The Taos Community Foundation is taking readiness to an all-new level
Responsiveness leads to community recovery and resiliency when disaster strikes

BY HAVEN LINDSEY

"Emergency are, by their very nature, unpredictable, which means the only thing we can really rely on is the certainty that uncertainties will happen, and we must be prepared," said Lisa O'Brien, Director of Taos Community Foundation, explaining the state of readiness that has come to define the organization she joined in 2007. It is precisely this readiness that has resulted in Taos Community Foundation's enhanced ability to respond to the community in times of need, help with resources required to recover and provide the resiliency needed to overcome the challenges that cannot be anticipated, but must be prepared for just the same.

"Just like a bright rainbow can result from the darkest storm, the Fund for Taos serves as a beacon to help meet the challenges that come from these storms and we're still learning," O'Brien said. "The Fund for Taos was established because of COVID, and it will outlive the virus. It is firmly positioned as a long-term fund that will be available for any emergency situation that affects our community."

Taos Community Foundation's readiness was on display in December when Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham declared a state of emergency in Taos following an intense storm of unprecedented high winds that not only caused extensive structural damage to many homes, but also resulted in power outages for much of the county.

When residents were displaced and needed food and resources, the Fund for Taos was there to provide aid. "The storm was devastat-

ing," O'Brien said. "By 8:00 that evening, phone calls were coming in for great assistance from both County and non-profit organization leaders. Those were folks who were in direct contact with residents displaced due to structural damage, and people on the in-country opera who didn't have power. Tassos in need understood they could reach out to us.

Prior to Taos Community Foundation's direct appeal to the community, a contribution had already been made. By the next morning, calls were coming in from private donors and foundations, asking what was needed financially.

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Within 30 days of the storm, nearly $50,000 had been granted out to local non-profits. The Enchanted Circle Community Organizations Active in Disaster — a network of local leaders — met for daily briefings on disaster efforts. This platform also allowed for a quick response related to the coordination of food and shelter services for locals in need, and the supplemental emergency work crew who were in town to help. A philanthropic commitment that is in its infancy stage, but will draw much deeper in the coming months, is one based on lessons learned from the pandemic. That particular emergency uncovered the stark realities of the numbers of families living on the edge of being home and/or food insecure. A community made up of families living paycheck-to-paycheck is a community of at-risk residents. Because the Fund for Taos had been established, when the next emergency hit, the community had a safety net.

"We cannot rely on the assumption that local, state or federal dollars will fix everything. That isn't reality," O'Brien said. "The need for cooperation is essential to understanding that partnerships bring our best talents to a collective, solution-focused response when our community is in need."

"Taos Community Foundation is poised, along with other local philanthropic entities, to be the first to support immediate relief efforts such as food and shelter, while governmental agencies are showing up and providing resources critical for reliable infrastructure and public safety," O'Brien said.