

PIÑON AWARDS

BY GUSSIE FAUNTLEROY • FOR THE NEW MEXICAN

While Americans were wondering how to reach out and help during our national crisis, hard-working teams of Santa Feans were reaching out to people in need in our own community — in the same ways they have been doing, day after day, for many years.

These are the dedicated staffs and volunteers of more than 400 local nonprofit organizations that, together, weave a broad network of support, assistance and hope for people of all ages and circumstances.

On Thursday, five nonprofits will be honored by the Santa Fe Community Foundation and receive the foundation's 15th annual Piñon Awards. The awards are the only local honor devoted exclusively to non-profit organizations.

This year's recipients are: the Young Father's Project (co-sponsored by Planned Parenthood of

New Mexico); the Northern New Mexico Animal Protection Society (Española Animal Shelter); Partners in Education; Outside In; and the Santa Fe Land Use Resource Center's Old Pecos Trail Scenic Gateway and Corridor Project.

Winners of Piñon Awards are selected each year through a peer-nomination process within the local nonprofit community. Each of the five winning organizations receives a hand-etched glass statuette and a \$1,000 unrestricted grant to be used for whatever the organizations need.

A free celebration honoring the Piñon Award organizations begins at 6 p.m. Thursday with an awards ceremony at the Lensic Performing Arts Center. Hosting the event will be actresses Marsha Mason and Jo Harvey Allen along with Mayor Larry Delgado and other local luminaries.

Short documentary videos on each award-winning organization will be presented. In addition, an entertaining and educational short video on the history of the Santa Fe Community Foundation will be shown in recognition of this year as the foundation's 20th anniversary.


While the event is free, reservations are requested. To reserve seating call 988-9715.

Billie Blair, a former Santa Fe Community Foundation board member who recently took over as the foundation's president, noted that grant money received by nonprofits often is earmarked for specific projects. Less easy to come by sometimes are funds for daily operating expenses.

Yet even with sometimes limited resources, Santa Fe area nonprofits are doing an "outstanding job," Blair said. She added that all the nonprofits are "staffed with absolutely the hardest-working and most passionate people I've ever met. They're the people in the

trenches, making life better for people who need a helping hand. They're really meeting critical needs in our community."

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Outside In

In the mid 1980s, David Lescht was playing in a not-so-great band in the San Francisco area. Yet there were certain places they played where the audiences were extraordinarily appreciative, regardless of the caliber of music. Those were prisons and hospitals, places where live music of any kind can help ease the isolation, loneliness, boredom and despair often experienced by those confined in these settings.

The performances were put together by Bread and Roses, an organization founded by Joan Baez's sister, Mimi Farina, who died earlier this year. For Lescht, the experience was a revelation. He caught a glimpse of the positive impact music could have on people confined in all types of institutions, including nursing homes, correctional facilities, residential treatment centers, homeless and domestic-abuse shelters and other human-service facilities.

In 1995, Lescht, who had moved to Santa Fe, decided to establish a nonprofit organization to take musical performances to such settings. In 1996 Outside In produced 84 live performances, offering them free to institutions and their residents. Last year, the events had climbed to 355 and had expanded to include not only music but dance, juggling and other performing arts as well.

The performances reach at least 8,000 people annually in more than 30 institutions around Northern and Central New Mexico. In a tribute to this work, Outside In is receiving the Geronimo Cruz Montoya Award for Arts and Humanities, named for the acclaimed San Juan Pueblo artist and teacher.

Some performers donate their time, but Outside In offers to pay all artists at least a minimal amount.

"We're dealing with a lot of local, talented musicians who need to get paid. We try to respect the profession," said Lescht, who runs the organization with one other staff person.

A major focus for Outside In today is its Creative Arts for Youth with Promise program, which takes weekly workshops in guitar, hip-hop dance and visual arts to incarcerated youth. The program also offers similar weekly workshops — held at El Museo Cultural in Santa Fe — for formerly incarcerated youth who are most at risk of returning to the criminal justice system.

Chris Abeyta, a longtime Santa Fe musician and member of the band, Lumbre del Sol, teaches guitar for the program. Guitars are borrowed from the Santa Fe Boys and Girls Club, which received a donation of instruments from the Fender Guitar Company and singer Bonnie Raitt.

Abeyta has witnessed the transformative power of music and the pride of learning to play.

"We're trying to do rehabilitation, true rehab, by having these guys feel like they're really doing something, learning something, in the music field. Then maybe they'll see that mathematics or reading or getting a GED is something they can do," he said.

"It's a new world now, and young people even more are asking about meaning, and needing power. So at least in a small way, this is saying, 'This is something you can take to the world.'"