

ocate

LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR PROFILE:



JENNIFER KIMBALL

Written by Andrew Koss

La Fonda Chairman of the Board Jennifer Kimball stands in the hotel lobby, laying out renovation plans. The front desk will be pushed back. The gift shop is moving to the end of the building. "We're going to put couches here in the lobby, so it's more open and gracious," she says.

Open and gracious is the perfect way to describe Kimball. She treats every guest and employee with the same degree of kindness. "Some of our staff members have been employed for 30 – 40 years," she says. "That's unique in the hotel business. We're a family."

That idea fits well with her general business philosophy. "It's not just about squeezing blood out of a turnip. It's about running an ethical business, being good to your employees, and being good to the local community." Many locals are regulars, frequenting the various shops that lease space in the building. "We have 16 tenants, a bar, a spa, and a hotel," she says, "You have to wear a lot of different hats to do this job."

Kimball's relationship with La Fonda stretches back to the hotel's former owners, Sam and Ethel Ballen, who knew her parents in Dallas. Years later, she moved to Santa Fe to be closer to the outdoor activities she loves. "I didn't want to have to take a vacation to go skiing," she says. Kimball served

The Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce presents Local Entrepreneur Profiles, a monthly series highlighting some of Santa Fe's most successful businesspeople. Writer Andrew Koss is a creative writing student at Santa Fe University of Art and Design and was a former editor for the 2014-2015 Glyph literary journal. Local Entrepreneur Profiles will be published in the Business Advocate newsletter, ENews updates and online at santafechamber.com

as an advising attorney for the hotel, then, after Sam Ballen passed away, she became Chairman of the Board. "It was a steep learning curve," she says. "Right now, I'm here all day, every day. As an attorney, I only saw a small part of the business. As Chairman, I have an overview of everything."

Part of Kimball's duties include overseeing the ongoing renovation of the facility. It's been a slow process, beginning with the hotel restaurant, La Plazuela. Construction begins in January on La Fiesta Lounge. Special care is taken to maintain the historic features of the building. What was an outdoor fountain now rests in the center of the restaurant. Murals and mirrors from the 1920s line the hotel exits. A restored nativity scene from the 1940s rests in the lobby, at the foot of the stairs.

"Back in the day, this place probably would've been torn down to put up a new hotel," she says. La Fonda will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2022. As the only hotel that touches the Plaza, it doesn't look like they'll be going anywhere anytime soon. "We've been here so long," Kimball says. "I'm lucky to have an ownership group that allows us to look into the future and do what's best for the hotel and the employees. When you take a longer term view, you make better decisions."