



# Newsletter

May 2006

**Dona Ana Historical Society**

## PRESIDENT'S STUFF

NEXT MEETING: MAY 18, 7PM GOOD SAMARITAN AUDITORIUM

DR. JAMES WILLIAMS, MD *GROWING UP AFRO-AMERICAN IN LAS CRUCES and the TUSKEGEE AIRMEN of WW11; 1920-1945*

Dr. Williams is the son of Clara Belle Williams, 1st Afro-American graduate of NMSU.

The April meeting was successful with James Hurst presenting the Pancho Villa raid on Columbus. We had the average attendance present and the only negative was that the cookie monster ate the cookies and drank the coffee. Rest assured we will correct that for the May meeting. Read the article that Donna Eichstaedt has written to get the specifics on the May program and the background on Dr. Williams.



We are also starting the nominating process for the various awards the Society gives out at the annual banquet. The description of those awards appear in this issue of the newsletter. If you could be involved in the Awards Committee process please call Donna Eichstaedt at 382-8679.

George Helfrich and I have been knee deep in working on the possible transfer of the Amador Hotel to the City and to find a use suitable for such a grand, historic structure. George will report on those efforts elsewhere in this issue.

As the Board reviews the Annual Meetings in past years we go back to the fact that it is hard to find a really good J. Paul Taylor-type speaker each year. There have been some years we all would have enjoyed not having a speaker but instead a slightly longer and more descriptive awards presentation and more visiting time. Your thoughts on this are appreciated- keeping in mind the main idea is to draw enough members to make the celebration fun and worthwhile.

We invite your comments and especially your assistance in the projects of your Society.

*Chuck*

## Become a Citizen Archaeologist

The New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and several heritage preservation partners (Human Systems Research), are planning to conduct a one-day SiteWatch Orientation and training program for individuals interested in becoming archaeological/historic site resource monitor volunteers for the SiteWatch program working for local land managing agencies. For years the Farmington BLM and Santa Fe National Forest have had successful site steward programs on their lands. "The SiteWatch program is an attempt to broaden the excellent cultural resource stewardship program to our other public lands in the state", said SiteWatch Coordinator Phil Young of the Historic Preservation Division. The State Historic Preservation Officer Katherine Slick, the manager of SiteWatch, further stated: "The Las Cruces area has a great concentration of lands managed by agencies that have heritage programs that the public can assist with. They are public resources."

The training day is scheduled for Saturday **May 20, 2006**, from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm at the Human Systems Research (HSR) offices, 535 S. Melendres St., Las Cruces.

The orientation agenda for the day will include: Introduction to SiteWatch, Ethics, Culture History Review (Taos area), Federal & State Heritage Preservation Laws, Field Operations Overview, Law Enforcement Considerations, and a Field Operations visit at an archaeological site (so bring adequate hiking clothes, shoes and equipment).

The class size is limited to twenty-four (24), and RSVP will be on a first-come, first-served basis. You can RSVP to Laurel Weathersbee at HSR: 505.524.9456 (home: 505.373.1971). After prospective candidates RSVP, Site Watch Volunteer Applications and Volunteer Site Steward Agreements will be mailed to them.



## Charles F. Murrell—a look back.

The Board of the Dona Ana County Historical Society is made up of approximately one half old timers and one half new comers ( I am in the latter category.) Old, of course, refers to time as a member of the Society, not age! We will be having each member of the Board write a short autobiography so the members know who is making decisions and hopefully moving the society forward. Karen George and Donna Eichstaedt have had their turn in the barrel and now it is my turn.

My folks came to Las Cruces in the late 1920's with their families and were married here. My Dad ran Murrell's Conoco Service Station where I worked as the typical grease monkey and gas pumper in Junior High and High School. I was married early in College, and decided I would need to get on with the educational experience since kids were on the way and I already knew what the service station business was like.



With the help of a mentor, Dr. Sid Carver, I settled on Dentistry since I was good with my hands and horrible in mathematics. After three years at NMSU we went to Baylor

Dental School in Dallas for four years. Then came enlistment in the Army and postings at Ft. Lewis Washington and Viet Nam. I started practice in the fall of 1968 and kept at it until February of 1994. Retirement has been good because of not having the Government agencies and insurance companies involved in my day to day life. However, I do miss the relationships I enjoyed with my patients and staff. I also miss the medical and artistic side of dentistry and have done many medical mission trips to third world countries as a way to preserve and use those skills.

Music, hunting, and sailing have been the main activities since retirement. I play saxophone in the Mesilla Valley Concert Band and other venues around town as well. My association with the Historical Society has also been a new and fulfilling experience. Working with the dedicated and talented people on the Board has been a real joy. Sincerely, *Chuck*

**Dear Society Members:**

As most of you know the result of the joint City/County meeting held on 4/18 was for the most part very positive with the result that the City wants a plan related to the proposed transfer of the **Amador** for use as a museum. Chuck and I are meeting with the City Manager on Friday to see just what needs to be addressed in the plan.

Today we met with Ms. Mary Pierce who is the Doña Ana County Coordinator, Americans with Disabilities Act. We toured the building and had a very detailed discussion related to ADA background, requirements, Ms. Pierce's qualifications, past actions and studies. Ms. Pierce was very informative and, in my opinion, takes a realistic view related to ADA issues. The



whole ADA issue on the **Amador** is best stated by Ms. Pierce as "it is as compliant as it can be" given the history and construction of the building.

There were several things pointed out that would improve wheelchair operations such as eventual replacement of the carpet with a less plush weave, resurfacing of the asphalt parking area, and changing the location of a water fountain which is located close to a support pillar. As far as the second floor access is concerned,

Ms. Pierce indicated that it is not practical to be made wheelchair accessible. She did however say that displays such as the murals on the walls and the names above the doors could be displayed at the lobby level via video.

I think it is time to drive a stake in the heart of the ADA issue as it relates to the **Amador**. The ADA should not be used as an excuse for not being able to preserve the **Amador** but with the help of Ms. Pierce we should be able to create a museum that is accessible and friendly to those with disabilities.

Regards, *George Helfrich*

**NOTES ON OUR MAY PROGRAM**

Dr. James Williams and his wife Willeen have recently retired to Las Cruces, having lived and worked in Chicago for 44 years. Mrs. Williams is from Nebraska, but Dr. Williams has "come home"....having been raised in Las Cruces. His life reads like a good history book....one of three sons of Clara Belle and Jasper Williams---both college graduates. His mother was the first Black woman to graduate from NMSU and saw to it that her 3 sons would get a good education as well. Not only did they do so, they went on to medical school and owned and operated the Williams Clinic in Chicago where James was the surgeon, Jasper, the internist and Charles, the obstetrician. Clara Belle Williams, honored by NMSU with a building and a street, died 3 months short of her 109<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Dr. Williams remembers growing up in segregated Las Cruces, attending the Blacks only Booker T. Washington school where his mother taught. He earned his high school diploma from Las Cruces Union High School though he never set foot in the building. His medical degree was from Creighton University in Nebraska and his entire medical career was served in Chicago. He was the personal physician for Dr. Martin Luther King whenever King was in Chicago, and has cared for other prominent Chicago figures, such as Elijah Mohammad and Louis Farrakhan. He was the first Black surgeon on staff at a major hospital in Chicago and is the only surgeon to ever remove a bullet from a baby "in utero", having performed the surgery on a young pregnant mother shot while trying to foil a robbery in Chicago.

His World War II days are equally as interesting. He was drafted into the Army and was chosen as one of the Tuskegee Airmen, made popular by a recent Hollywood film. He was trained on B-25 and B-24 bombers and was a member of the 477<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. After receiving his commission, he and other Tuskegee officers visited a white officers' social club on a base in Indiana. They were subsequently arrested and charged with Article 69 of the War Code. Their penalty was a military reprimand, but the biggest punishment was that the offense remained on their record until 1955.

Dr. and Mrs. Williams are parents of a prize-winning journalist daughter in California, and, a son who is a colorectal surgeon in Albuquerque. Dr. Williams will speak to the Dona Ana County Historical Society on Thursday, May 18 in the auditorium at Good Samaritan Village at 7pm.



The program is free and open to the public.

New Members:

*Herb & Cici Gross, Guy W. & Carla Floyd, Daniel Smith, Murry Kugler, and Monte Sarvo*

SPECIAL THANKS TO CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS - Norman Todd, Barbara Stevens, Len Sugerman, Chuck Murrell, George & Patsy Hackler, Marci Palmer, Lorraine & Morris Southward, and Walter & Bettie Hines

THANKS - To Jim Hulse for printing the name tags for the Banquet. Banquet Summary - 156 attended and the Silent Auction raised \$1,752.00

Apologies to Wolfgang and Barbara Schlauch whose names were omitted from the list of SNMHR sponsors.

Please renew/enroll my/our membership in the Doña Ana Historical Society. A check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Fees:**

Individual \$ 15      Student \$ 8      Benefactor \$ 150

Family \$ 20      Contributor \$ 40      Life \$ 300

Memberships are active for the calendar year of enrollment.

Membership in the Society is deductible within legal limits for Federal and State income tax purposes. If you are unsure of your status, please call Membership Chairman, George Helfrich, at 522-3477.

**Doña Ana County Historical Society**  
**P.O.Box 16045**  
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**[www..zianet.com/dachs](http://www..zianet.com/dachs)**

2005 Officers:

President - Dr. Chuck Murrell

Past President – Austin Hoover

Vice President – Roger Rothenmaier

Secretary – Donna Eichstaedt

Treasurer – George Helfrich

Historian – Karen George

Board Members-at-Large -

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