

LA VEREDA DEL NORTE

Rio Grande County Museum celebrates OST's 20th Anniversary of Becoming a National Trail Historic Trail



By Lyndsie Ferrell

Saturday in Del Norte bloomed cloudy and wet with rain showers promised for the remainder of the day but that did not stop several area historians and visitors from coming out to celebrate twenty years since the National Historical Designation of the Old Spanish Trail and to commemorate the anniversary with stories about days gone by. The Rio Grande County Museum played host to the event, which featured new exhibits and welcomed keynote speakers from across southwestern Colorado and northern New Mexico.

The morning started off with the Executive Director of the Old Spanish Trail Association, Lynn Brittner, speaking about how the Trail became a National Historic Trail through an

Las Verada Del Norte Chapter members

act of Congress. She acknowledged the many folks in the La Vereda del Norte Chapter who participated in the process, especially Ron Kessler. She addressed the attending crowd about the significance of the trail and what role it played in western civilization since the early 1800s and beyond. Brittner also took a moment to speak on behalf of the association: “We are looking for ways to revitalize the association and to bring new interest to the significance of the Old Spanish trail. We need new ideas and new members to ensure the survival of the organization we love so much.”

After Brittner, local archaeologist Ken Frye took the crowd on a “Trail Through Time” as he toured the museum and the exhibits based on the

Top to bottom: 1. Lynn Brittner and Chris Miller 2. Chris Gosar and crew grilling sausages for the event. 3. Lynn Brittner and local archaeologist, Ken Frye

Indigenous heritage that first formed the Spanish Trail, so many years ago. Frye highlighted the significant role that Indigenous peoples played in the creation of the trail and how their actions created the first road to the West.

The morning included tales of the trail from Loretta Mitson, who spoke about the Spanish plazas down south near Conejos and into the upper regions of New Mexico and how the trail followed water sources through most of the San Luis Valley. Mitson was followed by Frank White, a native of the La Garita area and one of the descendants of the original White family that homesteaded in the area bringing with them the first agricultural homesteads in the valley's history. "We have an obligation to remember and honor our past," said White.

The afternoon was filled with the scent of Gosar Sausage as Chris Gosar and his crew grilled up locally-sourced sausages for the attending crowd and played the perfect precursor for the afternoon keynote speaker, Devon Pena with the Acequia Institute, The San Luis Food Sovereignty Initiative. Pena and his group of stakeholders from San Luis are working to recreate heritage farming and to help educate youth on the importance of working the land like the first settlers to the area did. "Community health and well-being in the acequia villages have been affected by the decades of lack of access to La Sierra and a shift away from farming the traditional and healthier foods," said Pena.

The day was a wonderful way to start off the summer season at the museum and a huge thanks goes out to all who helped make it possible. Next up, the museum will be hosting a fun family evening on June 24 from 3pm to 7pm. The 2nd annual Summer Solstice event will include fun family activities, food, games and a drumming circle to welcome summer!

