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Come Celebrate Openness

By Robert Trapp Sep 29, 2016

The New Mexico Foundation for Open Government will hold its 13th annual Dixon Awards celebration Oct. 5 at the Embassy Suites in Albuquerque.

The event honors people from all walks of life in a variety of categories, who have demonstrated a strong devotion to openness in government. What once was an evening banquet has morphed into a midweek luncheon, but since its 2004 inception, it's been named after FOG co-founder William S. Dixon, a first amendment attorney of unparalleled caliber. He died of cancer in 2003 at the age of 59.

Late Rio Grande SUN publisher Robert E. Trapp was one of the founding members of the organization in 1989. The SUN continues to support the non-profit with Board membership and donations.



This organization does amazing, badly needed work in the open government arena. There is a tough as nail executive director who, with a cadre of Board members, routinely roam the halls of the Roundhouse working to stop bad legislation and trying to support legislation that encourages openness.

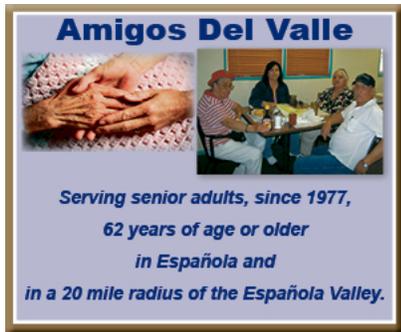
Executive Director Susan Boe daily catches calls on the hot line from all sorts of people, with all types of problems. Most calls involve questionable executive sessions and records being denied or the request being ignored. It's cold comfort that this goes on all over New Mexico, not just in our politically charged county.

These calls, legal advice and intervention on citizens' behalf by the FOG Board are all free. The cost is absorbed by participating lawyers (thank you, legal experts) and wrapped into FOG's annual budget, which is minuscule, especially when compared to its huge mission.

FOG provides training in many forms, including the Continuing Legal Education workshop held in May. We team up with the Attorney General's office to do road shows throughout the state, bringing open records/meetings information to working folks in the trenches.

This year's honorees are Terri Cole, business; Steve Terrell, journalism; Annette Marie Rodriguez, education and Norm Gaume, citizen. Gaume is a favorite of ours. He was a man alone, doing battle with the Interstate Stream Commission. At the onset he looked quixotic fighting the state and its team of

lawyers.



The Commission found a cute way to get around making decisions in public: hand the sensitive issue to a subcommittee and let it decide in a closed meeting. Gaume, with the help of several attorneys (including FOG's), forced the Commission to stop the practice. That's a real watchdog. You've got to love it when a little guy tilts at windmills and wins the battle.

We'll never win the war, there are just too many politicians and bureaucrats intent on hiding the public's business. Witness the case the Rio Grande SUN just settled with the Española School District.

The keynote speaker at the luncheon will be Columbia University professor Ann Cooper. "As a foreign correspondent with National Public Radio, she was an eyewitness to the fall of communism in the former Soviet Union and to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. Upon her return to the United States, Cooper served as executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, which is an independent, nonprofit organization which promotes press freedom worldwide. It is headquartered in New York City," according to the press release on the celebration.

Tickets are \$60 but anyone in public office or management at the city of Española, Rio Arriba County or Española School District may be guests at the Rio Grande SUN table. Anyone wishing to be our guest may contact mnged@riograndesun.com or call 505-753-2126 and ask for Bob.

The luncheon will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Oct. 5, at the Embassy Suites, 1000 Woodward Place, NE, Albuquerque. To purchase a ticket or donate to a very worthy and well-operated open government cause please go to nmfog.org or call 505-764-3750.

