



Getting Down to Business with Dave Herndon

New Mexico bills itself as a state full of “adventure steeped in culture.” As editor in chief of *New Mexico Magazine*, Dave Herndon knows that better than most. He talked with *The Taos News* about what it means to put together a monthly regional publication with national appeal, high standards and hits on the buzz of energy of New Mexico’s artistic and techy young entrepreneurs.

Tell me a little about yourself.
I’m from the East Coast. I started in newspapers and magazines in New York and did that for 25 years. And I’ve been here in New Mexico and at *New Mexico Magazine* for 4 1/2 years.

So you came to the state for the job?

I was looking for a place to relocate, and I went through a process of self-examination about where I wanted to live and what I wanted to do. All roads led to New Mexico.

What has it taken over the last four years to get the magazine to the point it is now?

To state the obvious: a lot of pretty hard work. The previous secretary of tourism hired me, and her marching orders were to produce a magazine of national quality. I thought that was a pretty good mandate, and I think we’ve achieved it by using magazine industry best practices — like finding and cultivating the best writers we can afford, and our art director gave us another turbo boost in terms of our visual appeal.

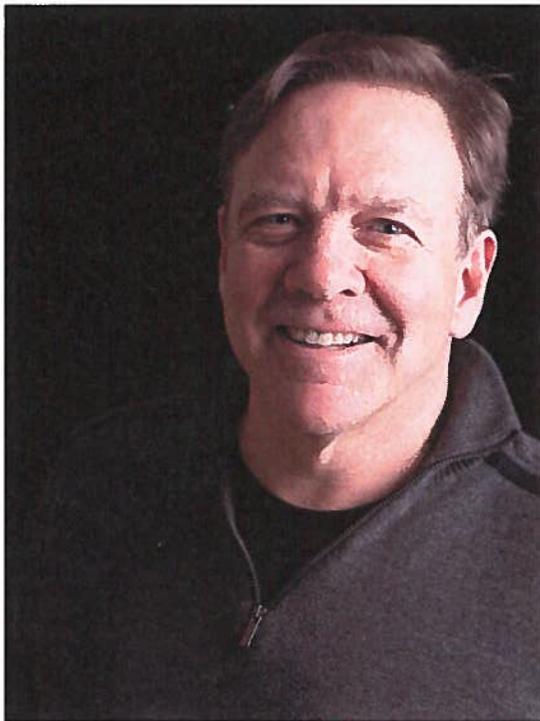
I like to say we’re regional, but we’re not parochial. Some of our readers also subscribe to *The New Yorker*, and we want to attain that level of sophistication and quality in what we do. But we try to make everything appealing to any kind of reader, too. We have a great pool of photographers. Visually, we can comfortably sit next to *Travel + Leisure* on [the] shelf of Barnes and Noble in New York.

Tell me about your staff and the reach of the magazine.

It’s a monthly publication. We have a fairly skeleton staff. We’re all multitaskers and hard workers. And we have some very talented freelancers we call upon as frequent contributors. The circulation is, rounding off, 92,000. Over half of our paid subscribers live out of state.

That’s a lot of content to come up with every month. How do you find new and fresh stories?

That’s one of the delightful aspects of the job. For somebody who does the kind of jour-



Left: Dave Herndon, editor in chief of *New Mexico Magazine*; The latest edition of *New Mexico Magazine*.

nalism I do, New Mexico keeps on giving. You can’t turn over a rock without finding some kind of story or character or lore. The state is so rich in history and culture, cuisine, places to go and things to do. Sometimes that means revisiting subject matter — we’re in our 94th year. As I always like to say of travel magazines, they’re not inventing new places in New Mexico. Certainly, we bring fresh eyes to it in writing and visuals.

What’s your relationship to the state government? Do their data and directives shape what you do?

We are part of the tourism department; a lot of people don’t know that. We are located in the state complex across the street from the Roundhouse.

Fortunately, we have a high degree of editorial independence from the department. That’s because the secretary of tourism has trust and confidence that we’re going to execute on our mission — to create interest and advocacy about the state’s travel, hospitality, tourist and cultural assets, ultimately help drive travel and tourism both out of state and in state.

What do you mean when you say “create advocacy”?

The people who subscribe to the magazine and sign up on Facebook (95,000 followers) are pre-certified people who have declared a love of New

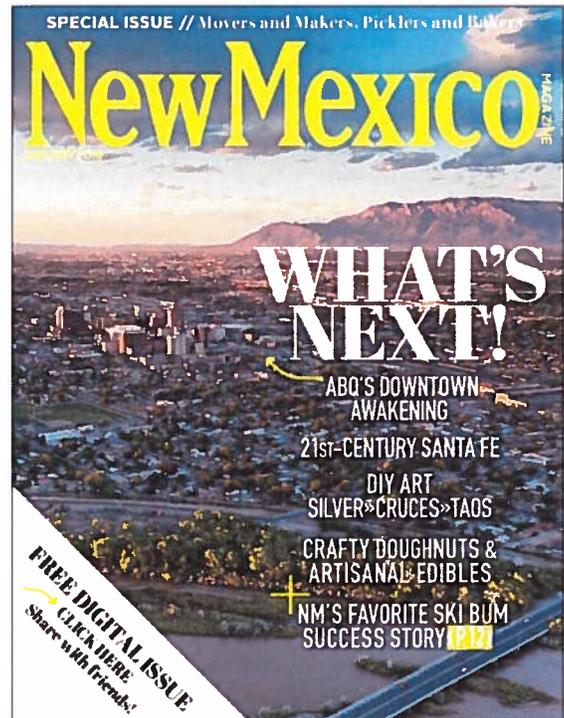
Mexico already. They’re not just our readers; they’re our community of people who get New Mexico and they can become advocates — sharing stories and photos with friends, their passion for New Mexico. Part of our mission is to shine a light on destinations and activities that are interesting. Just about everything we write about is actionable — go, see, do. Very rarely do we write about something you can’t go visit and see what we’re talking about and having an experience for yourself.

Do you have a favorite issue or theme?

Every January, we do an issue that sets the theme for the year, and two years ago, we did one that was called “A-ha — New Mexico Found.” Those were stories about people finding New Mexico as a place, whether they grew up here, traveled here or whatever life journey brought them to discover the state as their home. We had some incredible collection of personal essays throughout that year.

Tell me about the January issue of *New Mexico Magazine* and the theme for the year.

I got the idea in Taos, actually. Last winter, I was at an event at Taos Ski Valley, the Ski Lift Pitch Competition. Some of the ideas were bio-tech, geo-tech and nano-tech, all these things we wouldn’t usually write



Courtesy Photo

about in *New Mexico Magazine*. But the winners were the Taos Mountain Energy Bar guys. I had this a-ha moment about the intersection of start-up business that dovetail with lifestyle, recreation and travel — our core subjects. It all fits the ethos of [the state marketing campaign] “New Mexico True,” that there’s a sense of place to it. It’s a real success story that, for me, encapsulated a lot of themes I saw in other places in New Mexico.

From your perspective, what’s the common thread of that entrepreneurial movement?

It’s the start-up, entrepreneurial class that’s getting a boost from the incubators. That’s happening in New Mexico right now. To me, that’s an evolution that has everything to do with the emergence of non-traditional ways for people to bring things to market.

New Mexico has always had this creative class of artists, and since the Los Alamos and Goddard days it’s also had this scientific and tech class. What’s happening in the 21st century is these two assets — these two communities — are coming together with the lubrication of people who recognize we need new economic opportunity for young people in New Mexico. The traditional model of economic development is to

attract businesses to relocate here, and that’s important and needs to happen. But the talent and financial resources in New Mexico need to be cultivated and brought together for some homegrown economic development. It feels like only the beginning. It’s hopeful.

Later in the year, we’ll be covering The Paseo in Taos, and it’s a perfect example of what we’re talking about — this whole ecosystem of people who get it, have lots of ideas and are pooling resources and creating opportunities for themselves and other people.

Have you also noticed common challenges to this momentum?

You know, that hasn’t surfaced in our coverage. But what we all know is that to be really competitive in the 21st century, there needs to be high-speed broadband and wireless communication. That’s got to happen.

Can you see this month’s magazine online?

Go to nmmmagazine.com — you can scroll through it like any digital magazine. And we’re giving it away for free because we think it’s a valuable message to get out about economic development in the state. The state has a traditional identity, but the story doesn’t stop there. It is the 21st century, and New Mexico is a part of it.