

Chocolate Factory caps sweet Valentine's Day

By Tim Keller
Special to The Chronicle-News

RATON — If chocolate is a serious problem for you, a doctor may have ordered you to stay at least 500 yards away from Raton High School on the evening of Valentine's Day. Everyone else, it seemed, was inside the school's library for the second annual Chocolate Factory, sponsored by the school's Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America chapter.

Twenty-one student members each prepared at least four batches of a wide variety of chocolate confections, almost three dozen recipes and about 130 platters altogether. Popular items included chocolate-

dipped Oreos, chocolate truffles, chocolate-almond candy with coconut, chocolate-covered marshmallows, fudge chocolate pecan bars, chocolate cream puffs, chocolate tarts, black magic cake, and chocolate-covered strawberries.

There were "dirt cups" — chocolate crumbs over chocolate pudding — and fudge, chocolate cake and brownies, peanut clusters and chocolate donuts. There were fountains of flowing chocolate for dipping fresh strawberries, bananas, and pretzels. The most talked-about item was the white chocolate mice — cherries dipped in white chocolate with ears of almond slices and little candied eyes and red noses.

The all-you-could-eat

affair might have cost \$30 per ticket in Santa Fe or Denver; at Raton High School, students paid \$5, adults \$6. Not surprisingly, the library was packed throughout much of the four-hour affair Tuesday evening as 240 customers indulged themselves in the chocolate extravaganza. Tables were draped with red tablecloths and much of the room was decorated with romantic low lighting.

FCCLA students sponsored the event and made all of the chocolates in order to raise money to pay their way to the organization's state conference in Albuquerque next month.

Participating RHS students included Tucker Berry and Makayla Mondragon, state FCCLA

officers who stamped the hand of each entering patron with a big red heart.

Others included Breannon Trujillo, Nick Armijo, Courtney Harrison, Haley Gansz, Cheyann Duran, Kelli Ortiz, Alyssa Eggebrecht, Kristin Vance, Makala Vertovec, Leah Cimino, Justin Apodaca, Megan Holland, Arianna Krulyac, Moriah Daniel, Cam Baird, Taylor Hull, Mark Hightree, Gabe Padilla, and Audrey Arguello.

If anyone had trouble digesting plates of chocolate, they didn't show it at the event. The school's large library was filled with friends and families and smiles and chocolates, a success sure to be repeated next Valentine's Day.



Tim Keller/Special to The Chronicle-News

White chocolate mice were among almost three dozen handmade chocolate confections offered at the all-you-could-eat second annual Chocolate Factory at Raton High School, a fundraiser for the school's energetic chapter of Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America.

LETTERS

Pando responds to recent events

Dear editor,
You have probably been bombarded by lots of information and misinformation about efforts being made to have me recalled from my seat on the Trinidad City Council.

Please take a moment to hear my version of the events that have brought us to where we are today. I can begin by saying that my motives in serving on the City Council are totally honorable and in the best interests of Trinidad. I have no hidden agenda. I do not contract with the city. None of my relatives are employed by or contract with the city.

It seems to me that our problems first started when the subject of the evaluation of our city manager appeared on our meeting agenda. I knew that our city charter and the city manager's contract require an annual evaluation. The city charter states "the procedure for such evaluation of the city manager shall be at the City Council's discretion."

The city manager's employment states exactly the same language and adds that the City Council shall give the public the opportunity to provide written comment. It also states that the written evaluation shall not be made public. In other words, the city manager contracted with the city to keep his evaluation from the public.

When the city manager requested that his evaluation be held in an open session rather than in an executive

session, I couldn't see how we could really evaluate him in an open meeting. I did not want an open session evaluation because of the risk that the public in attendance might interfere or seek to participate in the evaluation contrary to the city charter and the contractual provision the city manager had signed. Also, at that time, he had not provided us with any criteria to follow or responses to surveys of the public. This is the meeting where I became frustrated and walked out.

These actions violated no legal or ethical standard. However, in retrospect, I realize that it would have been better if I had not left the meeting. I have publicly apologized for doing that and stated that it would not happen again. Mayor Garduno and my council colleagues accepted my apology. This was the end of that incident and we moved on.

However, it seemed clear to me that the city manager had recruited community support to appear at that meeting. I wondered why. My preference remains to discuss my evaluation of the city manager in private, without cheerleaders on either side and not at a public meeting. That would seem to be a good business practice.

I believe this incident was the beginning of our strained relationship with our city manager. Please remember that the city manager is hired by the council and serves at the pleasure of the council. He can be terminated at any time, with or without cause. The City Council has

authority to hire and fire only two people, the city manager and the city attorney.

Another point I would like to clarify. I have been accused of wanting to hire a power and light superintendent. What I really want is for the position to be filled, as I do not believe the city manager has the expertise or qualifications to fill that important position. His resume does not indicate any expertise or experience in running a power and light department.

I was in no way trying to tell the city manager who to hire, only to fill the position. This position has been recognized by this council and previous city councils as an important position. The position is part of the city budget, just like the position of chief of police. To this very date, I believe we need to fill that position. Creating the position and providing funds in the budget for this position is a City Council responsibility. The city manager's responsibility is to carry out or enforce the City Council's policies. It was actually my hope that the position would be filled by a promotion from within the department.

Regarding the LED street lighting project. I have come to believe that this controversy is not really about LED lighting at all. It is about whether the city manager will keep the council informed and whether the bidding process for purchase of city equipment and services will be followed. The city manager told us that there was a federal mandate that

was going to require the city to change its present street lighting to LED by the year 2014. This was only partially true. I have since learned that there really is no mandate. It does not exist. We were given false information.

Then, our city manager, without the council's knowledge or approval solicited proposals to change the streetlights with LED lights. He told us the cost would be in the neighborhood of \$750,000. Then he told us he negotiated the cost down to about \$466,000, but that we had to accept the proposal by the end of January 2012. At that time, I and other council members told the city manager that we were not going to approve this procedure. We told him that we should engage in a competitive bidding process as required by law.

It was at this meeting that I experienced one of the most ugly situations in my life. Members of the public were demanding that we accept the \$466,000 proposal. I was determined that I would not be bullied, regardless of consequences. It was then that I reminded the audience that they were only a small portion of the community and that I was not going to make a decision based on their demands.

If I was disrespectful for saying this, then so be it. This is how I felt. I could not allow myself to be pressured to a quick vote that I knew was not an emergency and required a bid process to be legal. Again, it seemed to me that the audience support for a quick vote was orchestrated and I wondered why. I have since learned from a reliable source that the company that offered us the LED contract no longer exists and that the people involved are no longer working together.

I try very hard to treat people with dignity and respect because that is the

way I want to be treated. But, I am also not afraid to speak up when someone disrespects me or my colleagues. I have not criticized individuals before council meetings other than to tell one certain individual how negative he was. That individual with all his negativism is at the root of most of the problems our city is experiencing today.

These are difficult economic times. These are also difficult times to be an elected official. I know that I will survive these bad times and I feel comfortable that dealing with these trying circumstances will make me a better person. To my surprise and delight, I have had many, many people come into my place of business, or approach me on the street, wishing me well and pledging their support.

Lastly, I appreciate your continued support, especially the support of my wife and children. We have a great city and it will be even better if we can amicably settle our differences and move forward.

Alfredo Pando
City councilman
Trinidad

Tranter responds to Meyers's op-ed article

Dear editor,
I couldn't help but notice the article that Vic Meyers put in the The Chronicle-News on Feb. 15 about Dr. Manuel Rodriguez's budget vs. the budget that I had put together last year. I am not sure exactly what his intention or point was, but let me just say this.

I did not appear before the board at the community meeting on the budget to defend myself or be critical of Dr. Rodriguez. As I stated at the meeting, I was simply there to try to help. The past is the past and I am sure that Rodriguez's budget is more accurate than the one I put together last spring. As time passes, with any budget, as you get new

information, you amend it, and make it better. I gave a brief history of the reserves (which are audited FACT), and then I tried to point out areas in the most recent projections that the District is making for this year; that need to be further discussed and looked at (Salaries, Benefits, Materials and Supplies, Purchased Services, etc.)

In my opinion, the district is overstating by \$400,000-\$500,000 the amount that should be spent this year. My observations were made based on factual spending through October and current payroll spending through December.

We have lost several staff members since the beginning of the year, and our payrolls have been declining each month. It is critical to fully understand all of this information before any plans are put in place for next year, especially any plans that might result in staff layoffs.

I have recently put together a budget alternative that would not require the layoff of any staff, would not require any pay cuts, and would still leave the district with healthy reserves at the end of the 2012/13 year. It is my intent to have this plan at least reviewed and considered during our budgeting process.

The only axe I have to grind in all of this, is trying to ensure that our kids get the best opportunities for a well-rounded education that we can give them, and that our community support our teachers and staff. They truly do their best for the good of our kids, and we need to continue to promote a supportive environment where they can continuously improve and develop.

It's all about our kids and their future.

Mike Tranter
Former Trinidad
school superintendent
Trinidad

Chamber dinner, dance scheduled for Saturday

The Trinidad & Las Animas County Chamber of Commerce will present its annual awards Saturday during the business group's annual meeting and Mardi Gras dinner at Sebastiani Gym.

The event will kick off at 5 p.m. with a silent auction of Mardi Gras masks made by local students and sponsored by the Consortium of Positive Educators.

Dinner will begin at 6 p.m. with the chamber's annual meeting and awards ceremony beginning at 7 p.m. A dance will follow at 9 p.m.

Funds from the silent auction and dance will go to "giving back to our area youth through education."

The Trinidad Community Foundation will raffle a car, a gasoline voucher and an iPad during the dance. Tickets are \$10 or three for \$25.

This year's recipient of the Chenoweth Public Service Award is Howard Lackey.

Other awards to be presented Saturday are: Large Business of the Year — Purgatoire Valley Construction; Small Business of the Year — Norwest Corp.; Businesswoman of the Year — Dr. Amy Wilson; Businessman of the Year — Felix Lopez; Non-profit of the Year — Noah's Ark Animal Welfare Association; and Ambassador of the Year — Deb Hartman.

Tickets for the dance can be purchased at Trinidad State Junior College or the Trinidad Community Foundation offices at 134 West Main St..

For additional information or dinner reservations call the Trinidad & Las Animas County Chamber of Commerce at 846-9285.

Tickets for the dinner and dance are \$25 for seniors, \$35 for chamber members, non-members \$40 and corporate tables of eight for \$400 and can be purchased at the chamber office at 136 W Main St.

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