



FINANCE
NEW MEXICO



Article 346

May 18, 2014

Small Business Week Winners Include Family Restaurant Veteran

By Finance New Mexico

Angela Atencio-Sanchez grew up bussing tables at her parents' restaurant on State Route 76 in Española, and she was promoted to working the cash register before going off to college and a career as an assistant comptroller for Santa Fe Public Schools.

Today the daughter of El Paragua Restaurant founders Luis and Frances Atencio is the president of Las Brazas Enterprises — a company that owns and manages El Paragua and El Parasol restaurant in Española. The business was just named this year's Family Owned Small Business of the Year by the Small Business Administration in New Mexico.

"I grew up in it," Atencio-Sanchez said of the business. So did her brothers, whose successful taco and tamale stand actually inspired their parents to open El Paragua in 1966. The restaurant has since become a fixture in the community and a destination for foodies who have read mouthwatering reviews in national media.

Atencio-Sanchez went to the SBA in the 1990s to help her brother secure financing for the first El Parasol restaurant, which has since grown into a four-restaurant franchise involving three generations of the Atencio family. The family has maintained a relationship with the SBA as its business has expanded.

Spotlight on Small Business

Every year since 1963, the U.S. Small Business Administration has used National Small Business Week to highlight the accomplishments of outstanding entrepreneurs and small-business owners like the Atencio family.

The main event is set for May 12 to 16 in Washington, D.C., where SBA will name the National Small Business Week's Person of the Year.

New Mexico's nominee for that award is Shelly Herbst, president and chief executive officer of Marron and Associates in Albuquerque, which provides comprehensive environmental consulting services to state and regional industries.

Herbst, like Atencio-Sanchez, grew up in a business started by her parents. She worked as its marketing director and assumed leadership of the company when her mother retired.



Herbst, Atencio-Sanchez and their fellow winners will be honored at a May 22 luncheon at the Isleta Hotel and Resort in Albuquerque. Sharing the spotlight are:

- Retired Army Lt. Col. Adolfo Vasquez, an adviser at the New Mexico Small Business Development Center's Procurement Technical Assistance Program, as Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year
- Chauling Armijo, president of Four Winds Mechanical HTC/AC Inc., a plumbing, heating and air-conditioning contractor in Albuquerque, as Women in Business Champion of the Year
- Linda A.C. Ruckel, president of Advance Tax Services Inc. in Santa Fe, as Financial Services Champion of the Year
- Norma Valdez, development director of The Loan Fund in Albuquerque, as Minority Small Business Champion of the Year
- Donn E. Wiese, president and general manager of Tsay Construction & Services at Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, as Entrepreneurial Success Award and Region VI Award Winner
- Wells Fargo Bank of Albuquerque as 7(a) Small Business Lender of the Year, and
- New Mexico Bank and Trust of Albuquerque as 504 Third-Party Lender of the Year.

To register for this event, call (505) 766-9545 or visit the American Indian Chamber of Commerce of New Mexico website at www.nmnaec.com.

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