



## Rio Rancho Leverages its Library to Grow Small Businesses

By *Finance New Mexico*

Aspiring entrepreneurs won't be shushed at the Loma Colorado Library in Rio Rancho on Watercooler Wednesdays. The City of Rio Rancho aims to create dialogue at its main library and bridge the gap between entrepreneurs and the resources that can help them.

Watercooler Wednesdays are part of the GrowIt!@RRPL initiative launched in January by the city as part of its economic

development efforts to create a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem. The initiative includes co-working space, learning opportunities and networking at the library.



The idea puts Rio Rancho at the vanguard of a movement that advocates for leveraging existing infrastructure, such as libraries, to build entrepreneurial resource networks. A 2016 report by the American Library Association urged decision makers in the U.S. Small Business Administration, the U.S. Department of Commerce, national foundations and Congress to include libraries in their plans to promote small business development.

And why not? Libraries are easily accessible and contain the resources and staff to guide entrepreneurs and business owners toward growth.

### **Harnessing Grow It!**

Rio Rancho's economic development and business relations manager, Savannah Jermance, was already working with the city's library and information services division to brainstorm ideas about utilizing existing library resources to provide entrepreneurial support services in Rio Rancho's underserved market when she heard about the Grow It! initiative.

Grow It! is an online database created by the New Mexico Municipal League to deliver business resources to entrepreneurs statewide, not just in metropolitan areas. The league, the association of all 106 municipalities in the state, aims to stimulate private sector job development — and local gross receipts taxes — by simplifying access to free and low-cost resources such as small

business development centers, workshops and capital. Each municipality has its own page on the Grow It! website where local and statewide resources can be searched by category.

“Rio Rancho has a large number of home-based businesses and shows indicators of being a highly entrepreneurial community,” said Jermance. “Recognizing a lack of existing incubators and co-working space, this was a great opportunity to connect our residents with a multitude of business resources and successful local entrepreneurs.”

Lynette Schurdevin, the city’s library division director, said the Loma Colorado Library is the ideal place to deploy Grow It! resources and host entrepreneurial meetups because it’s an established hub of community activity. The initiative targets home-based business owners and workers because they represent Rio Rancho’s smallest businesses with the greatest growth opportunity.

### Join the Crowd

The inaugural Watercooler event focused on marketing and featured resources available through the Digital Media Lab at Central New Mexico College. Rio Rancho Mayor Gregg Hull shared some of what he has learned as a business owner. The event drew nearly 40 people, a third of whom expressed interest in starting a business.

Future sessions will feature different business topics presented by community partners, including “Business Orientation” presented by Rio Rancho’s city clerk Steve Ruger with guest entrepreneur Susana Marquez of Pet Food Gone Wild on April 11. “This is a place where aspiring and existing entrepreneurs are going to feel supported and part of a larger community,” said Schurdevin. Community resources are provided free of charge.

Watercooler Wednesdays convene at 10:30 a.m. the second Wednesday of each month at 755 Loma Colorado Blvd. NE in Rio Rancho. Friends of the Library, the local support group, provides refreshments.

Find more on the GrowIt@RRPL initiative at <http://www.riorancholibraries.org/Index.aspx?NID=149>. Access the New Mexico Municipal League’s Grow It! database at <https://growitnm.org/>.

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