Kelsang Khyenwang, who is a resident teacher at the center.

Kadampa Buddhism was first introduced to the West in 1976 by the Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, a Kadampa Buddhist Master. Gen Khyenwang is a close disciple and student of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso and has been practicing and teaching under his guidance for many years.

Gen Khyenwang was soft spoken, but warm and sincere sharing perspectives and traditions with the class and led us through a beginning meditation to clear our minds and open our hearts.

We already have "all the tools we need to improve our mind," said Khyenwang. "Use your imagination to be the kind of person you want to be. Happiness is a calm and peaceful mind."

Meditation is at the heart of the Buddhist way of life. According to the Meditation Center, "through meditation we first learn to identify our different negative mental states known as 'delusions,' and then learn how to develop peaceful and positive mental states or 'virtuous minds.'

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Geshe Kelsang Gyatso has written more than twenty books on Buddhism that are now being translated into many different languages. Two free books are available for those interested in learning more about modern Buddhism, including *Modern Buddhism-The Path of Compassion and Wisdom*, and *How to Transform Your Life-A Blissful Journey*. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso says, "through reading and practicing the instructions given in these books, people can solve their daily problems and maintain a happy mind all the time."

There are over 1,000 Kadampa Buddhist centers in 36 countries around the world where people of all cultures can train in meditation and other Buddhist practices. All Kadampa Buddhist Centers are open to the public.





Farm to Doorstep: Skarsgard Farms Delivers CSA- Style Bundles Straight to Your Home

By Emily Harris

Monte Skarsgard is the owner of Skarsgard Farms which operates out of Albuquerque but services all of New Mexico with delivery of their consumer supported agriculture (CSA) -style bundles. Monte hosted Class 16 of the New Mexico Agricultural Leadership (NMAL) fellowship in November and was eager to share in not only his own success, but the success of so many partnerships that are crucial to making Skarsgard Farms a success.

Skarsgard Farms has evolved in its structure over the years. Starting as a farmer, Monte grew a large portion of the produce going into consumer supported boxes. As the ag market has changed, so has his operation. Currently, Monte has hung up his farming hat to better serve the partners he works with. He sources from trusted, Certified Organic growers and local or regional producers. He glowed as the class sipped freshly pressed juice from the apples from just across the Colorado line. This partnership with the orchard has grown since joining with Skarsgard Farms, and Monte is always on the lookout to add more farmers to his list.

Monte has transitioned Skarsgard Farms from the traditional style of CSA boxes, where boxes are filled with seasonal produce without much room for customization, to 100% customizable boxes. He found that customers were not as interested in some vegetables as others and also noted that some vegetables were not as in high demand as the supply. His pivot was centered around less waste of vegetables that were being delivered while also expanding the palates of his customers to try new produce.



Not only do these boxes come with fresh fruits and vegetables, but now have grown to include breads, pastries, meat, drinks (ciders, kombuchas, etc.), condiments, pies, and more. They utilize an online ordering system that can be found at <https://skarsgardfarms.deliverybizpro.com/> where you can fully customize a box to be delivered straight to your home. Fresh produce and local delicacies have never been easier to get!

While Monte is busy running an ever-changing business to suit the needs of his customers, he dreams of one day being closer to his roots and growing some of his own produce again. With such success, it is evident that Skarsgard Farms is busy, and they are even currently in the process of moving their operations to expand to a storefront within the next year. Their storefront is envisioned to be a barebones front that focuses on the quality of the produce and food as opposed to the aesthetic nature of grocery stores consumers are used to. The focus partnerships and providing quality goods from the Southwest region is evident in their work and their workers.

So, the next time you are hankering for some fresh produce or new goodies to show off to your out-of-town friends, remember Skarsgard Farms and order one of their fully customizable boxes to satiate your needs. Also, be on the lookout for their new storefront opening up in Albuquerque and stop in once they are all set up.





Veterans Integration Center of Albuquerque

By Bernadette Romero-Benally

Did you know the Veterans Integration Center (VIC) is not associated with the actual U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)? It was a big surprise to learn that the VIC is a unique, non-profit organization and a resource for Veterans and their families in New Mexico. According to the VIC website this program was founded in 2005. On November 30, 2023, the New Mexico Agricultural Leadership (NMAL) Class 16 explored the VIC located at 1335 Ortiz Drive SE, Apt. 3, Albuquerque, New Mexico (NM). There are two additional VIC locations in Albuquerque (Central and Wyoming), and one in Alamogordo, NM. Our host, Lisa Martinez, explained her leadership role at the VIC. She gave us a tour of the VIC apartment-style, compacted office while explaining how the organization mainly assists in finding homes for veterans and addressing their needs which is determined after an intake interview.

Veterans can be either men, women, with or without families. The ages of veterans vary. The youngest Veteran they assisted is 20 years old, while the oldest is 90 years old. The VIC assists veterans of World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Afghanistan, and Iraqi wars. The most important qualification of the VIC is that the veteran must have a honorable discharge. The three main disqualifications from the VIC are 1) dishonorable discharges, 2) arson charges, and 3) sex offenses.

The VIC does not determine veterans healthcare. The VA determines the eligibility for VA healthcare. Veterans do not need to be approved for healthcare through the VA to participate in the VIC. Here are some situations that may exclude veterans from VA Healthcare: 1) dishonorable discharge, 2) served less than two years in the military, 3) served in the National Guard, 4) discharged for behavioral issues, 5) court martial discharge, and 6) absent without

Our discussion with Ms. Martinez and her team were about veterans social issues, addiction, homelessness, and employment issues they face daily. It was sad to hear that some of the veterans trickle in with other problems, such as mental issues and

substance abuse. We discussed where the funding comes from to keep the VIC in operation. On an average year, they estimate assisting 250 Veterans. Most of the VIC funding comes through donations. There is little funding from New Mexico. Grant per diem comes from the VA. Bernalillo County and the City of Albuquerque have assisted with funding the purchase of land and construction of the future home of the VIC. leave.

As we continued to talk with the VIC team, we tried to connect more funding opportunities to the VIC. Each member of Class 16 had ideas to contribute to the VIC team. As future leaders, we departed knowing that there is more work that needs to be done for our brave veterans. Some questions remained unanswered. Why are Veterans stereotyped as homeless? One VIC team responded, "In order to house a Veteran, we need to deal with the mental and social issues before housing." Why does Congress fund U.S. troops across the seas to fight in a war we are not a part of? Some of that funding could go toward the veterans here in America, such and programs such as the VIC. It is a complex situation to solve not only for the veterans but for everyone to integrate that our veterans are treated poorly after any service in the military. To all our U.S. veterans, thank you for your service!

The highlight of the discussion was when Class 16 asked if any of the Navajo Code Talkers had come through the VIC. They said no, but they do get many American Indian veterans who apply for the VIC program. New Mexico consists of pueblos, tribes, and the Navajo Nation. This is what makes NM rich in culture. The purpose and the theme for the NMAL seminar three—Social Issues and Cultural Awareness and Urban Ag.





Islamic Center of New Mexico

By Luther Dunlap

On the evening of November 29, 2023, the New Mexico Ag Leadership Program Class 16 had the opportunity to meet with Sheikh Dr. Mahmoud Eldenawi. Dr. Mahmoud Eldenawi is the Imam at the Islamic Center of New Mexico. The class had the opportunity to sit down and have a 35-minute visit about the Islamic Faith and later that evening observed their evening prayer time. The conversation mainly focused on the history of the Islamic faith, the food they eat, and why they believe what they believe.

Eldenawi was born in Egypt and attended the prestigious Durham University in the United Kingdom, where he obtained his doctoral degree in Islamic Studies. He returned to Egypt and served as an assistant professor at Al-Azhar University. Dr. Eldenawi served as the Imam at the Islamic Center of Little Rock in Arkansas. He then moved him and his family to Albuquerque, NM, to serve as the Imam at the Islamic Center of NM.

One question asked during our visit with Dr. Eldenawi was what is one thing he wished or hoped that more people understood about the Islamic faith. His answer really captured my attention. Dr. Eldenawi wishes the public would ask more questions about the Islamic faith and not believe everything they hear and read in the news about Islam. He stated Islamic faith is about peace, love, and helping your neighbor. He went on to explain that is evil everywhere no matter the religion. This was a powerful statement.

Something else interesting was during prayer time the men and women are in two different rooms. The reason this is done is it allows the Islamic women to have the freedom to remove their hijab, a religious headscarf worn to cover their hair and face. It is an expression of their faith and personal relationship with God, and it symbolizes modesty and privacy in Islam. Many people believe that since the women are not allowed to pray in the same room as the men that this is a restriction for Islamic women. However, if you take a step back and look at the faith behind hijab and what it truly means, this is a freedom for Islamic women to be able to have a safe and free place to remove their hijab and pray.

As a strong Christian, I had my concerns about this visit. However, I left with more knowledge and understanding about the Islamic faith. I now have a more open mind about being in the presence of people with a different religion or faith. Thank you, Dr. Eldenawi, for taking time out of your day to answer questions.





A Word from College Drive By Tina Wilson

In December, Class 16 was in Albuquerque for Cultural and Social Issue Awareness. This seminar has always been one I observe the most growth in the participants. Part of this seminar is to visit religions outside of the mainstream. I always include a visit with an imam to learn about Islam and a Buddhist temple. Gen Kelsang Khyenwang led the group in meditation and talked about the principles of Buddhism. This was my third time doing this seminar, and I always manage to come away with new knowledge. Another highlight of this seminar was visiting the Central New Mexico Correctional Facility in Los Lunas. What impressed me the most was the programs offered to help inmates become productive citizens once released. Programs range from obtaining a GED to college classes and life skills like financial literacy.

As I write this, Juan Sanchez from NMDA and I are finalizing the details for our upcoming trade and innovation trip to Italy. In the coming weeks, we will begin taking registrations for the trip. The dates for the journey are to arrive in Rome on Saturday, May 18th, and depart Rome for home on Sunday, May 25th. We will learn about U.S. trade with Italy, wine and olive oil production, and tour dairy and cattle ranches.

Next stop for Class 16 – Santa Fe



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