This year, our nation’s network of Prevention Research Centers (PRCs) is celebrating its 30th anniversary. The PRC network consists of 26 academic research centers in 24 states that study how people and their communities can avoid or counter the risks for chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and cancer. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) provides oversight for the PRCs, which are located at either a school of public health or a medical school with a preventive medicine residency program. The University of New Mexico (UNM) has had a PRC since 1995, and its founding director, Sally M. Davis, PhD, remains its director today.

PRCs conduct applied public health research, with each center working closely with at least one underrepresented community. Every PRC has at least one core project and several additional projects. Some are funded by the CDC, others by another government agency or a foundation. Most PRCs are also part of one or more of CDC’s seven thematic networks, in which several PRCs work together on a specific health issue.

The anniversary celebration includes several events. In February, the director of the PRC network, Mehran S. Massoudi, MPH, PhD; associate directors from CDC’s National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion; and principal investigators and staff from PRCs throughout the country gathered at CDC headquarters in Atlanta, GA, for the celebration kickoff. Speakers from the CDC discussed the value, background, history, and links to research of the PRCs and their community partners. The keynote address was given by our own Dr. Sally Davis, who described our core project, Village Interventions and Venues for Action (VIVA II). VIVA II studies the dissemination and implementation of evidence-based recommendations for increasing physical activity, consumption of water, and use of telephone and web-based tobacco-cessation programs in rural areas.

Another celebration activity is publication of an all-PRC supplement to the American Journal of Preventive Medicine that will contain commentary articles on the history of the PRC program, research articles from PRCs that report scientific findings with direct applicability to public health programs and policies, and reports from funders regarding the value of building prevention programs by funding extramural research. The UNM PRC’s article in the supplement, “Research to Practice: Implementing Physical Activity Recommendations,” was written by Dr. Davis, Theresa H. Cruz, PhD, and PRC partner Richard Kozoll, MD, MPH.
The 2016 summer meeting of the UNM PRC’s Community Advisory Council (CAC) was held Friday, July 8, at the Hospital Services Corporation building. The meeting, attended by 15 CAC members and 8 PRC staff, began with enthusiastic networking and lunch. Sally Davis, PhD, PRC director, then introduced the two new members of the CAC: Valerie Hermanson and Beth Pinkerton. This was followed by self-introductions by everyone in the room and three presentations.

Valerie Hermanson, a transportation planner with the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MR-COG), a PRC partner, explained that MR-COG provides planning services in several areas, including urban and rural transportation, workforce development, employment, land use, and water resources. Valerie focused on the Mid-Region Rural Transportation Planning Organization (MR-RTPO), which helps communities with transportation planning, including development of activities to promote active transportation. Examples of projects in which MR-RTPO has been involved are a Rails-to-Trails initiative in the Estancia Basin between Moriarty and Estancia and Step Into Cuba’s project to enhance St. Francis Park.

Theresa Cruz, PhD, PRC deputy director, talked about Healthy Here, a project in which the PRC is partnering with Presbyterian Healthcare Services and other groups to help improve the health of Hispanic and Native American residents in the South Valley and International District of Albuquerque through access to healthy food and places for physical activity. The project is funded by a Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Theresa and her PRC REACH team are responsible for evaluation of the project.

The PRC’s Linda Peñaloza, PhD, and CAC members Cris Ortiz, PhD, of the NM Public Education Department (NMPED) and Dan Green, MPH, of the NM Department of Health (NMDOH), discussed partnership, particularly as it pertains to the New Mexico Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (NM-YRRS). The NM-YRRS, which assesses the health risk behaviors and resiliency (protective) factors of New Mexico high school and middle school students, has been administered every 2 years for more than 13 years. The PRC is responsible for logistics and data collection, NMDOH provides epidemiologic expertise and data analysis, and NMPED liaises with the CDC and the schools.

After the presentations, several CAC members provided short updates on their recent health promotion and disease prevention activities. Sally then discussed the “scaling up” in our core project (VIVA II), and she noted that the PRC recently submitted an application for a new Science Education Partnership Award from the National Institutes of Health.
NCCDPHP Director Visits Cuba, NM, and the PRC

Renée J. Robillard

On July 15, Ursula E. Bauer, PhD, MPH, director of the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP), visited the PRC and Cuba, NM, the beta site for our core project, VIVA-Step Into Cuba. The NCCDPHP is a unit of the CDC, and the national PRC network is part of the NCCDPHP’s Division of Population Health. Dr. Bauer was accompanied by David Espey, MD, of the CDC. Sally Davis, PhD, PRC director, and Richard Kozoll, MD, MPH, volunteer coordinator for the Step Into Cuba Alliance, hosted the visitors with the help of Alejandro Ortega, the PRC’s Cuba-based community research specialist.

The group made several stops in Cuba so that the visitors could see the results of some of Step Into Cuba’s projects. At the Nacimiento Community Foundation (NCF) office, the visitors talked to Beth Hamilton, NCF’s executive director, and Karolyn Schaffer, a local public health nurse. The visitors then went to four sites at which the Alliance has created or enhanced access to places for physical activity.

JoAnne Hughes, chair of the Alliance, and local resident and trail user, Merejildo Salaz, met the group at the Fisher Trail, site of the electronic pedestrian counters being used in the PRC’s VIVA II research project. JoAnne recounted the history of Step Into Cuba, and Merejildo explained the importance of the trail to him and his family. At St. Francis Park, the guests saw the enhancements (plantings, benches, a walking trail) done to promote walking.

At the School Overlook Trail, the group met Shirley Hurford, principal of Cuba Middle School and Cuba Elementary School, and the youth workers who did trail maintenance this summer, with funding provided by the Cuba schools. Quick stops were then made at the Sandoval County Fairgrounds, site of several Step Into Cuba walking trails, before the group returned to the PRC office at UNM.

At the PRC, Dr. Bauer and Dr. Espey met PRC staff and several invited guests, including members of the PRC’s Community Advisory Council and other PRC partners. PRC associate scientist Andrea Cantarero demonstrated the center’s online interactive map, which shows the center’s diverse and broad reach across New Mexico. Andrea also demonstrated the boundary and community identifier map for the Cuba area, which shows how a rural community can use geography, driving times, school districts, and service points of interest to define its reach. Both these maps can be accessed on the PRC website at: http://prc.unm.edu/educational-materials/map-gallery.html.
Step Into Cuba is a program that promotes physical activity through the development of sidewalks, paths, trails, social support, and opportunities for lifestyle change in Cuba, NM. It is guided by a partnership of organizations and individuals called the Step Into Cuba Alliance. The UNM PRC is a member of the Alliance, and Step Into Cuba is a focus of the PRC’s core research project, VIV A II.

This summer, the Cuba Independent School District, another Alliance member, funded a work crew of five students (pictured above) and a supervisor to work on trails and community beautification in Cuba. On National Trails Day (June 4), the crew met with Alejandro Ortega, the PRC’s community-based research specialist, for an orientation to Step Into Cuba and VIV A II. This was followed by an introduction to tools used for trail maintenance and a hike on two of the trials that Step Into Cuba has worked on: the Fisher Community Trail and the Rito San Jose Trail.

Another trails event took place in Cuba during the Science Summer Day Camp for middle school students, held June 6 to 10 as part of “The Science Around Us,” a program at the UNM PRC that is funded by a Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) from the National Institutes of Health. During the week, the SEPA team collaborated with Just Move It, an initiative that promotes physical activity for indigenous people throughout North America, to put on a walk/run. The 30 summer camp attendees and about 50 other community members participated. The students walked the “magenta route” on the cross-country trails near the Cuba schools; the other community members walked or ran longer stretches.

On July 9, Step Into Cuba sponsored a “Family Walk” on the new Fairgrounds Trails. The group hiked most of the trail network, stopping to admire the scenery and the horse barn built by AMIKids Sandoval, a nonprofit youth treatment center and Step Into Cuba partner.

The 10 trails that are maintained and promoted by Step Into Cuba are included in a new version (1.1) of a free mobile application for the iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch: “Walking and Hiking: A Guide to Places near Cuba, New Mexico.” The updated app, which was created by Alejandro Ortega, includes the trails at the Sandoval County Fairgrounds and more accurate GPS coordinates for the School Overlook Trail. For each trail, the app provides a map, the distance, the level of difficulty, a narrative description, nearby points of interest, and whether dogs are permitted. To download the app, go to iTunes or the Apple App store and search for “Cuba Trails.”
The PRC provides future workforce development in prevention research, policy, and practice by offering training opportunities for undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral students, as well as other health professionals. The students receive training and experience in evidence-based, community-engaged research to reduce health disparities; the PRC and its partners benefit from their help on projects; and the multidisciplinary capacity of prevention research is enhanced.

LaShea Harris, a senior at Santa Fe Indian School, worked at the PRC during the summer. LaShea registered clients of the Healthy Here Mobile Market, one of the PRC’s community partners. She also worked with Julia M. Hess, PhD, a PRC faculty member, formatting transcripts from focus groups on water consumption by middle school students and their parents in Cuba, NM. In June, LaShea helped out during the SEPA project’s Science Summer Day Camp.

LaShea plans to major in sociology in college and is interested in a career in social work. Currently, she is involved in groups at her school who are promoting “eating right, exercising, and growing food on the school grounds.” When not in school or at work, LaShea likes to read, paint, and spend time with her family, friends, and four dogs in Zuni.

LaShea’s work at the PRC was sponsored by the Continuing Umbrella of Research Experience (CURE), a National Cancer Institute program for American Indian students that is supported by partnerships between UNM and several schools. CURE students attend seminars and lectures at UNM and conduct a cancer-related research project in community, public, or environmental health under the mentorship of a UNM faculty member.

Andrew West, who is seeking a PhD in health communication from UNM’s Department of Communication and Journalism, worked at the PRC under the supervision of Theresa Cruz, PhD, PRC deputy director, on the New Mexico Department of Health Program to prevent falls among elderly people in assisted living facilities. Andrew came to New Mexico a year ago from California, where he received a MA in communication from California State University, Northridge. Andrew is interested in involving seniors themselves in creating what he sees as much needed changes in fall incident reporting and documentation. He thinks that those who are most at risk of falling have a lot to contribute to the development of preventive measures but are seldom asked for their input. Andrew likes living in New Mexico because it’s a “great place for outdoor activities.” He runs and rides his bike often and is training to become a yoga teacher.

Dissertation Committees. For PRC faculty, future workforce development may involve serving on dissertation committees, in collaboration with faculty from other UNM units, of students seeking a degree in an area related to public health.

Currently, Sally M. Davis, PhD, PRC director, and Patty Keane, MS, RD, CHILE Plus project director, are serving on the committee of Regina S. Eddie, who is pursuing a PhD at UNM’s College of Nursing. Regina’s dissertation is “A Socio-Ecological Analysis of Childhood Obesity and School Nutrition Policy and Practices in Select Schools on the Navajo Reservation.”

Theresa Cruz, PhD, and Tamar Ginossar, PhD, a PRC affiliate faculty member, are serving on the dissertation committee of Emily S. Lilo, MPH, a candidate for a PhD in health communication from UNM’s Department of Communication and Journalism. For her degree, Emily is designing, implementing, and evaluating a social media-driven campaign to encourage teens to increase knowledge, awareness, and intent-to-change behavior on consumption of water and sugary drinks and to serve as messengers to encourage their families to do the same. Emily, an associate scientist at the PRC, works on the VIVA II project, serving as its communication and dissemination team lead, and she also manages the statewide Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education evaluation program.
New Hydration Stations for Partnering Schools

Emily S. Lilo

A combined effort by the PRC’s VIVA-Step Into Cuba project, the Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) project, and UNM medical student Nicholas Levin has the goal of increasing access to—and students’ knowledge of the benefits of—drinking water, the healthful alternative to sugar-sweetened beverage.

As part of VIVA, Nick applied to Brita, a company that manufactures water-filtration products, and received 10 hydration stations (retail price, $1,700 each) for installation in schools with which the VIVA and SEPA projects are collaborating. The hydration stations provide cool, filtered water for filling water bottles. Stations were installed in Lybrook Elementary School in Lybrook and Coronado Middle/High School in Gallina during the summer. Cuba Elementary School, Cuba Middle School, and Cuba High School got their hydration stations at the start of the school year. Funds from a UNM Graduate and Professional Student Association scholarship awarded to Nick helped to pay for the installation of the stations at no cost to the schools. Nick’s mentor for his medical student research project is Theresa Cruz, PhD, deputy director of the PRC.

The two middle schools that received the hydration stations participate in the SEPA program, “The Science Around Us.” With the help of the SEPA team, Nick created a lesson for students in the schools on the risks of sugar consumption and the benefits of drinking water. The lesson included an exercise on using nutrition labels on foods and drinks to calculate the amount of sugar they contain. During the school year, the VIVA and SEPA teams will continue to collaborate with these schools on determining ways to increase the drinking of water, especially water from the new hydration stations. For example, the SEPA program will give students attractive new water bottles embossed with “The Science Around Us” logo.

Students at Cuba High School will have the opportunity to participate in an 8-week water “challenge” developed by PRC associate scientist Emily Lilo, MPH, as part of her dissertation project. The Choose H₂O Challenge is a theoretically grounded, two-tiered health communication campaign designed to move students toward behavioral change. The challenge includes a contest on social media and at school in which students will learn about the health risks of sugary-beverage consumption, the benefits of drinking water, and the influence of the media on beverage selection. Some students will create their own content for these messages for the target audience of their choice. Students who participate in the Choose H₂O Challenge will receive water bottles, earn “Splash” points for weekly activities, and have opportunities to win prizes donated by various public, private, and corporate groups.

School hydration station installed as part of the PRC’s VIVA and SEPA projects

Photo credit: Ashlee Begaye
Third Annual Science Summer Day Camp

Kathryn Peters

In June, students from Cuba Middle School, Lybrook Middle School, Coronado Middle School, and Lindrith Area Heritage School spent a week of their summer vacation at Science Summer Day Camp. The camp, which was held at Cuba Middle School, was a result of the partnering efforts of dedicated teachers, community members, and the Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) team, which is housed at the UNM PRC. SEPA is funded by a grant from the National Institutes of Health. SEPA camp was hosted by the Cuba schools and the following teachers: Kate Bagby, Olivia Casaus, and Daniel Delgado of Cuba High School; Joseph Brondo and Daisy Cortez of Cuba Middle School; and Darlene Chiquito of Lybrook Middle School. The camp was facilitated by SEPA team members Kathryn Peters, Ashlee Begaye, Alejandro Ortega, Quirin Martine, and LaShea Harris.

Students began the week by learning about the science of soil during a trip to the Fisher and Rito San Jose Trails. Many students were surprised to learn the importance of the substance we consider just “dirt.” But Clay Robinson (“Dr. Dirt”) taught the students that everything we eat, wear, or use to build our houses must be grown in soil. Students learned about various soil textures (classified by particle size as either sand, silt, or clay); how soil undergoes changes (through erosion or weathering); and other biological, chemical, and physical properties of soil.

After getting dirty on Monday, students cleaned up on Tuesday—by making soap and lip balm to learn about the science of beauty. They discovered that virtually all the products in a home, from make-up to dish detergent, are developed and tested by a team of scientists.

On Wednesday and Thursday, camp activities pertained to engineering and computer science. A computer scientist from Project GUTS (Growing Up Thinking Scientifically) taught the students how to write computer code. Students then worked in groups to make their own “roller coasters,” which helped them learn about engineering, kinetic energy, rate, speed, and acceleration. Students also learned about water pollution from a groundwater model, worked in “engineering firms” to complete a pipe-cleaner building challenge, and heard from seniors in high school and students at NM Tech about what to expect when applying for and attending college.

On Friday, students learned about the science of sports. A UNM student who is studying exercise science led the students in several activities, including measuring their pulse rate while resting, standing, walking, and running.

Overall, the students learned that science is all around us, not something that is practiced only by people in white lab coats. In fact, it is a way of thinking that is done every day. The many interesting careers in science include those in health care, engineering, and the outdoors.
Let’s Get Healthy!

Emily A. Lilo

The new PRC Wellness Coalition has the goal of helping the PRC staff practice what we preach. We have implemented some initial ideas for enhancing wellness through healthier eating and physical activity during office hours, but we continue to seek input and help in achieving our goal from all PRC staff and our community partners.

Our first priority is improving the healthfulness of food served at PRC events. Because good nutrition is critical to staying healthy and preventing many chronic diseases, we want to set a good example. We have created new sign-up forms and guidelines for potlucks to encourage people to prepare dishes with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other healthful options as the centerpiece. We have also asked people to limit the number of desserts they bring and to serve only water, fruit-infused water, or another low-calorie beverage without added sugar. We plan to start a monthly tossed-salad event to which everyone will bring ingredients, and we have discussed preparing a healthy eating recipe book that will include items people have brought to our potlucks.

To promote physical activity, we initiated a 15-minute, once-weekly “Stretch-Out” that includes stretching routines, meditation sessions, muscle relaxation, and other destressing/stretching activities. We are also encouraging more standing and walking meetings, beginning with a monthly “Walk with a PI” during which the principal investigator of a PRC project leads one of our regular “Breakout” walks, answering questions and leading a discussion about the project. During our first PI walk, on June 2, Glenda Canaca, MD, talked about her social marketing project “Eat Smart to Play Hard.” During the second, on July 7, Theresa Cruz, PhD, discussed home visiting programs for new parents as a primary prevention strategy for a range of negative outcomes, as well as a way to promote healthy behaviors. In August, Sally Davis, PhD, talked about several of the PRC’s projects and the history of the center.

Other plans to foster physical activity include creating an office “Fit-It-In” box. The box will contain equipment such as exercise bands and small hand weights that people can use while participating in conference calls or other activities at their desks.
Data are starting to emerge from the 2015 New Mexico Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (NM-YRRS) conducted by the PRC team headed Linda Peñaloza, PhD, and staff at the NM Public Education Department and the NM Department of Health (NMDOH). The NM-YRRS, which about 21,000 high school students and about 10,000 middle school students completed voluntarily, anonymously, and with parental consent during a single class period last fall, includes more than 100 questions on alcohol and drug use, unintentional injury, violence, suicidal ideation and attempts, tobacco use, sexual health, physical activity, and nutrition; resiliency factors such as relationships in the family, school, community, and with peers; and health status issues such as body weight and asthma. The survey has been conducted every other year since 2003 by the PRC NM-YRRS team.

The NM-YRRS provides the only comprehensive surveillance and epidemiological data on health behaviors of NM high school and middle school students, so its data are used by many education and health service organizations to plan—and obtain funding for—public health work involving NM youth. The survey’s results are also widely reported in the popular media, through newspaper stories and columns, websites, and blogs.

Not surprisingly, the 2015 data that have received the most attention so far are those on alcohol, tobacco, and drug use by NM high school students. The good news is that a long-term decrease in binge drinking among the students has continued, from 34.4% of those surveyed in 2003 to 14.6% in 2015, a decline of more than half. Other alcohol-related behaviors such as drinking and driving and riding with a drunken driver decreased to a similar extent. The 2015 NM rate for binge drinking was lower than the national rate of 17.7% for all US high school students. Binge drinking, defined as drinking five or more alcoholic drinks on a single occasion within the past 30 days, accounts for 90% of alcohol use among US youth.

The news about tobacco use is mixed. The percentage of NM high school students who said they are currently smoking cigarettes (that is, within the past 30 days) declined from 25.7% in 2005 to 11.4% in 2015. However, as Dan Green, MPH, an NMDOH epidemiologist and PRC Community Advisory Council member noted, those gains have been offset by the increasing use of electronic cigarettes, which 24% of survey respondents said they currently use.

Unfortunately, the 2015 NM-YRRS found that the rates of current marijuana use (25.3%) and ever-within-their-lifetime use of cocaine (8.8%), ecstasy (7.9%), and methamphetamines (4.4%) among NM high school students are higher than those among US high school students overall. However, there was a small decrease in current methamphetamine use in the past 10 years (4.6% to 3.2%).

Detailed results from the 2015 NM-YRRS, as well as those from previous years, are available online at www.youthrisk.org. The website includes comparisons with nationwide data from the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, of which the NM-YRRS is a part.
Community Advisory Council and Partners News

Renée J. Robillard

Valerie Hermanson, MCRP, a transportation planner with the New Mexico Mid-Region Council of Governments (MR-COG), joined the CAC this summer. Valerie’s job is to provide technical and transportation-planning assistance to urban and rural local governments. In coordination with the DowntownABQ MainStreet Initiative, she planned and implemented Albuquerque’s pilot bike share program and is currently working on its expansion. In 2014 and 2015, Valerie co-planned Albuquerque’s first open streets event, ABO CiQlovía. MR-COG is a PRC partner on the VIVA-Step Into Cuba project, and Valerie provides technical assistance to the project. Sally Davis, PhD, the PRC’s director, is an associate member of MR-COG.

Abigail Velasquez, student representative on the CAC, stepped down from the council in June. Abby has graduated from UNM and moved to Arizona. She plans to continue her education by training as an EMT.

Bianca Villani, program director of Community Education and Outreach at the Rape Crisis Center of Central New Mexico, was invited to the White House in March for a reception honoring Women’s History Month. Bianca is a UNM PRC community partner in efforts to prevent sexual assault in New Mexico. Research on sexual violence prevention at the PRC is conducted by Theresa Cruz, PhD, PRC deputy director; Leona Woelk, MA; and Julia Hess, PhD. Said Theresa of Bianca, “We join President Obama in recognizing Bianca for her passion and dedication to ending oppression in all its forms. She is an exceptional woman and has truly made a difference in the lives of others!”

Beth Pinkerton is our other new CAC member. Beth works for the New Mexico Department of Health, overseeing the Cancer Prevention and Control Section and managing the Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. The cancer section’s programs focus on reducing the burden of chronic diseases, especially preventable morbidity and mortality resulting from cancer. Programmatic activities address the continuum of cancer and chronic disease prevention and control with an emphasis on primary prevention, risk reduction, early detection, cancer survivorship, and outreach to underserved populations. Beth has been with the cancer section for more than 16 years. When asked why she was interested in being on the CAC, Beth said, “We’ve partnered with the PRC on a number of projects over the years, and our two organizations share an interest in improving health by improving access to the resources people need to be healthy. Serving on the CAC will allow for opportunities to learn more about the PRC’s various projects and also to expand connections to other organizations doing similar work.”

Captain David Wong, MD, has stepped down from the CAC because he has a new job with the CDC for which he will be stationed in Korea. Dr. Wong was chief of the Epidemiology Branch of the National Park Service (NPS) Office of Public Health. He served on our CAC for 5 years, providing valuable insights regarding collaboration between the PRC and agencies such as the NPS.
**MILESTONES**

**Felipe Amaral, MA,** the UNM PRC’s former instructional media specialist, is now working for UNM’s Project ECHO as a program specialist on its replication team. While at the PRC, Felipe did the layout for *The Connection* newsletter, worked on the redesign of the PRC website, and produced graphics for the VIVA II, SEPA, social marketing, and CHILE Plus projects.

**Sharon Bedenbaugh,** a health educator and coordinator of the Teen Outreach Program (TOP) at Laguna-Acoma Junior/Senior High School (one of the PRC’s Teen Centers), left her position to return “home” to Savannah, GA, at the end of June. Sharon had worked with the TOP program for 7 years.

Before coming to New Mexico, Sharon received a BA in education with a concentration in English as a second language (ESL) from DePaul University in Chicago. She also taught ESL to migrant workers in Florida and parenting classes in Georgia. Sharon came to New Mexico to write her ESL thesis on Native American culture and language and decided to remain in the Land of Enchantment for some time. Her daughter, Elizabeth, joined her and obtained a BS in biochemistry and a BSN in nursing at UNM. Elizabeth is now engaged to be married, and she and her fiancé will also move to Georgia.

Asked about changes she has observed during her years at the Teen Center, Sharon noted the considerable and encouraging decrease in the number of teen pregnancies.

Sharon said she is especially looking forward to reuniting with family members in Georgia and eating fresh seafood, although she admitted that the humidity and mosquitoes may be a challenge. The energetic Sharon will not be retiring, however—she hopes to work with veterans and their families in the Southeast.

**Andrea Cantarero, MA, MPH, RD,** an associate scientist at the PRC, left us in August to move to Colorado with his wife, Christine Black, MD, and 18-month-old son, Santiago (an honorary PRC staff member). Christine will join an obstetrics-gynecology practice in Fort Morgan, and Santiago will be able to see his paternal grandparents more often. Andrea intends to do some consulting work and to continue to care for Santiago.

During his 2 years at the PRC, Andrea worked on the CHILE Plus and VIVA II projects. In his “spare time,” he completed both an MS and an MPH degree; qualified as an RD (registered dietitian); wrote or co-wrote three papers that were accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals; presented at several conferences; inspired the PRC staff to walk regularly; and changed a lot of diapers.

**Phillip Cordova,** who was an exercise specialist on the PRC’s CHILE Plus team, is now working for the New Mexico Department of Health’s Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Program.

**Amanda Harris, MS,** formerly a field research associate with the Adolescents Committed to Improvement of Nutrition & Physical Activity (ACTION PAC) project, left the PRC in July to move to Denver and work for a nonprofit organization as a health educator in the Native community. Amanda said that she is “sad to leave my friends and work colleagues in Albuquerque but also happy and excited about all the changes that are happening.” She is looking forward to moving to Colorado with its open space and trails, and she plans to climb a 14er in the near future.

We wish Felipe, Sharon, Andrea, Phil, and Amanda well in their new endeavors.
New Staff at the PRC

Renee Conklin, MS, RD, began working as a health education consultant with the PRC’s CHILE Plus project in April. Previously, she was a nutrition coordinator with Kids Cook!, one of the PRC’s community partners. At CHILE Plus, Renee is involved in professional development related to healthy eating and active living for teachers, administrators, and food service staff of early-childhood learning facilities in New Mexico. Renee said she applied for her PRC job because “so much research” is done at the PRC, she is interested in the educational aspects of nutrition, and she wanted an opportunity to work in communities rather than in a clinical setting. Renee received her MS in nutrition and dietetics from UNM in May. She currently serves as the public policy coordinator for the New Mexico Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Renee’s outside-of-work interests include photography and her two dogs, Lucy and Ginger.

Kathy Deeshchii’nii started work as the PRC’s new unit administrator in April. Kathy came to us from UNM’s College of Nursing, where she was a fiscal service tech. She has been at UNM for 25 years. Kathy said her new job involves “everything under the sun”—purchasing, travel arrangements, scheduling, facilities management, interacting with UNM’s human resources department, and much more. All this is fine with her, however; she came to the PRC because she wanted a job with more variety and responsibilities. Kathy likes to learn new things, so learning on the job appealed to her, although she also takes business classes at Central New Mexico Community College. Kathy and her husband, Dan, have been married for 23 years and have four sons and three grandkids. Kathy enjoys running and is planning on tackling the Duke City Half Marathon this year.

Sheldon Benally has been a health educator in the PRC’s Laguna-Acoma Teen Outreach Program since September 12. He previously worked in an HIV prevention program at Diné College in Shiprock, NM, and for UNM’s Truman Health Services. Sheldon has a BA in biology and psychology from UNM and is currently pursuing an MA in community health. He applied for his PRC position because he wanted the opportunity to do field work in public health. Sheldon’s long-range plans include teaching community health and continuing to work with high school and community college students. Sheldon is from the Navajo Nation town of Cove, AZ. He has run several half marathons, including the Duke City, and has two goldfish, Ava and No. 2.
Awards, Honors, and Recognition

Robert L. Williams, MD, MPH, associate director of the UNM PRC, has been promoted to the rank of distinguished professor. According to UNM’s Office of the Provost/Executive VP for Academic Affairs, only individuals who have demonstrated outstanding achievements and are nationally and internationally renowned as scholars may be considered for this faculty rank. It is the highest faculty title UNM bestows and is used for only a few of its most prominent faculty members. Dr. Williams is a faculty member in UNM’s Department of Family and Community Medicine and the director of the New Mexico Center for the Advancement of Research Engagement and Science on Health Disparities (NM CARES) at UNM, a PRC partner.

The Thornburg Foundation in Santa Fe, NM, has awarded $60,000 to UNM to support a grant proposal submitted by Theresa Cruz, PhD, the PRC’s deputy director. The funded project involves formative research on how to increase referrals to home visiting programs in Bernalillo County. Such programs comprise an evidence-based primary prevention strategy that has many positive outcomes, including reduced child maltreatment and improved educational outcomes. The award will be used to conduct observations, focus groups, and interviews. The data obtained will inform the development of systems, policy, and environmental strategies for increasing referrals to existing home visiting programs, with the long-term goal of increasing participation and retention in these programs. Working with Theresa on the project will be PRC staff member Leona Woelk, MA, and Cathy Sanchez of the UNM Center for Development and Disability.

The PRC’s CHILE Plus program was mentioned twice by Michelle Lujan Grisham, US Representative for New Mexico’s 1st congressional district, during a June 22 hearing by the Agricultural Committee of the US House of Representatives. The hearing was on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed), which is funded by the US Department of Agriculture. The witnesses at the hearing described the obesity epidemic, food insecurity, health disparities related to access to healthy food in the United States, and specific SNAP-Ed programs.

Lujan Grisham, a member of the Agricultural Committee, noted that New Mexico has one of the hungriest populations in the country. She also described visiting a SNAP-Ed site and observing a child who had never before seen a fresh tomato. She then noted that the CHILE program in her state is “showing better health outcomes.” Subsequently, Lujan Grisham asked one of the witnesses, Susan B. Foerster, MPH, of the Association of SNAP-Ed Administrators, about evaluating health outcomes related to SNP-Ed. Foerster emphasized the importance of the socioecological model, which involves working with a variety of partner organizations. She also commented that the effects of SNAP-Ed on obesity will be observed first in young children. Lujan Grisham responded that CHILE works in partnership with Head Start in New Mexico, so SNAP-Ed begins early in her state.
New Staff at the PRC

Marcos Martinez, MSW, PhD, a PRC associate research scientist since September 1, is the new coordinator of the Teen Outreach Program (TOP) at Laguna-Acoma Junior/Senior High School, one of the PRC’s Teen Centers. Marcos was previously an assistant professor at the College of Public Health and Social Work of Florida International University in Miami. Marcos received his MSW in 2010 from New Mexico Highlands University in his hometown of Las Vegas and his PhD in social work in 2015 from Arizona State University in Tempe. He served as the evaluator of the PRC-based SEPA 2016 summer program before beginning his job at TOP. Marcos is a classically trained pianist and composer who has recently begun to play the ukulele. His favorite composer: Chopin.

Ruth Healy, MPH, who recently received her MPH at UNM, is working with Linda Peñaloza, PhD, Courtney FitzGerald, MSSW, LMSW, and the rest of the NM-YRRS team to help with the analysis of the 2015 NM-YRRS data. Said Courtney, “This is a great opportunity for Ruth to hone her skills, and it will help us to get our reports written and ready much faster than in past years.” Ruth is interested in community health activities, particularly those for people living with disabilities. Her MPH thesis was on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Ruth loves volleyball and comes from a family of balloonists.

Robyn Viera, MA, has been the scientific research manager for the PRC’s core project, VIVA II, since March. Robyn formerly worked for the New Mexico Human Services Department, most recently as the care coordinator unit administrator for Centennial Care. Robyn received her MA degree in organizational learning and instructional technology from UNM in 2013. Robyn’s principal role in VIVA II is the development of procedures and protocols for scaling up the project to rural communities throughout New Mexico, primarily through the project’s website, VIVA Connects, which will provide information for VIVA II’s community partners on evidence-based community strategies to increase physical activity. Robyn said that her interest in working at the PRC is related to her background in public health work, the great need for such work in New Mexico, and her preference for being involved in research that can help communities rather than in medical services delivery. Robyn and her husband, George, who also works at UNM, live in the East Mountains and recently celebrated their 31st wedding anniversary. In the past, Robyn bred quarter horses on their 10-acre spread, but she is now involved in horse rescue, particularly with the Walkin N Circles Ranch in Stanley, NM.
Theresa Clay inspires running for healthier communities

Renée J. Robillard and Linda Beltran

Theresa Clay is an enrolled member of the Navajo (Diné) Nation who has served on the PRC’s Community Advisory Council since 2006. She is a role model for physical activity in a big way: she runs marathons throughout the United States—and outside the country. But that’s not all. Theresa participates regularly in groups and events that encourage running among American Indians and others, from youth to older adults.

Theresa and some friends have made it a point to combine travel and marathoning since 2010. So far, Theresa has run eight marathons, including races in Las Vegas, Washington, DC, Chicago, Seattle, New York, Nashville, and Bar Harbor, ME. In April 2016, she was among the almost 50,000 people, including about 7,000 Americans, who ran the Paris Marathon. Of course, Paris being Paris, Theresa did a lot more while there than pound the pavement; she also saw the sights for which the City of Light is famous, including The Louvre and the Eiffel Tower.

Back home in New Mexico, Theresa is involved in a program called Pueblo Crossroads (PCR). Fifteen pueblos are part of PCR, and other pueblos and tribes are being recruited. PRC is based on the understanding that walking, running, and being physically active represent efforts to strive for healthier communities. PCR uses running as a catalyst to empower American Indian and Alaskan Natives to take pride in themselves and their cultural identity. PCR was inspired by Just Move It (JMI), a program that started on the Navajo Nation in 1993 and has grown immensely. JMI offers runs/walks throughout the Albuquerque area.

Theresa also partners with Running Medicine, a program run through the Native Health Initiative. Running Medicine is a family-style “community” that includes a welcome circle, warm up, running, walking, cool down, and a closing circle to create a culture of health and wellness. It also provides individualized fitness and training programs, with coaching from experienced runners, including Theresa and Anthony Fleg, MD, a physician in UNM’s Department of Family and Community Medicine.

Recently, Theresa helped to publicize the “Life is Why” campaign of the American Heart Association (AHA), which focuses on the AHA’s answer to why it does what it does. According to the AHA, “we believe everyone deserves to live a healthier, longer life. Why? Life. Life is why.” Theresa’s photo appears on the side of four Albuquerque city buses with the notation that she is a member of the Navajo Nation and an AHA volunteer and the following quotation: “Our legacy is why. Our hearts matter. We must stand together for the health of our communities.”

Theresa is a health promotion disease prevention specialist at the Albuquerque Area Indian Health Service, where she has worked for 11 years. Theresa was a health education manager at the UNM PRC from 1994 to 2005.
The University of New Mexico Prevention Research Center (UNM PRC) is one of 26 PRCs funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The mission of the UNM PRC is to address the health promotion and disease prevention needs of New Mexican communities through community- and evidence-based research. The PRC fulfills this mission through collaboration, training, dissemination, implementation, and evaluation activities.

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