

Large Chimney Stands Guard In Front of Former Power House  
Coal Ovens To Right of Chimney Are Also in Decayed State



Cemetery of Former Thriving Mining Community  
Graves are Marked by Uniform Metal Crosses

Journal Photos by Steve Winston

## Little But Memories Remains of Dawson

By STEVE WINSTON

### Around The State With Bern Gantner

Odds and ends on this Easter Sunday, the day before the IRS begins smacking its lips and rubbing its hands in glee over that big bundle of cash that is expected to flow in from last-minute income tax filers:

- In what is perhaps an answer to the "Billy the Kid Trail Ride" of the Roswell Campus of Eastern New Mexico University, officials at New Mexico Highlands University have come up with a program that will hit the rails instead of the trail.

Christened the "Train for Thought" program, the Highlands study project will use Amtrak's Southwest Limited to transport students from Albuquerque to the main campus in Las Vegas for a weekend of course work. The students are from Highland's Kirtland Air Force Base Extension Center. And they'll be going up to Las Vegas in the school's effort to establish a stronger relationship between the main campus and the extension center.

The first course, on Amtrak, will be a marketing strategy seminar Friday and Saturday. The seminar will be co-taught by Dr. Richard Wald, business and economics department chairman, and Dr. Ken Gibson of the University of Wisconsin.

As Dr. John Aragon, Highlands president, pointed out, this venture is not only an experimental course that also a "motive in a non-scholarly nature to aid Amtrak and other public transportation agencies" in increasing use of their services.

A few more special efforts like this for Amtrak may give boosters a tiny ray of hope that the apparently doomed Southwest Limited will yet be saved.

- Guillermo "Billy" Martinez of Albuquerque sends along word that Fern Sawyer will be back in the saddle again this



RATON — Every book about New Mexico ghost towns covers Dawson. Each book also contains at least one photograph of two huge smokestacks that tower over a half mile long row of coke ovens and the rusting power plant behind the more northerly smokestack.

It's probably because there's little else left of the coal mining town 18 miles northwest of Cimarron. All that remains of the community of 9,000 people are a few houses and barns used by the cowboys who tend cattle for CS Ranch that leases the property from the Phelps Dodge Copper Corporation.

There are other reminders of the past, such as the Dawson morgue sitting lonesome now that the giant gymnasium and department store that flanked it are gone; the staff house (a frame cottage boarded up and decaying beneath giant cottonwoods); and an empty filling station that still displays a Conoco sign near the entrance of what was once downtown Dawson.

The ghost town books cover the cemetery, too. Dawson suffered two awesome tragedies that are much written about: a mine explosion in 1913 killed 263 men; a decade later, 120 more miners died in a similar accident. Their graves are marked by uniform metal crosses stamped with their names — except for the blank crosses over the bodies of men who had no relatives in America. Their bodies were unidentified.

But, Dawson is no ghost town. Rather, it is part of the great American immigrant experience that marked the late 19th and early 20th centuries — the migration to this country that made the U.S. a cosmopolitan nation. Roughly 80 percent of Dawson's citizens were immigrants — from Italy, Poland, Greece, the Balkans, Mexico, the British Isles, Finland, Sweden, and Germany.

"There was every nationality you could think of there," recalls Nick Didomenico. His father, Clemente, came to Dawson in 1904 from San Valentino, Italy. The younger Didomenico, now athletic director of Robertson High School in Las Vegas, said: "It was a regular United Nations — Greeks, Slavs, blacks, Chinese — you name it, we had it."

John Salvo, secretary for Commerce and Industry in Gov. Bruce King's cabinet, was a football star in a town that was sports-crazy. He remembers, "We got along great, too. We were all brothers and sisters. Everybody stuck together."

This mini-U.N. was named for John B. Dawson who first bought the property where the mines and town were located from the Maxwell Grant in 1869. It set him back a paltry \$3,700 for what he thought was one thousand acres.

A cattle rancher, Dawson noticed the coal deposits on his land, but he mined it only for his own use. He learned through subsequent litigation with Maxwell Grant that he had actually purchased 20,000 acres.

Agents for the Maxwell Grant were trying to stimulate interest in coal deposits on the Maxwell Grant by the 1800's. Their promoting caught the eye of C.B. Eddy — for whom Eddy County was named. Eddy was driving his El Paso and Northeastern Railroad north from Carrizozo in 1900 after getting badly burned financially in an attempt to develop coal fields around Capitan. These proved to be of low quality. However, in 1901, assays proved the Dawson Ranch coal to be what Eddy wanted: good fuel for locomotives and good coke material for copper smelters.

In that year, Eddy's El Paso and Northeastern joined the Rock Island Railroad at Santa Rosa. Then, the Eddy line drove a 146-mile spur from Tucumcari to Dawson. This was to become the Southern Pacific's Dawson Branch.

Dawson was already a going concern by then. A post off-

Continued on E-2



**Mrs. Madeleine Salvo**  
Mother of 11 Children



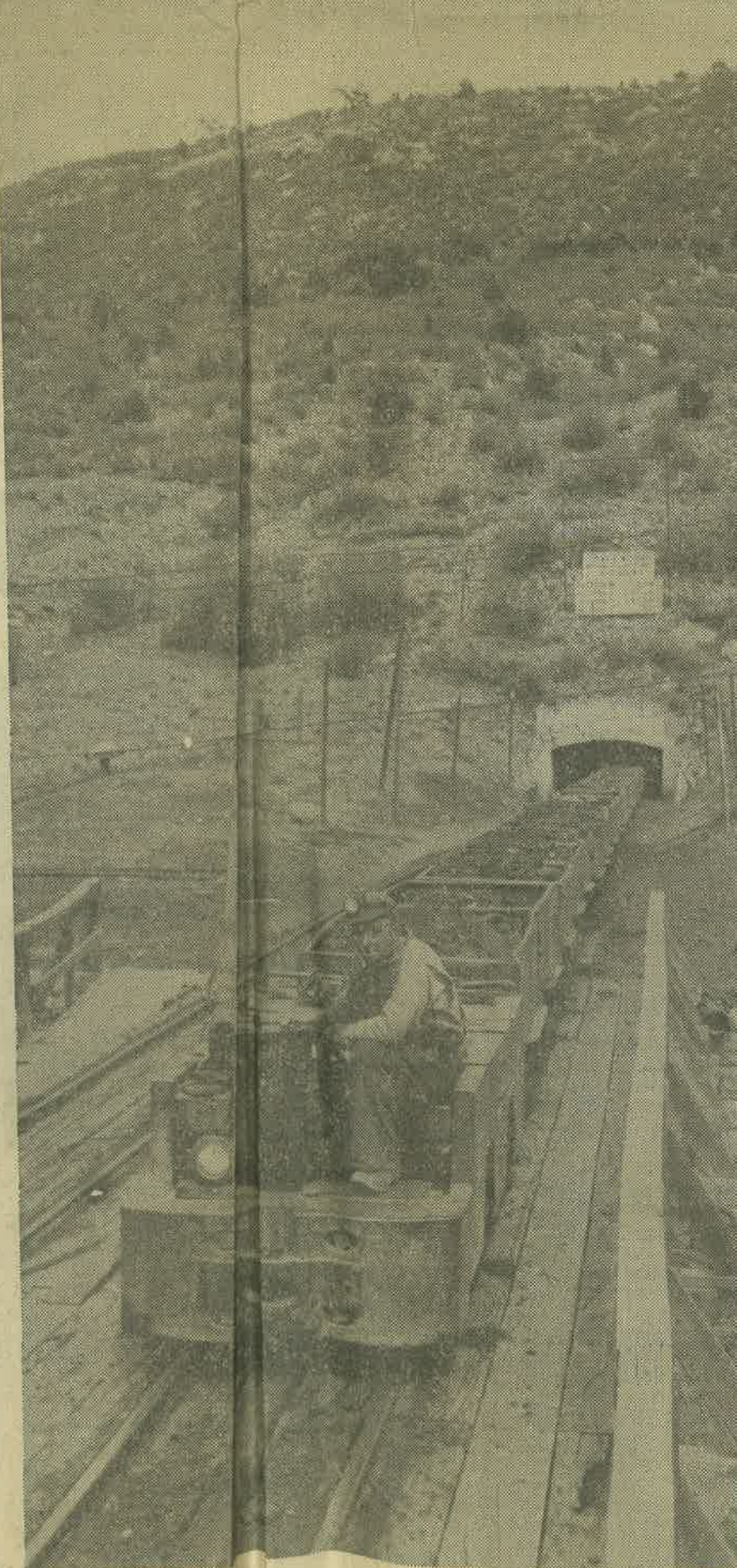
**Pietro Montepara**  
Recalls Mine Disaster



**Nick Didomenico**  
"Regular United Nations"



**Tony Arcangeli**  
Every Family Made Wine



(Emma Arcangeli Photo)

How Ore Cars Coming Out of Tunnel  
Small Tunnel The Right Used By Mule Teams in Early Days

week in front worth. She'll appear with Walt Garrison in the Copenhagen Tobacco Super Stars roping championship starting Thursday.

Nearly everyone in New Mexico knows Fern and her exploits in rodeo and State Fair work. And nearly everyone in the Southwest and elsewhere knows all about Walt Garrison, the former rodeo star who is however more famous for his former backfield work with the Dallas Cowboys.

Walt plugs Copenhagen on TV and also makes the rounds plugging the rodeo profession. It's a nice combination. Profitable, too.

● Connie Sanchez Martinez, formerly of Las Vegas but now of Albuquerque, is making arrangements for what will be the inaugural reunion for former students and faculty members of the old Immaculate Conception School in that San Miguel County city. The reunion, Connie says, will be held July 7 at the Shalako Inn in Albuquerque.

Connie wants to hear from former students and also from the ex-faculty group. And she wants reservations as soon as possible. The "exes" can contact her at P.O. Box 6472, Albuquerque, 87197.

● Talking about reunions, there'll be a big one this coming weekend in Deming. In addition to the annual Old Timers' Reunion planned for Saturday, the folks down in Luna County also will be staging "Class Reunions of the 1930's" on Friday night. The old timers in that county always come out in full force for this annual gathering, and from every indication, another big turnout is expected this weekend. So reports Lola T. Upton, chairman of the Luna County Historical Society which is helping to stage the celebration.

The windup feature of the reunions will be a Stephen Foster Festival to be presented by the historical society Sunday afternoon. Main part of the Stephen Foster program will be given by Bradford Hodges of Silver City, who is described as an authority on the great American composer.

● H. Gail Eilebrecht, a general contractor in Truth or Consequences, has been appointed to serve a two-year term as a member of the Sierra County Flood Control Authority. His appointment was made by the County Commission upon the recommendation of County Administrator Gil M. Olguin.

Gantner is state editor of the Albuquerque Journal.



# Dawson, Once Thriving Little U.N., Now Listed as Ghost Town

Continued from E-1

ice had opened there in 1900. The Dawson Fuel Company, first operator of the mines, incorporated in 1901 as a subsidiary of the El Paso and Northeastern. In 1906, Phelps-Dodge bought the property and laid out a model company town. By 1910, Dawson could boast a population of 3,500 persons.

Phelps-Dodge operated through a subsidiary named the Stag Canyon Coal Company. Dawson produced coal for both the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe while Phelps-Dodge fueled its El Paso smelter with clean-burning coke made in Dawson. Coal from the region also went to Arizona, Kansas and Texas.

Dawson was laid out along the Vermejo River valley. Houses were built of frame or from blocks made of coke and cement. Miners lived in residential areas such as Loretto Heights, Capitan, and Number One Camp.

Downtown came to possess a gym, an opera house, a movie theater, and a huge mercantile store. There was a modern hospital, and a huge swimming pool. Thirsty miners had recourse to three saloons while the faithful attended one of the two churches. In short, Dawson had the appearance of a typical small American town.

Phelps-Dodge went out of its way to develop a model community, but life there wasn't easy. Joyce Lancieri was brought there by her miner father when she was 6 years old. She recalls, "When we first moved to Dawson, there were barrels of muddy water on the porch of our house. We had to put some kind of chemical in it so that we could drink it." Ms. Lancieri lived in Dawson from 1916 to 1950 and is now a resident of Raton.

The miners' homes also lacked indoor plumbing — giving the Dawson kids numerous chances for pranks. "We used to push the privies over on Halloween," said Joe Didomenico. He's Nick's brother. A resident of Raton, Joe worked in the mines from 1926 to 1950. He was also brought from Italy as a child.

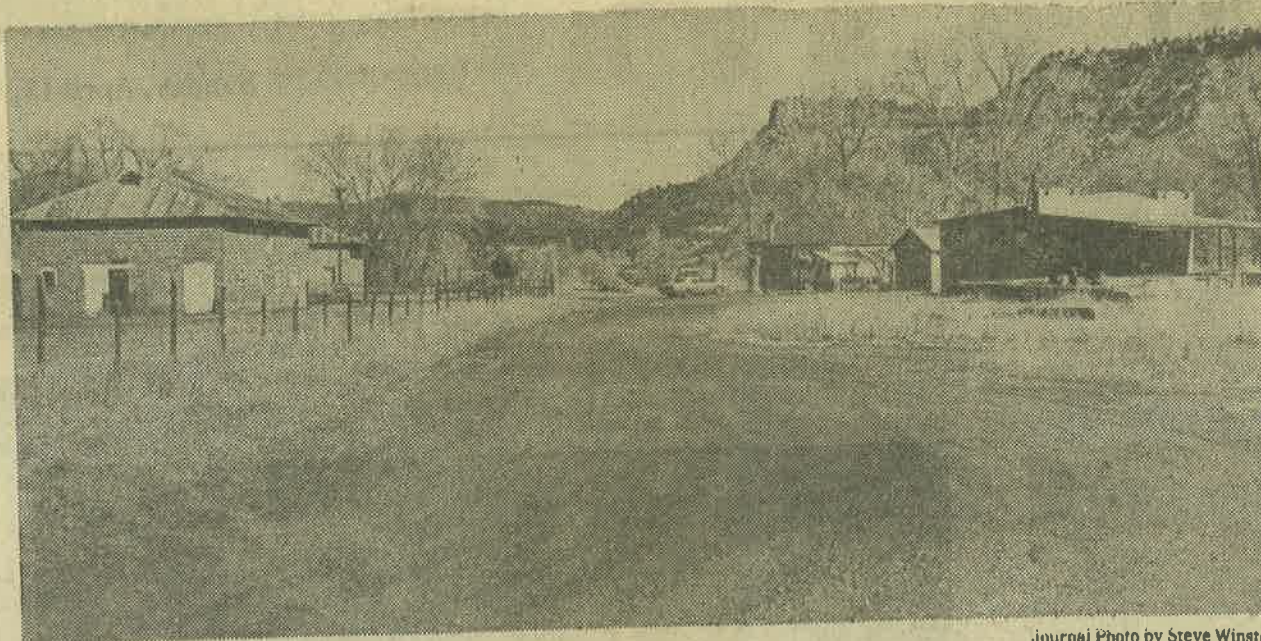
"We didn't have houses with modern conveniences," recalls Mrs. Livia Mora. "So, it was a lot of work all the time. We had to carry all the ashes out and carry all the bathwater in." Mrs. Mora is married to Kelly Mora, representative from Union, Colfax, and Harding Counties. She also spent her childhood in the vanished town.

Dawson miners didn't earn a lot of money. Tony Arcangeli, 63, was born and raised there and worked in the mines. He said, "You got \$3.95 for a nine hour day. Later, we got \$5 a day." This wasn't salary, either. Miners were paid by the tonnage they sent out of the mine. Arcangeli said, "We made \$600 to \$700 a year. When you first started work, you paired off with an older guy. You spent 10 months sharing tonnage with him at a 60-40 ratio in his favor while you learned the ropes."

The company decreased the miners' pay still further by docking the miner's work for rock it suspected was mixed with coal. "If you loaded 10 cars, they'd dock six of them — they'd take 1,000-pounds from each car off your tonnage." The cars held 3,000 pounds of coal.

Miners also paid for their own equipment and dynamite. Much of the construction work they did on the mine got no recompense from the company as it produced no coal.

The mines were dark and dangerous places to work. They were built according to a definite plan. First, two parallel tunnels were driven on either side of the coal deposit. "Rooms" branched from the tunnels into the coal as miners harvested the black mineral.



Journal Photo by Steve Winston

## Downtown Dawson Was The Center of Activity During Hey-Day of Coal-Mining Today Former Businesses And Homes Still Standing Are Boarded Up

because every big accident would kill off several members of one family."

The last of Dawson's major tragedies, the 1923 explosion in Mine No. 2, is still vivid in the memories of the people who lived there. Frank Gallosini, another retired miner living in Raton, recalls, "One fellow we knew got too drunk to go on his shift in No. 2. That saved his life. Everyone else was killed."

Gallosini, Josephine Lancieri, Tony Arcangeli, and Joe Didomenico were school children at the time of the blast. "The explosion rolled through the school like an earthquake," recalled Gallosini who was then in the 8th grade. "All the kids started crying. Everyone wanted to go home to see who got killed." Josephine Lancieri did run home — crying.

Pietro Montepara was deep in the bowels of another mine shoring up timbers with a partner, Frank Cook. He wasn't aware of the accident until he began to choke and cough: the pair was suffocating because the fans in the stricken mine had been reversed and were blowing noxious gases into their tunnel. Cook and Montepara fled.

Rescue efforts mounted by teams from Dawson, neighboring mining communities, and the federal government had no success. One hundred-twenty men died in No. 2. After the bodies had been brought out, Tony Arcangeli's father took him along to help identify the body of a man who boarded with the Arcangeli family.

The boarder was known for his gold teeth. Arcangeli identified him by the lump of gold fused in the mouth of a charred corpse. "I had trouble sleeping for years afterward," recalls Arcangeli.

"It was real sad. Seems like everybody lost somebody in that one," said Didomenico.

The closeness of the community made such losses doubly felt. "Dawson was like one big family," recalls Mrs. Salvo. "When somebody died, it was like a member of your own family dying."

Isolation and poverty made the community close. "We didn't have the money to be driving around in cars all the time. When we had a dance or a picnic, we really looked forward to it," recalls Livia Mora.

"All the girls were real tomboys," laughs Sue Didomenico. "We hiked all over those hills; we picked chokecherries, wild plums, pinon nuts. We canned and canned and tended gardens and chickens and things. Boy, did we work." She's Joe Didomenico's sister.

Kids in Dawson also had a good movie theater that played three times a week. "It cost only 10 cents. And a candy bar or a Coke was only a nickel," reminisces Nick Didomenico.

Every family in Dawson made wine, and grapes for that purpose were shipped in by railroad at 40 to 50 tons per

car. "They'd haul the grapes from the trains in wagons. I can remember chasing the wagons and snatching grapes as a kid."

That was in 1919 with Prohibition looming. Miners socked away a good supply of grapes and made enough wine to last through the government-imposed drought. "My dad bought a quarter ton of grapes — enough for two years' worth of wine; some guys bought eight tons," recalled Didomenico.

"It was real wine, too: made by stomping the grapes with your feet," laughs Gallosini.

Prohibition gave some of the miners a chance to augment their wages making hooch. Tony Arcangeli laughs, "If Prohibition had lasted longer, we'd have gotten rich."

Arcangeli's family made wine and two 25-gallon stills in their basement. The wine barrels were equipped with siphon hoses. Arcangeli would station his two sons in the cellar by the barrels while he took orders from his post outside near the basement window.

"Dad would whisper, 'Ps-s-s-st. Quart of white.' A few minutes later, we'd hear 'Ps-s-s-st, quart of red.'" The boys would fill bottles with the siphons in the barrels. Once, the father, getting no response to his order, went into his basement to see what the matter was. He found that both boys had passed out from taking nips out of the siphons.

Bread was another commodity the Dawsonites made for themselves. It was baked in giant outdoor ovens similar to hornos. "They were made of brick and covered with brick or dirt," said Didomenico. His sister, Sue, adds, "They baked big flat loaves that had a wonderful thick crust from cooking on the brick floor of the oven." The Didomenico children would fight over the crust.

Dawson kids were healthy. The company provided inexpensive medical care that would be a boon in the 70's. Nick Didomenico recalls, "Everybody working at Dawson paid \$3 a month for a doctor's care and free medicine."

The Depression struck Dawson with a fall-off in the demand for coal. Miners were reduced to working three days a week, and former Dawsonites remember patching a lot of pants to get by. "But, we didn't suffer like a lot of people did," recalls Joe Didomenico.

"We had plenty to eat. Hell, a hog cost five cents a pound in those days, and we'd make our bacon, ham and sausage." With a hundred pounds of beans selling for \$5 and a like amount of flour costing \$2.65, Dawsonites, bolstered by gardens and chickens rode out the disaster fairly well.

All except Mrs. Salvo. When the Dawson bank closed prior to the Depression, she deposited \$3,000 she and her husband had saved for their children's education in a bank in El Paso. Bank losses in the 30's cost the Salvos half their savings.

## He's Helping Short Folks Tackle Big Problem

By The Associated Press

A child who doesn't grow may bear the brunt of teasing, but a short adult can't get other adults to treat him seriously.

There is seldom a reaction to the growth hormone because it's a normal human protein.

The growth hormone is a complex molecule that makes up about 1 percent of the pituitary gland. Although the

Peake said children who don't grow normally are the second or third most common pediatric problem.

"Growth and development is very complex," he said. "It has to do with genetic background, nutrition, emotional environment and a number of hormones. Any kind of



the tunnel by collapsing. Timbers also provided support for the tunnels, and timbermen worked on nothing else but keeping those supports safe.

Tracks led into the mine for the cars in which miners dumped their coal. Originally, these were mule-drawn rigs. Later they were powered by a small motorcar controlled by a motorman. His assistant was the nipper whose duties of coupling and uncoupling the coal cars were similar to those of a railroad brakeman.

Mining proceeded according to a schedule designed around safety. Joe Didomenico recalls, "First, the miners would clear out fine stuff from the previous day's shot. Then, they'd lie on their sides and dig the coal out. It was pick and shovel work. At the end of their shift, the miners would drill holes for the shots. They knew how to line the shots up in the coal for the best results."

After the miners had gone off duty in the evening, the shot firers came in. "They placed the dynamite and wired it. Then, when the mine was clear, the shot was fired," said Didomenico.

From midnight until the miners returned in the morning, fire bosses went through the mine and checked every shot to make sure it had gone off. "If your shot misfired, you were sent back home for the day," recalls Arcangeli.

Gas and coal dust — both highly flammable — were omnipresent dangers. "All mines have gas — methane gas, I think," said Didomenico. "When the gas and air mix just right, it explodes easily." Better ventilation reduces the risk of gas explosions in contemporary mines while mine walls and floors are sprayed with crushed limestone to hold the coal dust in place.

Fans provided ventilation in the Dawson mines. Crosscuts were driven every 75 feet to increase their efficiency. When a mine exploded, the first act of the rescue teams was to reverse the fans to suck out blackdamp and other gases from the stricken area.

"You were paid 87 cents a ton in the rooms. In the pick-holes, you got \$1.01. That was where you made your money," recalls Arcangeli.

The men who worked the mines usually began their occupations in the northeastern U.S. and hopped jobs to Dawson by way of the coal fields in Colorado. Livia Mora's father, Pietro Montepara, and Clemente Didomenico followed this route.

Montepara, now 86, had his trip interrupted, however; he was working in the Midwest when he was drafted by the Italian Army to fight in World War I. The U.S. paid his way home to Italy and back at the end of the war. He began a 31-year career as a timberman at Dawson in 1919 which has left him bent nearly double.

John Salvo's father followed a similar route and came to Dawson from Aguilar, Colo., where he began his career as a miner at age 13. Domenic Salvo also served in World War I. He took advantage of the free trip to Europe to visit relatives in Italy 60 miles west of Rome. He stayed long enough to get married.

"I didn't know what a miner was then in 1921," said his wife, Madeliene. The Salvos had a number of mishaps getting their family to Dawson, but they made it by 1924. "When I got there and found out what miners did, I told my late husband, 'We don't want our kids to be miners. We have to save every penny to get them an education so they don't have to go into the mines.'"

Mrs. Salvo had 11 children of whom seven lived; all the survivors made it through college. So have her 19 grandchildren.

John Salvo adds, "They wouldn't let us become miners

for nine years at the University of New Mexico Medical School.

"If you're 4 feet tall, doorknobs are too high; you can't drive many automobiles. You can't get a job. You're excluded by law from the police, the military; you can't drive a bus."

And children who are small for their age are often treated as if they are younger, Peake said.

"They are treated as if size is a degree of maturation," he said. "If you're the size of a 7- or 8-year-old, then you're related to as a 7- or 8-year-old. But the kid's 13."

Peake's research is geared to helping children who would otherwise be dwarf-size to grow normally. The children take injections of the growth hormone over a number of years, then are treated with a variety of other hormones.

## Chama Area Snow Victims To Get Loans

### Journal Special

CHAMA — The Small Business Administration has opened an office in the Chama City Hall to assist victims of snow and ice storms in Rio Arriba and adjacent counties who may be eligible for long-term, low-interest loans.

Loan applications are available at the Chama office. The deadline for filing the applications is May 3.

Personal and commercial properties may be replaced or restored to pre-disaster conditions. Maximum maturity of these loans is 30 years with terms based on the borrowers' ability for repayment, an SBA spokesman said.

The Chama SBA office will be open during regular business hours, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Applicants are urged to bring all documents which might help the loan process.

The spokesman said required documents include lists of damaged property and replacement costs, copies of deeds, leases or mortgages, and copies of last year's federal income tax returns. Personal or home loans require only last year's income tax forms. Commercial or business loans require federal returns for the past three years.

For more information contact the Chama SBA office at 756-2388.

chronic illness also will affect growth. common, and the standards for getting into the program — one of about a dozen in the country — are rigid.

Basically, the child's pituitary must make so little of the growth hormone that there's no doubt he won't grow normally, Peake said.

There are currently about 20 children in the New Mexico program.

The National Institutes of Health, whose financial grants sponsor Peake's research, has set up the National Pituitary Agency, which collects pituitary glands, extracts the growth hormone and distributes it on the basis of research grants.

Average children grow about two inches a year. Children without a normally functioning pituitary may grow only an inch or less.

Pediatricians handle many of those problems. Cases dealing with growth hormones often are referred to Peake.

Peake said many children have pituitaries that intermittently produce the hormone, but not enough for them to grow normally. However, the criteria for the program are so strict as to exclude 99 percent of them.

"We treat the 1 percent that unequivocally have no chance of growing normally," Peake said.

Part of his research, however, is identifying the children who will benefit from the treatment. He's also trying to find out which children an intermediate amount of growth hormone might benefit.

"Some don't respond," he said. "I've treated some kids and it doesn't make a bit of difference."

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