

## Today's speaker was Larry Sonntag—New Mexico Business Coalition



Mr. Sonntag wasn't born in Albuquerque, but his family moved here when he was very young, so for all practical purposes, he is a native. His first residence was at 469 63rd street—yep, he grew up in “that part of town”. One of his neighbors was a drug dealer, but Larry was too young to know, or understand about that. He often played with the neighbor kids and didn't even realize what was going on inside the house. Mr. Sonntag also learned a lot of Spanglish terms in those younger days, but his formal education was at Lavaland Elementary, John Adams Middle School and West Mesa High School. Larry's father was a schoolteacher and a good man. He taught Larry that a person can, and should, do for themselves. While growing up, the younger Mr. Sonntag learned he could work odd jobs and get his own spending money. He was a professional trash-picker-upper and aluminum can collector. Larry's dad would take him to the Hitching Post parking lot to pick up the plethora of cans left there on the weekends. On a good day, he could redeem the haul for \$3 (nice money for the work). Larry also earned the rank of Eagle Scout, a feat of which he is (and rightly should be) very proud. In high school he played on the baseball team, but his favorite times were when he was in the wood shop or auto mechanics classes. Mr. Sonntag enjoyed the woodworking so much that he initially thought that would be a good long term career. In 1977 he started the Sunshine Wood Design shop. His girlfriend, Carla, would do the design work while Larry, using his trusty Shop Smith lathe, would produce the carvings. The Sunshine shop didn't last too long, but the relationship with Carla certainly did. They initially met in high school and have been great companions ever since. Larry and Carla were married 41 years ago and have raised two great sons. The eldest son, Allen, is a UNM graduate and currently working on computer systems stuff at Sandia National Labs. He and his wife (who works in a 4-H extension program) have Larry's only granddaughter/cowgirl, Madeline. The Sonntag's younger son, Daniel, is a NMSU grad. He is now working for Vanguard in Scottsdale, AZ. Having both a Lobo and an Aggie in the family allowed for a little rivalry. Then Allen went on to get another degree at Texas A&M, so now there are two Aggies in the family (but that hasn't decreased the rivalry). After he closed his wood shop, Larry joined the Air Force. He became a Security Specialist (That's not an MP. They are different departments altogether). Mr. Sonntag apparently had a good time in that service. He smiled a lot when showing us pictures of the weapons he used. An M-16 assault weapon and an M-203 grenade launcher that could attach to his rifle. Larry was initially stationed at a Titan II missile site near Wichita, Kansas. Soon after arriving he was involved in an incident usually found in comedy shows or cartoons. The commanding officer at the base was giving Larry a tour of the facility and, inside the silo command area, reached out his arm to point at the 'red button' used to activate the huge missiles. At that moment, he tripped and lurched forward sufficiently to hit his hand on the button. Larry had a front row seat to the ensuing bells, whistles, flashing warning lights, closing gates, and locking doors...and the fallout (though not on him) of an unauthorized military action. That could be the most 'exciting' adventure of his military career. At some later point (and not because of the incident), Officer Sonntag was assigned to a base in Germany where he was a Nuclear Weapons Convoy Commander. Larry had worked his way through the ranks from E-3 to E-5 in two years; earned an Associate's Degree in Industrial Security; and accumulated an impressive list of awards including Buchel NCO of the Year; Weisbaden Air Base Security Specialist of the Year; and at NCO Leadership School, he won 4 of the 5 awards issued by that program (that had never been done before). Shortly thereafter, Larry was awarded USAFE NCO of the Year; received a step promotion to E-6 and became one of the top 12 in the USAF. Then his promising military career took an unforeseen turn. Larry's mother became seriously ill, and he asked for leave to visit her. The request was denied. The Air Force felt his being gone at that time would interfere with their plans. It became a choice of family or career. Larry put his family first and left the Air Force. He was able to spend some time with his mother before she passed. But now he had to move on to Plan B for a career. Larry wanted to be a Department of Energy Courier. Moving hazardous waste around the country would be 'cool' and he was well qualified for the job. Well almost. The courier program only accepted people with uncorrected 20/30 or better vision. Larry wears glasses, so he had to create a career Plan C. That turned out to be as a car salesman at Melloy Dodge, and it also turned out to be a not very good plan. Larry was uncomfortable with the money driven aspect of the job, so he moved on to another plan. By now he wasn't keeping track of plan numbers, he was just looking for productive work. Woodworkers Supply was looking for employees and Larry remembered the 'old days' when he enjoyed wood crafting. Mr. Sonntag was hired...in the phone sales department. He could do the job fine, but it wasn't his dream job, so he continued to look around. A friend suggested the Albuquerque Police Department. His Air Force experience certainly provided sufficient credentials and Larry was hired. That was the beginning of a 20-year career, primarily in the APD Crime Lab. He was good at his job which, ultimately led to a sticky situation. Larry discovered irregularities in the evidence unit indicating missing money, guns and documents. Reporting the situation to his supervisors and on up the chain of command provided insight into just how involved the corruption had spread. After blowing the whistle, Larry decided that he would end his APD career and just move on. He was still very interested in making New Mexico a better place so Larry and Carla founded the New Mexico Business Coalition and Rebound New Mexico. Those organizations strive to improve the lives of all New Mexicans through the philosophies: “Provide equal opportunity to everyone. That doesn't always mean equal success for everyone. People have to help themselves by taking advantage of opportunities that arise”; “Offer a hand-up, not a handout”; and “Give folks a safety net, but make sure that they don't turn it into a hammock”. President John Kennedy said it quite well. “Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future”. NM Business Coalition is doing a lot to promote NM businesses and to try to bolster the initiative of state residents. There are many organizations and even public officials promoting government dependency. Larry's organizations attempt to contradict that message by providing a voice promoting the 'I can do it for myself' attitude. They, in collaboration with Rebound New Mexico, recently hosted a 2023 Heroes Banquet where folks from all over the state came together to honor the first responders, veterans, and other advocates of the community. NM Business Coalition works to promote beneficial legislation and discourage detrimental laws. They offer access to a large amount of information regarding current legislative activity, and they give citizens the ability to easily communicate opinions to legislators. To see all of that, go to the website [nmbizcoalition.org](http://nmbizcoalition.org) or give Mr. Sonntag a call at 505-366-8150. NM Business Coalition is also pursuing legal options to force the city to enforce existing laws. To find out about their February 20th event regarding that issue, go to the website <https://events.humanitix.com/abq-crime-crisis-fundraiser>.

◆ **First announcement of a new member application:**

**Maven Dentistry**

**Representative: Dr. Ben Stogsdill**

**Category: Dentist**

**Sponsor: Phil Buckles**

If you have an objection to this company becoming a member, or if you have information that you feel should be considered during the review process, please contact Membership Committee Chairman, Jack Zipper (via telephone number 505-259-5959 or email at [jdzipper@comcast.net](mailto:jdzipper@comcast.net)) as soon as possible.

- ◆ **The 2024 golf outing has been scheduled for Friday May 17<sup>th</sup> at Santa Ana golf course starting at 12:30PM. Committee Chairman, Jerry Becker will provide more details in the coming weeks.**
- ◆ **We are not able to have a breakfast meeting at Tanoan Country Club on April 23rd. That will provide a great opportunity for a member to host an open house instead. If you are interested in scheduling an open house at your facilities on that morning, please contact Mario. His information is in the box at the bottom of this page.**
- ◆ **Please note that we have a need for greeters and speakers at upcoming breakfast meetings. Please check the vacancy dates noted below and, if you can take one of the slots, contact Mario as soon as possible.**
- ◆ **Board members: The next board meeting will be at 5:30pm on February 15th at Rio Bravo Brewery.**

## Badge Board Greeters

- Feb 13<sup>th</sup> Robert Biernacki—WaterQuest
- Feb 20<sup>th</sup> Andrew Sanchez—Revelco of New Mexico
- Feb 27<sup>th</sup>
- Mar 5<sup>th</sup>
- Mar 12<sup>th</sup>
- Mar 19<sup>th</sup>
- Mar 26<sup>th</sup> Timmy Simms—Territorial Scaffolding
- Apr 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Apr 9<sup>th</sup> John Mead—John Thomas Jewelers
- Apr 16<sup>th</sup>

## Upcoming Speakers

- Feb 13<sup>th</sup> Phil Houser—DSI
- Feb 20<sup>th</sup> Paul Jew—Moji Cinema
- Feb 27<sup>th</sup>
- Mar 5<sup>th</sup>
- Mar 12<sup>th</sup>
- Mar 19<sup>th</sup> Lawrence Herrera—Performance Ranch
- Mar 26<sup>th</sup>
- Apr 2<sup>nd</sup> John Mead—John Thomas Jewelers
- Apr 9<sup>th</sup>
- Apr 16<sup>th</sup>

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