

# New executive director at The Mandala Center

By **TIM KELLER**  
The Chronicle-News

Artist/social worker Lori Coon has taken over the helm of The Mandala Center, an ecumenical retreat near Des Moines, becoming the organization's third executive director since its founding in 1996.

With the retirement of Gaye Brown, who held the position since 2000, the board of directors conducted a lengthy nationwide search; Coon was a late applicant whose résumé was such a perfect fit that she rose to the top over other applicants already under consideration.

The Mandala Center offers educational and experiential workshops and facility rentals for individuals and groups seeking to explore topics in health and wellness, creativity, spiritual growth and personal and professional development.

Born in Oil City, in rural western Pennsylvania, Coon grew up helping with her family's garden and chickens. At ten, the family moved north to Erie, PA, then on to Orchard Park, NY, a suburb of Buffalo. (She acknowledges that this made her a Buffalo Bills fan. Even today, she allows, "I'd watch a Bills game now and then, if I had a TV.") Her family – parents, brother, sister, nieces and nephews – remain in Orchard Park, but Coon moved on.

She earned her undergraduate degree at Mercyhurst College in Erie, having changed her major from art therapy to social work, with a minor in psychology. She did graduate work at California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, where her thesis delved into women's spirituality and eco-psychology – combining art, land, and creative writing, for women recovering from domestic abuse. She says her work equated creativity with healing, restoration of land with restoration of souls.

Coon's early work included educational services for pregnant teens, work with handicapped children, and ten years of hospital social work that included discharge planning as well as intake services for senior care.

For the past twelve years, she has focused on combining healing and the arts. She worked for years in arts education, grades K-8, creating arts programs in collaboration with an area arts council. She managed the ArtCenter at Dave Poulin Studios in Jamestown, NY, a community arts center offering arts classes, where she was office manager and programs director for four years.

Finally, Coon created her own business, Creative Wisdoms, which she says grew out of all the other classes and programs she'd done. The organization's website, [www.creativewisdoms.com](http://www.creativewisdoms.com), is topped by the slogan "art as a healing pathway." Through Creative Wisdoms, Coon offered art classes, stress management, social work, and personal awareness training. She had contracts with the NY Office of Mental Hygiene. She taught classes for six years at Chautauqua Institution, a center for art, education, religion, and recreation, which also took her to Taiwan for a two-week residency.



Lori Coon has been at The Mandala Center in Des Moines since mid-September

Photo by Tim Keller

Additional training through a California organization called A Window Between Worlds led to Coon administering programs with the Salvation Army.

Coon says she came to art as a healing tool through her own childhood experience, where she recalls drawing in her sketchbook as her own therapeutic recovery process, helping to overcome a variety of challenges.

She has a fondness for circles and mandalas – her home is filled with them – so a friend told her about The Mandala Center's website, [www.mandalacenter.org](http://www.mandalacenter.org), where the posting for executive director applicants caught her eye.

She discussed it with "the most important person in my life," her 19-year-old son, Jaymes Thompson. "We lived in Jamestown, NY, for the past four years, until Jaymes graduated from high school. He wanted me to follow him to Boston,"

21, with special events for International Peace Day, September 21. She hopes this event will attract collaborations and relationships with other organizations, such as Sugarite Canyon State Park and the University of New Mexico. She wants to emphasize the mandala as a symbol of peace.

Lori, a native of the eastern U.S., said she loves the openness of the southwest:

**"It's humbling to be part of something so big and grand."**

She's excited to continue Gaye Brown's emphasis on maintaining close links with the Volcano Triangle neighbors around the Des Moines, Capulin, and Folsom communities. Thanksgiving at TMC November 26-29 will emphasize events for locals, as will the December 13 Festival of Lessons and Carols, accompanied by a potluck dinner.

Walking The Mandala Center grounds with Coons last week, it was apparent that she had arrived in the right place, at the right time. The enthusiasm and energy she brought with her were clearly accompanied by a sense of peace. The mandalas seem to be working.

– a gifted writer and artist, Jaymes studies illustration at Massachusetts College of Art and Design – "but after looking at The Mandala Center website, he said, 'Okay, Mom, you can go. It looks just like you.'"

Coon loves the openness of the southwest. "Back home, in the northeast, there's too much, too close," she says. "My whole being feels like I have more room out here." She invokes the paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe, saying that, in New Mexico, "It's easier to see things in isolation. It looks like nothing is out here, but there is, and it's easier to focus on it." She adds, "It's humbling to be part of something so big and grand."

Since her arrival at The Mandala Center in mid-September, Coon has taken over responsibility for programming, marketing, public relations, budget, and staff. A high priority is staff camaraderie and teamwork. She inherited a great staff, she says, including operations manager Monica Ingamells and chef/kitchen manager Marsha Stepelton. Sasha Jensen is lead housekeeper and also assists Stepelton in the kitchen. Part-time staffers who assist with special events include Nancy Abbott, Kathryn Atwater, Sylvia Cisneros, and Debbie Martinez. A frequent presence at the attractive facility on the shoulder of Sierra Grande is neighbor Anna Wolfe, The Mandala Center's founder and president of its board of directors.

Coon has contracted with Richard Gere Productions to bring Tibetan lamas to The Mandala Center September 17-

## World News Briefs From the Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The glow from a health care triumph faded quickly for President Barack Obama on Sunday as Democrats realized the bill they fought so hard to pass in the House has nowhere to go in the Senate.

Speaking from the Rose Garden about 14 hours after the late Saturday vote, Obama urged senators to be like runners on a relay team and "take the baton and bring this effort to the finish line on behalf of the American people."

The problem is that the Senate won't run with it. The government health insurance plan included in the House bill is unacceptable to a few Democratic moderates who hold the balance of power in the Senate.

If a government plan is part of the deal, "as a matter of conscience, I will not allow this bill to come to a final vote," said Sen. Joe Lieberman, the Connecticut independent whose vote Democrats need to overcome GOP filibusters.

"The House bill is dead on arrival in the Senate," Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said dismissively.

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Hurricane Ida, the first Atlantic hurricane to target the United States this year, plodded Sunday toward the Gulf Coast with 100 mph winds, bringing the threat of flooding and storm surges.

A hurricane watch extended over more than 200 miles of coastline across southeastern Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida Panhandle. Louisiana's governor declared a state of emergency.

Authorities said Ida could make landfall as early as Tuesday morning, although it was forecast to weaken by then. Officials and residents kept a close eye on the Category 2 hurricane as it approached, though there were no immediate plans for evacuations.

At 1 p.m. EST, Ida was located 510 miles south-southeast of the mouth of the Mississippi River and moving northwest near 10 mph. The latest forecast from the National Hurricane Center shows Ida brushing near Louisiana and Mississippi, then making landfall near Alabama before continuing across north Florida.

Yet many residents took the forecast in stride.

## New K-Club officers installed



Mike Tranter, Trinidad Kiwanis Club President and School District No. 1 Superintendent, introduces Kiwanis Key Club new officers – from left, Connor Johnston, president; Hannah Lamden, vice president; Thera Mullet, secretary; and Danielle Payne, treasurer. The introduction took place during Thursday night's annual Key Club installation of officers ceremonies at Fisher's Peak Elementary school. Tranter also introduced new Key Club board members Anthony Payne, Dusty Meyers and Zoe Rivas and new 2009 K-Kids club members. Also on hand for the occasion were K-Kids school advisors Lydia Velarde, Barb Campbell, Shirley Incitti and Mike Sciortino and Kiwanis advisors Paul Cordova and Phyllis Moniot, who spoke on the value of leadership and community good deeds and involvement.

Photos by Mike Garrett

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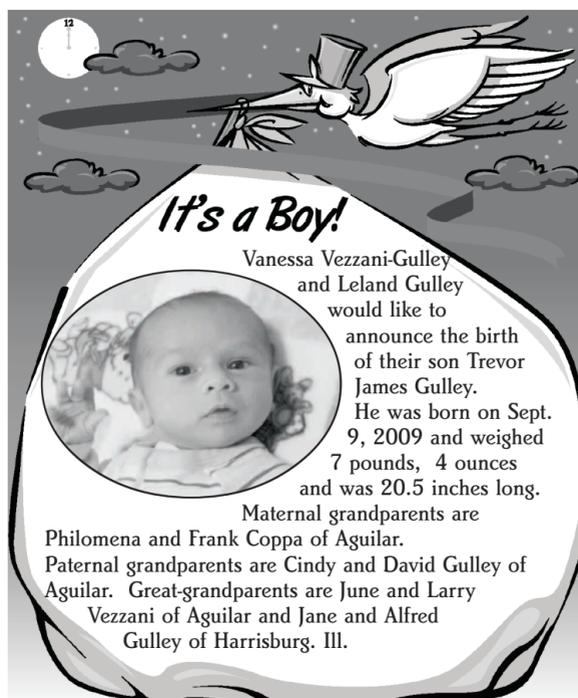
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## NOTICE OF BUDGET

Notice is hereby given that a proposed budget has been submitted to the Board of Supervisors of the Spanish Peaks - Purgatoire River Conservation District for the 2010 budget year. A copy of the proposed budget is available for public inspection at the District Office, 3590 E. Main Street, Trinidad, Colorado. Office hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The proposed budget will be considered at the regular meeting of the Spanish Peaks - Purgatoire River CD on November 12, 2009 at 1:00 p.m. Any interested elector of the Spanish Peaks - Purgatoire River CD may inspect the proposed budget and file or register any objection at any time prior to the final adoption of the budget.