



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **Michael Sage, Developer of The Year** Distinguished Award bestowed by NM IDEA

Gallup, N.M. – Today, during the annual luncheon of New Mexico IDEA, the Statewide Association of Economic Developers, Michael Sage was awarded the Developer of the Year award. This award recognizes the outstanding efforts of a person who spearheaded a major project that relocated, consolidated or expanded in NM during the receding twelve (12) months. A person who prepared a community for economic growth in a unique way.

As many are aware, our region was put on economic life support 12 months ago with the announcement of several powerplant closures, including the very unexpected closure of the modern Escalante Generating Station in Prewitt, NM. Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association announcement might that the entire cluster of businesses that anchor McKinley and Cibola counties were on the chopping block including mine-mouth coal mines of El Segundo and Lee Ranch and McKinley Paper, a recycled cardboard manufacturer that was powered by the waste stream and a boiler from the powerplant. This cluster represents over 600 high-paying jobs and a major portion of the overall tax base of McKinley County. Everyone knew that if this cluster closed, someone would be asked to pull the plug and turn off the lights.

While economic development is a team support and no one does it alone, there was one person that the region turned to and depended on and that was Michael Sage. Michael Sage is the Deputy Director for the Greater Gallup Economic Development Corporation and works as the Regional Economic Development Program Manager for the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments. The following are accomplishments in the last 12 months that have stabilized our regional economy and started to change our situation and the narrative including but not limited to:

- Prior to the public announcement, Michael Sage led a bi-county delegation to meet with the Board of Directors of Tri-State helping to secure a commitment for a \$5M Community Assistance Fund.
- Michael Sage authored the global strategy and presented numerous to local stakeholders, Tri-State, and regional organizations and State agencies including:
  - Support of the implementation of House Memorial 72 & 41 Committees.
  - Facilitation and support for the passage of House Bill 8 that sets up a new bi-county redevelopment authority.
  - Facilitation of weekly ZOOM call of the HB8 Stakeholder group to mobilize actions.
- Creation the investment framework for the use of those funds to maximize impact and effectiveness.
- Lead Business Retention and Expansion efforts with McKinley Paper and the coal mines to find out what the community could do to support their continued operation and avoid shutdown.
- Supported the planning, design, and site control for the Prewitt Industrial Park including a shovel-ready 120,000 spec building to promote expansions and future growth, including negotiations with State Land Office and attracting Brownfields investment.

- Spearheaded one of the State's highest LEDA investments (\$5M) in history to save McKinley Paper, its 100+ jobs, and cement them as an anchor for decades to come.
- Assisted the Council of Governments secure several Assistance to Coal Communities grants including one in September 2020 for \$988,400 to continue this work.
- Assisted in submitting another LEDA grant that is in review by NMEDD for \$750,000 to provide final design of the Prewitt Industrial Park Site #1 as a shovel-ready site for the region and set in motion site certification and foreign-direct investment.

All of this work was done with the double whammy of COVID-19 and bringing together people during a time when physically we were not allowed to – without the visionary leadership and ability to implement of Michael Sage we would not be able to tell this story. He is definitely our region's "Developed of the Year" that overcame incredible odds to transform our region from boom-bust to robust.

As a regional agency, our organizing principle is to bring the region together in the belief that what is good for one is good for all. We believe that we are stronger together and only united can we transform our economy from boom-bust to robust. Mr. Sage is an embodiment of this belief and his work over the past year is proof.

#### **About Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments**

Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments (NWNMCOG) is 50-year-old regional development organization (RDO) recognized and empowered by the State of New Mexico and the US Economic Development Administration. We serve the entire three-county region of Cibola, McKinley, and San Juan counties and the communities therewithin to improve community and economy for the region and its people. The NWNMCOG is association of nine local governments governed by a Board of Directors unified by the belief that we are stronger together and only united can we advance on regional opportunities and tackle regional challenges from sustainable water supply, to behavior health, to strategic infrastructure, and to regional economic development. For more information about NWNMCOG, visit [www.nwnmco.com](http://www.nwnmco.com).