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THE LAS CRUCES

Bulletin

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LAS CRUCES BULLETIN
SPECIAL SECTION

CHILE

DAVID SALCIDO
Las Cruces Bulletin

As the first quarter of the 21st century draws to a close, a whole new year stands poised to usher in new hopes, new dreams and the inevitable realization that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

To help it along, The Downtown Las Cruces Partnership once again hosts the biggest block party of the year, as the Chile Drop takes over Plaza de Las Cruces with live music, family-friendly activities and, of course, the iconic dropping of the illuminated chile pepper at midnight, Tuesday, December 31.

"The Chile Drop is a celebration of our community," said John Muñoz, board chair of DLCP. "It's a time for everyone to come together and enjoy what makes downtown Las Cruces special."

"We're proud to bring this event to life every year. It's a great way to celebrate with neighbors, friends and visitors alike," adds event coordinator Russ Smith.

Kicking off at 5 p.m. with KVIA newscaster Paul Cicala as grand marshal, guests can enjoy a wide variety of food from local vendors and games designed for all ages, ensuring a fun and welcoming environment

DROP

spices up new year's eve

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CHILE

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for the whole family. A DJ will provide music until 9 p.m., when Las Cruces band Caliente, featuring Hurley-based Tejano singer Keana Huerta on vocals, take the main stage with high-energy dance tunes. That's when the party really begins.

"We don't have a beer garden, or anything like that," said DLCP Executive Director Susan Greenwald. "Instead, we encourage people to visit the bars along Main Street. Little Toad Creek, Icebox and Rad Retrocade will all be open. They're sort of our de facto beer garden. It's also our hope that people will start the evening at the Amador Live New Year's Eve bash, have dinner, enjoy some

entertainment, then walk over to enjoy the festivities at the Plaza."

The evening's highlight, of course, is the illuminated chile drop at midnight, a unique symbol of Las Cruces' culture and heritage. At the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve, a 19-foot chrome chile pepper, covered in 2,400 sparkling LED lights is lowered, while the crowd goes wild. As in previous years, the public votes on whether the chile pepper will be red or green, paying homage to the official state question, "Red or green?" To vote, the DLCP provides a QR code for people to vote both before the event and during.

"Last year we had between 6,000 and 7,000 people, but they weren't all there at the same time," said Greenwald. "Some

people, mostly families with kids, come early to eat, play a few games and listen to music, then leave before the band starts. Then there are a lot of people who come later in the evening to experience the event. Last year I was on the stage at midnight, and it was wall to wall people all the way to Bank of the West. I think it's just become a tradition for most people. It's something they can do with the family and best of all, it's free."

The Las Cruces Chile Drop is a tradition that seems to be catching on. As Greenwald points out, "Different communities and regions have their own. There's a peach drop in Atlanta, there's a potato drop in Boise. It always seems to be something unusual. There's a crab drop somewhere back east.

There's a cheese ball in Wisconsin. I think it sort of symbolizes the region each takes place in."

With all those drops to choose from, it's a point of pride that for the last few years, the Las Cruces Chile Drop has been in the top 5 of USA Today's lineup of New Year's Eve celebrations. This, in turn, has gotten the attention of national media outlets.

"Our event continues to grow," said Muñoz. "Last year we had CNN and were top ranked in USA Today's New Year's Eve destination spots. It was incredible to see us on TV with an international audience and a record crowd. The CNN group absolutely loved our community, and the Chile Drop celebration. We were so proud because

this is a great family event and celebration and a great way to show case our beautiful city and community."

"They really loved Las Cruces," adds Greenwald about the CNN crew. "They were so kind and supportive. They loved downtown, they loved Grounded, they even loved the chile. They asked for a case of chile to share with the folks back in Georgia. They were so enthusiastic. They couldn't have been better guests."

All of which makes this event the feather in the DLCP's proverbial cap. Credited through New Mexico Main Street and Main Street America, the DLCP is a nonprofit dedicated to the economic development of downtown

Las Cruces.

"It's something we do for our community," said Greenwald. "The Chile Drop is sponsored by the city and it's something that we all take a lot of pride in. It's also important to remember that this is a family event. Even though it runs late, it is for the whole family. It's a friendly, welcoming, feel-good place to be at the turning of the new year."

The Las Cruces Chile Drop brings the community together to ring in the new year, 5 p.m.-12:30 a.m., Tuesday, December 31 at the Plaza de Las Cruces, 100 N. Main St., Las Cruces. More information is available online via DowntownLasCruces.org, or by email at director@dlcp.org.



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OPEN MEETINGS

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peau, only the employment agreement."

"The City Council's lack of compliance (with open meetings law) deprived the public of information and the opportunity to participate in the affairs of government and the official acts of public officers and employees who represent them," Moffat wrote.

It also rendered the process legally invalid, starting with the decision to limit the scope to internal candidates, the letter stated.

The GCA investigation also found that required public statements about what was discussed in closed session had not been made promptly, as the law directs, while noting the council had said that arose from an error "due to misrepresentation of the requirement by staff."

The GCA offered the city two ways to cure the violations.

One option is to hold a properly noticed open meeting "summarizing all the discussions and comments made outside of a public meeting in violation

of OMA, and ratifying the actions by a public and open vote of a majority of the City Council." The discussion would need to address all of the defects in the process dating back to the decision to limit the search to internal candidates. This would not have the effect of validating the decisions retroactively, Moffat underscored, and the approvals would take effect on the day of the new meeting. The implications of that on matters including the employment agreement were not immediately clear.

Another option offered to the city was starting the entire process over and conducting all deliberations and votes in lawful public meetings.

In a written response, City Attorney Brad Douglas did not indicate which option the city would choose.

"We will take immediate action to remedy the deficiencies the (Attorney General) identified. We will take this as a learning opportunity and make improvements in the future. As the AG acknowledged, we have already made corrective action regarding the closed meeting statement requirements."