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Leadership Los Alamos focuses on education

The 2010 class of Leadership Los Alamos held its Education Session on Friday, Nov. 12. The session was hosted by the University of New Mexico-Los Alamos. The Leadership Los Alamos program is nine months in duration. Program sessions are designed to address current issues facing the community.

The Education Session focused on how education is in a constant state of evolution. Speakers addressed local, statewide and national issues, as well as how community involvement can drive educational opportunity.

Speakers included NM Representative Rick Miera who addressed the challenges of maintaining high educational standards in these times of budget shortfalls. Los Alamos School Superintendent Dr. Gene Schmidt and Principal Jill Gonzales of Pinon Elementary School addressed issues from a local perspective.

The advantages and challenges of modern technology in the classroom and in the lives of students were the subjects of two presentations, one by Dr. Jonathan Brinkerhoff and Dr. Cheryl Torrez of the UNM College of Education and another by Los Alamos High School math teacher John Pawlak and UNM-LA psychology instructor Dr. Carol Furchner.

UNM-LA Dean of Education Dr. Kate Massengale discussed how UNM-LA is dealing with state budget cuts amounting to 12-15% of the college's operational funds at a time when enrollment has been steadily rising. Steps include reduction of core faculty from 26 to 17 and the reduction of full-time faculty from 14 to zero and reduction of support staff in a number of areas. The college is concentrating on its strength in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education, she said. Massengale pointed to a number of new programs and initiatives at UNM-

LA, including a paramedic certificate training program, a Microsoft IT Academy and a number of others.

The event included a discussion of the Dual Credit Program through which students can receive both high school and college credit by UNM-LA Registrar Kathryn Vigil. High school students are required to take an AP class, an online class or a college-level class in order to graduate. UNM-LA staff works closely with area high schools to make sure the program provides a good introduction to college, Vigil said.

The day also included a discussion of home schooling by UNM-LA instructor and homeschooling parent Dr. Mickey Marsee. The large and active homeschooling community in Los Alamos provides many resources for parents who choose homeschooling, she said. Resources for homeschoolers of varying philosophies and teaching styles are also available in print and via the Internet.

Leadership Los Alamos Chairman, John Hofmann, ended the session by urging the group to use the information from the session and the skills they have gained in program to improve educational opportunities for students at all levels.