

The Defender: Coronavirus Edition

A mini  newsletter

Corona week 8
May 8, 2020

The new way of doing work



Court look so different now, but LOPD attorneys, staff and administrators have been leading the way in mastering the new technology and problems.

KOB 4 news station recently turned to us to help show the public what court is like these days. Even the news story was reported in a new way, with attorneys working together to set up cameras in Albuquerque attorney Ben Smith's office and coordinate with KOB reporter Tommy Lopez.

More pics on the next few pages

A Hands on the Wheel profile

Deputy Chief Jennifer Birmingham



Deputy Chief
Jennifer Birmingham

Balance is a long game in Jennifer Birmingham's life.

Birmingham, the department's Deputy Chief of Operations, is from a family of law enforcement. Her dad was a sheriff in small town Nebraska. Her uncles were law enforcement. Her mom was the 911 coordinator.

Now she's a public defender.

She openly talks about her addiction to alcohol in her past. She won't hide her arrests for DWI. Or how she took help during her low time.

Now she attends 12-step recovery programs and considers her work as a public defender part of her returning the help she was given in that time.

"I've been given so much, it's how I give back," she said.

She's tended bar, sold shoes, worked as a nursing home aid, worked on a road construction crew and as a dispatcher in a gravel pit.

"Her background and life experiences are really a strength for her in this work," said Chief Public Defender Bennett Baur.

She managed small public defender offices in Nebraska and Arizona before coming to New Mexico. Baur said when she came to the Las Cruces office, she quickly jumped into whatever task was asked of her, including running the Ruidoso and Las Cruces offices and then stepping into the deputy chief position.

See the rest of the story over the next few pages



Jennifer Birmingham's son Dylan and her cousin Donnie give her lots to smile about at their home in Las Cruces.

“The first thing I noticed about Jen was the breadth of her experience in public defense,” he said. “The second thing I noticed about her were her tattoos – because she was wearing a long-sleeve shirt the first time we met!”

Birmingham, who is an avid heavy metal music fan, says she knows she doesn't always look the part of an attorney.

“I look like one the clients. I've heard that before. I tend to bring all my experiences into what I do, and the other part is I know what my client that smells like booze and is shaking is feeling like. I can't let go of the part of me that is a recovering alcoholic,” she said. “And I care about them, and I care about my people.”

Baur said that caring drives Birmingham.

“What is so apparent when you get to know her is how much she cares about people – about our clients and about the people who work in this office. Before COVID-19, she was almost constantly on the road as Deputy Chief – helping to cover dockets, listening to concerns, brainstorming solutions to problems. I think it's hard for her right now to not have those direct personal connections with everyone. But it's that caring and wanting to go the extra mile or 300 that makes her such a good leader.”

But she has to work to make sure she's not caring too much. She has to step back and remember that she doesn't always have to be “at work” and she can just be all the things that “make me Jenn.”



Amira the snake, one of four at the Birmingham home, hangs out for a selfie.



One of Jennifer Birmingham's many nature photographs

One of my priorities at LOPD is defender wellness. If we don't care for ourselves and achieve a balance between what we do and who we are, we become ineffective in work and life. This is something that is a continual struggle for me. It is difficult for me to ever "leave" work. This struggle has increased now that my office is my bedroom. These four walls have become my constant reality. If my email notification goes off at 8 p.m., I HAVE to answer it, even if it can probably wait. I know that if it is a real emergency, like an employee is ill with this awful virus, not only will someone call, but that is something that I have to do right now. But that 8 p.m. email is something that can wait until morning. I want you all to make healthy decisions for yourselves, as my bosses want the same for me, including not answering the 8 p.m. email. Leave work, be present in other parts of your life. If it is an emergency, your phone will ring. Be OK with taking time to care for yourselves. Being a public defender is a calling, but there is a difference between what we DO and who we are.

-Jenn

"I do public defense because my heart is in it. I could never do anything else in the law now," she said. "But I'm not going to give up getting my tattoos and spending time in a (metal music concert) pit and riding my Harley just because I'm a lawyer."

She says her son Dylan, now 18, and cousin Donnie, who live together in Las Cruces, have to take breaks to go hike to unplug from work. She takes photographs to unwind. And she cares for a growing family of snakes. And of course she can't wait to return to the mosh pit at metal shows.

"As an attorney, maybe if I take a break a client will suffer. As a manager, my employee might suffer if I don't answer. I have to know it's OK to not always be at work," she said. "I have to work on balance."



Jennifer Birmingham's art is one of her ways she relaxes.



9th Clovis, Portales + Hobbs
Ibukun Adepoju



1st Santa Fe, Taos
Julie Ball



5th, Roswell, Carlsbad
Deirdre Ewing



MCDU
Craig Acorn



Gallup, Aztec
Matt Cockman



Social Work
Louella Arellano



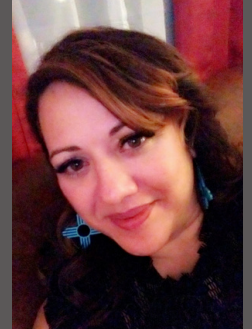
Las Cruces
Kris Knutson

Operations Unit

All of the District Defenders, pictured here, in the state report to Deputy Chief of Operations Jennifer Birmingham about the daily operation of their offices. This includes personnel issues, court issues, supply and infrastructure issues and HR issues.

Birmingham communicates executive decisions to the front line offices and front line office issues back to the Executive Committee, which includes Chief PD Ben Baur, all the deputy chiefs, HR head Ronald Herrera, CFO Christina Keyes, General Counsel Adrienne Turner and the communication specialist.

“That’s the short explanation for very important work,” Birmingham said.



Albuquerque
Jennifer Barela



12th Ruidoso, Alamo
Matt Chavez

Bake, ride off the stress

Hobbies abound in coronaland



Katina Slaughter revives an old hobby during coronatime at her home in Nogal.



Appeals atty Caitlin Smith made this lamb cake and entered it into a highly entertaining online Lamb Cake contest, which you can find [here](#).



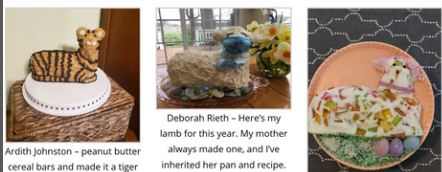
General Counsel Adrienne Turner and magic cookie crew have been baking cookies and sourdough bread.



Cheryl Wright

Tyler Davis

Caitlin Smith - We didn't have jellybeans for the face this year, so we went with what we had. Our lamb is very silly.



Ardith Johnston - peanut butter cereal bars and made it a tiger

Deborah Rieth - Here's my lamb for this year. My mother always made one, and I've inherited her pan and recipe.

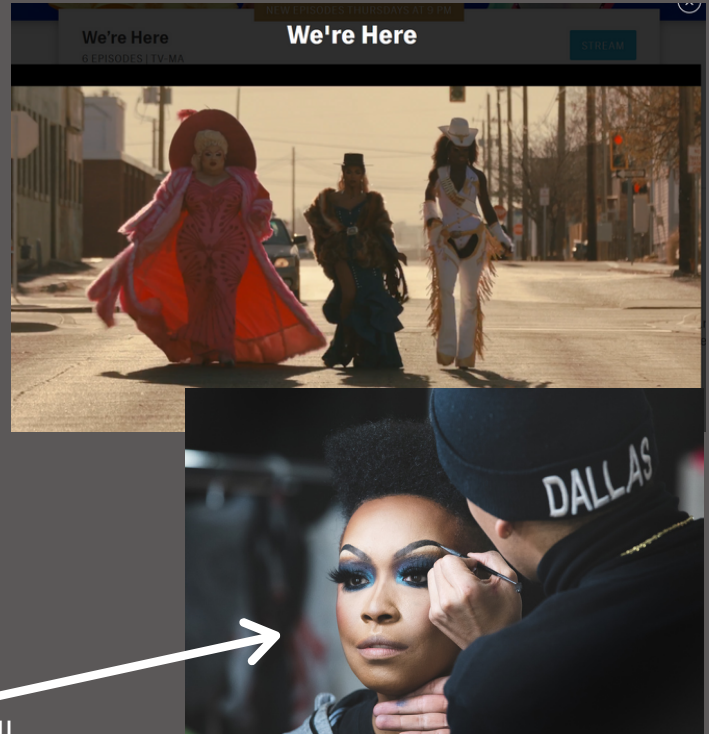
Aztec live on HBO

The HBO episode featuring Aztec attorney Nicole Hall is about to air.

HBO informs us that it will air on May 14. You can watch some trailers here www.hbo.com/were-here

Here is how HBO describes the episode featuring Hall:

"The queens journey into the desert to help the residents of Farmington and Shiprock, New Mexico foster unity and open-mindedness. In the process, they enlist: Nate, a gay, indigenous photographer eager to make a deeper connection with his Navajo people; Nicole, a proud lesbian, public defender, and local LGBTQ activist who's constantly misgendered because she wears "men's" clothes; and Stacey and Jasmine, a mother-daughter duo processing the traumatic suicide of their beloved daughter and sister DJ, who struggled with not feeling accepted as a lesbian in her community." Directed by Johnnie Ingram.



LOPD atty Nicole Hall

More screen time for LOPD



Some more pics from the KOB 4 story from the Albuquerque office on how court works these days.

NMDOH

LOOKING FOR

VOLUNTEERS

Help Out Your Local Food Banks

The demand for food in our state has increased substantially. Widespread layoffs triggered by COVID-19 have led to an unprecedented number of New Mexicans turning to food banks. As the demand grows, food banks are receiving fewer donations. Food banks help vulnerable communities including the elderly, disabled, low income and unemployed. Most regular volunteers are senior citizens who are at high risk of contracting COVID-19.

**To volunteer or make a donation
please visit nmfoodbanks.org**

*Thank you for helping those in need during this difficult time.
We are all in this together.*



Welcome to these new hires:

Whoops: Bailey McGowan is now an attorney, no longer a law clerk, in Clovis



Virtual recovery

NM DEFENDERS IN RECOVERY, a virtual recovery meeting, will be held every Friday night (for the next several weeks) at 6 p.m. via Zoom. For the Zoom link, more information or for other links to other virtual recovery resources, you can contact Craig Acorn at craig.acorn@gmail.com or 650-283-0694; Jennifer Birmingham at Jbirmingham2112@gmail.com or 575-288-7958; or JJ Hall at jjhall@me.com or 307-321-4752. Notice those are their private numbers and emails as this is not a department-sponsored effort. Anonymity is strictly honored.