

BUSINESS

Kimberly Corbitt
Business
Different



Trust falls in Texas

We have many reasons for expanding into Texas, but foremost among them is our deep belief in our way of doing business.

We want to share this model with more people in more areas, knowing that cultural and structural differences in varied geographies will help us learn and refine how we work to better serve caregiving and our country.

Two weeks ago, Nina Martinez and Gerson Perez flew to Houston for our first group interviews there, joining our Houston-based coach, Sha'Tara Robinson. A week later, Gerson and I made the trip ourselves for our first caregiver orientation. Boy, were the new Houston-based Biscochito caregivers ever worth the trip.

There's a chicken-and-egg situation in the caregiving industry: How do you attract caregivers without guaranteed work, and how do you secure clients without a ready workforce?

Most organizations solve this by hiring people only when they have waiting work. At Biscochito, we've chosen the path of investing in caregivers before we have clients, paying them for orientation and community building while we develop our presence in the market.

In such a low-margin service, this can be nerve-racking. The new Houston caregivers came to orientation knowing we didn't have immediate work for them. They want a kinder, more supportive and work-focused way of doing business. Their enthusiasm was infectious — the orientation was filled with laughter, a few tears, and an abundance of curiosity and connection.

The orientation gave us all a chance to explore what makes Biscochito different. We shared stories of caregiving experiences — both challenging and rewarding ones — and talked about how supported autonomy could transform not just individual caregivers' work lives, but potentially the entire industry.

As they engaged with this approach, these experienced caregivers brought fresh perspectives and insights that will help us grow stronger. And we played Jenga and giant Uno until we cried a little from laughing.

A week after the orientation, we faced our first real test of shared decision making. On a Google Chat spanning multiple locations — homes, offices and cars — we tackled the crucial question of pricing our services in Houston.

I have always been timid about pricing, with a strong instinct to charge too little and pay too much. Sha'Tara and I had reviewed the prices of other home care agencies and found the top of the market in Houston is around \$31. We talked about entering the market at \$33 and felt pretty good about it.

We shared this information with the Houston caregivers — Lawanda Jones, Lillie Guinn, Chasity Hines, La'Trelle Miller and Deborah Ibikunle — and discussed where we should enter the market. With conviction, they concurred we should start at \$35.

Sha'Tara and I were buoyed by their confidence and got on board with a bolder entry. Then I did some research and found that 10% to 50% higher prices are common for a premium service, so their vote for a 13% increase seemed modest.

I think this is what happens when you trust the people doing the work to make choices that directly affect the work. Traditional hierarchies might have left this decision to executives far removed from the market reality and possibly locked in bravado or a bit of insecurity. Instead, we had the people who know the work, know the market and will be doing the caring making the call.

Like an aspen grove, each new location we grow into teaches us something about the whole organism. Houston is our newest shoot, bringing fresh nutrients and learnings that will help nourish and strengthen our entire system. Sometimes, leadership isn't about having all the answers; it's about creating space for the answers to emerge from the collective wisdom of the team.

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Business beat at your fingertips

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By Mike Easterling
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Although they now focus their attention on providing funding for five statewide policy areas, officials at Santa Fe's Thornburg Foundation say the organization remains flexible enough to respond quickly to various needs as the foundation marks its 25th year of existence.

As an example, Garrett Thornburg, the organization's founder and chairman, pointed to a situation that arose during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The federal government had \$1 million in food available for New Mexico tribes and pueblos, but the state was required to provide a 25% match before it could receive and distribute the assistance. That was problematic, Thornburg said, as state officials would have had to scramble to find a spare quarter-million dollars on short notice.

"So, it occurred to us, 'Can we pay the state's share?'" Thornburg said, recalling a brainstorming session of Thornburg Foundation officials.

When they discovered they could, the foundation quickly ponied up the money, and the badly needed food began making its way to tribes and pueblos across the state.

"That happened in a matter of days," Thornburg said, even though funding for such endeavors is not normally part of what the foundation does.

That kind of responsiveness remains a hallmark of the organization, according to Allan Oliver, the foundation's executive director.

"We're very adaptive," he said. "When we see an opportunity, we move quickly to ward it. The state and federal governments have big money, but they tend to move more slowly."

'Strategic philanthropy'

Thornburg Foundation officials gathered at the organization's headquarters Nov. 18 for a luncheon celebrating the 25th anniversary. The milestone provided an opportunity for them to contemplate how the foundation — which has awarded more than 1,700 grants totaling \$67 million to New Mexico nonprofit groups — has evolved since its birth in 1999 and to ponder what its future might look like.

Since 2013, Thornburg said in a recent interview with *The New Mexican*, the foundation has targeted its giving in what it calls a "strategic philanthropy" approach.

"Our mission is to promote systemic change that serves the public," he said.

Oliver offered an equally succinct description.

"We fund smart people to do good work," he said.

The foundation's approach wasn't always so focused, Thornburg said, recalling that for the first several years of its existence, the organization operated essentially as a family foundation that funded pet projects.

"I thought, 'This is not bad, but that's all we do. I think we can do more than that,'" Thornburg said.

Things changed when Oliver came aboard in 2013, Thornburg said, explaining the organization began to follow a model established by the Pew Charitable Trusts. It also looked to the other side of its building on Ridgetop Road northwest of Santa Fe for inspiration, where Thornburg Investment Management, a \$46 billion investment management firm, is quartered.

"We have different portfolios with different objectives and different people managing them," Thornburg said, adding that he thought the same approach could work for the foundation.



Garrett Thornburg, Thornburg Foundation founder and chairman, at the entryway to the Thornburg offices last week. The foundation recently celebrated its 25th anniversary.

PHOTOS BY GABRIELA CAMPOS/THE NEW MEXICAN

25 years of support for 'systemic change'

Thornburg Foundation founder points to successes as organization marks milestone



Allan Oliver, the Thornburg foundation's executive director, listens to Garrett Thornburg speak during an interview Thursday. Thornburg said Oliver has helped the foundation focus its efforts.

Instead of "dishing our lollipops" to various needy groups in a scattershot approach, Thornburg said, foundation officials identified a handful of areas where they thought their money could make a real difference.

Over the last 11 years, that list has come to include:

- ◆ Education, with a focus first on early childhood education and, later, K-12 education, as well as a teacher residency program.
- ◆ Regenerative agriculture, including conservation stewardship, support for the bipartisan Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund and providing training for New Mexico producers in regenerative agriculture practices.
- ◆ Water policy, which includes conducting research and providing support for the Governor's Water Policy and Infrastructure Task Force.
- ◆ Good government objectives,

including supporting nonprofit organizations that advocated for the creation of the State Ethics Commission; supporting the passage of a 2021 bill to create an advisory redistricting commission; supporting legislative modernization efforts, including the hiring of professional legislative staff; and helping lead a coalition that funded efforts to support an accurate count of New Mexico residents for the 2020 U.S. census.

◆ A pilot program that helps organizations access millions of dollars in federal grants for projects related to agriculture, health and water.

The foundation also devotes a considerable amount of time and resources to teaching officials from other family foundations how to be more strategic and effective in their giving, Thornburg said.

Making something happen

When it takes on a new initiative, Oliver said, the Thornburg Foundation tries to avoid reinventing the wheel by studying and researching the approaches folks in other states have taken to addressing a problem. The foundation also takes another page from the Pew Charitable Trusts playbook by hiring experts to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of the programs it funds, thus assuring it is receiving a return on its investments.

The 2020 census is a great example of that, Thornburg said, noting the coalition led by the foundation was successful, with the U.S. Census Bureau naming New Mexico's headcount the most accurate in the nation. The state's official census count that year was 2.8% larger than in 2010, he said, which was important because New Mexico received \$36,000 in federal funding for each person who was counted.

The idea for tackling that issue originated with Oliver, Thornburg said.

"It became a really big snowball, but he started it," Thornburg said.

While the foundation is committed to continuing to work on the five statewide problem areas it already has identified, Thornburg said it is likely other issues will be added.

"I don't know exactly where we'll go in the future," he said. "We've been doing research on different areas, and we've had some great suggestions."

The standard for choosing to get involved in a particular area is simple, he said, if it is determined the problem is nonpartisan and that its resolution would benefit New Mexicans.

"Can we make something happen?" Thornburg asked rhetorically. "If we think we can, we'll form a policy office and start down that path."

“We fund smart people to do good work.” Allan Oliver, the Thornburg Foundation's executive director

IN BRIEF

Santa Fe tops rankings of medium-size, arts-vibrant cities

Santa Fe was ranked as the nation's most arts-vibrant, medium-size community in the United States, while Taos was ranked seventh among small communities, according to an annual ranking.

The Arts Vibrancy Index, a project of Southern Methodist University's Meadow School of the Arts, ranked Santa Fe second a year ago, while Taos was ranked for the first time this year, according to a news release.

The index covers aspects of supply and demand as well as public support for arts and culture, the release states. It is adjusted for such factors as cost of living and population differences among communities.

The San Francisco area was ranked No. 1 in the large communities category, while Jackson, Wyo., topped the list in the small communities category.

Home sales, prices increase in October over September

Home sales across New Mexico surged more than 16% in October, according to the latest figures sup-

plied by the New Mexico Association of Realtors.

The increase to 1,782 sales in October from the September figure of 1,532 sales came with an accompanying increase in the median sale price, which grew from more than \$340,000 in September to more than \$356,000 in October.

The October figures outpaced the numbers from a year ago, as 1,748 homes were sold in New Mexico in October 2023. The median price then was nearly \$330,000, according to a news release.

A total of 193 homes sales were reported in Santa Fe County in October at a median price of \$645,000. Bernalillo County led New Mexico with 617 sales at a median price of \$365,000.

AAA says gas prices down again in New Mexico, in Santa Fe

Gasoline prices remained on a downward trajectory across most of New Mexico last week, declining to an average price of \$2.74 a gallon statewide, according to the Dec. 12 AAA New Mexico Weekend Gas Watch report.

That represented a drop of 3 cents from the previous week's figure for a gallon of regular unleaded gas and 18 cents cheaper than at the same point in 2023.

Drivers in Santa Fe are paying the least for gas among the state's four metropolitan statistical areas at an average price of \$2.68 a gallon, down from \$2.75 a

week ago and \$2.84 a year ago. Fuel is most expensive in the Farmington area, averaging \$2.97 a gallon — an increase of 4 cents from last week, according to the survey.

The average price nationally is \$3.03 a gallon, unchanged from last week. The national price a year ago was \$3.14 a gallon.

There are some indications the downward trend could be coming to an end as Christmas and New Year's Day approach. A record number of holiday travelers is expected nationally this year, with nearly 120 million Americans expected to leave home, according to AAA. That number is slightly more than the record number of people who traveled in 2019.

"Gasoline prices are going down for now," Daniel Armbruster, a AAA New Mexico spokesperson, stated in the news release. "Price fluctuations through the remainder of 2024 are possible as record year-end holiday travel volume will likely put pressure on demand for fuel in the coming days."

That increase in national traffic is expected to be mirrored locally. AAA New Mexico officials have projected 8.7 million people in the Mountain region will travel 50 miles or more from home over the holidays. The overall travel volume for the region is expected to 2.8% higher than last year, although that figure is 3.5% lower than 2019.

The New Mexican