

# THE ALBUQUERQUE TRIBUNE

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## Danny Romero

The Albuquerque boxer goes for the flyweight jackpot in Las Vegas, Nev. See Sports, page B1.

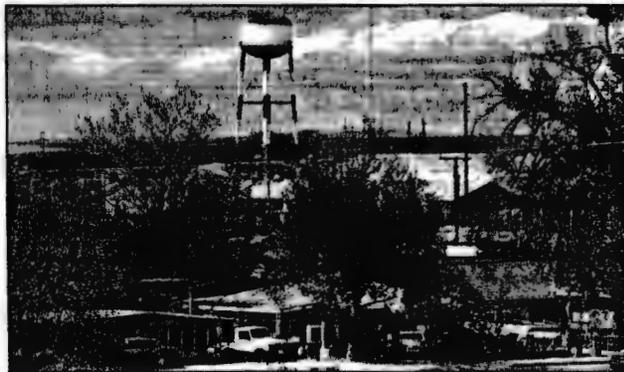
## C1 You Are Here

Hike the Sandias, enjoy the view and the variety of trees.

## TV WEEK Turn off the tube

We dare you to turn off the television for a week.

**Pollution nearly wiped out the historic San Jose neighborhood in south Albuquerque. Restoration will take years, but residents have reason for optimism on Earth Day '95.**



THE GE TOWER is a reminder that the people of San Jose have had to adjust through the years to having industry as a neighbor.

# The long road back



FRANK SALAS, 6, walks the street looking for his lost dog before heading off to school. His parents, James and Charlene Salas, chose to settle in the San Jose neighborhood because they were raised here and like it. James Salas said he feels safe letting his children walk down the street and play outside. His parents and brother live on the same block, just a block from the General Electric plant.

By Tony Davis  
TRIBUNE REPORTER

Six years ago, a bank turned down San Jose's Leroy Candelaria for a home loan because he lived on a Superfund toxic-waste

parts plant.

The groundwater pollution shut down two city wells and hit a half-dozen private residential wells at low levels.

The pollution dealt a near-death blow to a neighborhood rich in pride and history but short on cash. It's one of Albuquerque's oldest

## Oklahoma bid

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The Associated Pres

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Michael J. Sallinger/THIRD

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TRIBUNE REPORTER

Six years ago, a bank turned down San Jose's Leroy Candelaria for a home loan because he lived on a Superfund toxic-waste site. Last year, another bank gave James Salas, who lives across the street from Candelaria, a loan.

For residents in this square-mile neighborhood lying in an industrial shadow, this is progress. It's one of many signs, big and small, that Earth Day 1995 — today — looks a little brighter in San Jose than Earth Day 1990.

Five years ago the area was in the grip of a seemingly endless pollution controversy.

Day after day, story after newspaper story told of well tests, angry neighbors, cautious public officials and a thick, deep stew of toxic chemicals that spread a half-mile from their source under an aircraft

parts plant.

The groundwater pollution shut down two city wells and hit a half-dozen private residential wells at low levels.

The pollution dealt a near-death blow to a neighborhood rich in pride and history but short on cash. It's one of Albuquerque's oldest neighborhoods, developed in 1830 along what is now called the Barlas ditchbank.

It's a neighborhood that ranks well below the norm on virtually every economic indicator.

Today, San Jose is host to two Superfund sites, meaning they're on the federal government's list of the most contaminated sites and are targeted for cleanup. It is rife with holding tanks, monitoring wells and storage yards, with barrels of chemicals sitting behind barbed

Please see SAN JOSE/A7

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## L.A. base supporters tried to tour Kirtland with BRAC men

The Californians were allowed to see the base a day after being barred. Their presence was a good sign, New Mexicans say.

By Karen MacPherson  
and Shonda Novak  
TRIBUNE REPORTERS

WASHINGTON — The battle of the Air Force bases — Kirtland vs. Los Angeles — escalated this week as an aide to California Sen. Dianne Feinstein and two Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce officials toured the Albuquerque base.

But the tour for the Californians was

conducted only after a skirmish among Kirtland supporters as to whether it was a good idea to let "spies" onto the base, according to retired Lt. Gen. Leo Marquez, coordinator of the Kirtland Retention Task Force.

The Californians toured Kirtland on Wednesday, the day after two members of the federal Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

toured the base as part of their investigation into the Pentagon's proposal to disband or move most of Kirtland's military units.

The Californians wanted to join the Tuesday tour but were barred by New Mexico officials, Marquez said.

"It wasn't any of their damn business," Marquez said in an interview Friday.

"We didn't think it was appropriate for them to be here. We told them we weren't intending to attend any of the California visits.

"We're not predators on California.

If they're paranoid about us, that's their problem," Marquez said.

New Mexico officials say the Californians' presence in Albuquerque this week is proof that the campaign to take Kirtland off the Air Force's hit list and replace it with Los Angeles may be working.

"I think we have their attention," said GOP Rep. Steve Schiff.

Democratic Sen. Jeff Bingaman agreed, saying that it will boost Kirtland's case if the eight-member base closure commission decides to add the Los Angeles base to the list of bases

targeted for closure or major changes.

As one defense expert put it: "If they (the BRAC commissioners) want to get savings in this category of bases, the only place left is Los Angeles."

Bingaman criticized the Californians' decision to visit Albuquerque, saying: "I think if I were in their position, I wouldn't be calling attention to myself."

Neither Feinstein aides nor the two Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce officials, Ron Lamb and Barry Lyden, returned telephone calls Friday from

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**SAN JOSE PROFILE**

In the San Jose neighborhood:

- The 1990 median household income was \$14,325; for all New Mexicans it was \$24,087.
- About 36 percent of the population earns poverty-level income; for all New Mexicans the figure is 20 percent.
- About 35 percent of the population over 25 has a high school degree and 3.4 percent has a bachelor's degree; for all New Mexicans the figures are 75 percent and 20.4 percent.
- About 70 percent of the population is Hispanic, compared with 20.4 percent of all New Mexicans.
- Nearly 40 percent of the houses are over 50 years old, compared with 8 percent for all New Mexico houses.

Source: 1990 Census

**CLEANUP PROGRESS**

■ **South Valley Superfund site:** Listed as a Superfund site in 1982. Since May 1994, General Electric has been pumping out and treating contaminated groundwater up to 25 feet deep from beneath its jet engine parts plant at Broadway and Woodward roads Southeast.

- By late 1995 or early 1996, it should start cleaning up deep groundwater pollution that's up to 1,000 feet underground. Estimated cleanup time: 30 years. Estimated cost: up to \$45 million.
- The Chevron Bulk Terminal on 3200 Broadway S.E. has removed 200,000 pounds of petroleum product from soil beneath its bulk fuel storage terminal in the past year. It may start pumping out contaminated groundwater later this year.
- Last month, the state Environment Department signed a cleanup agreement with Texaco for its bulk terminal on 3209 Broadway S.E. It is already removing contamination from the soil and will start pumping out tainted groundwater later this year.
- The state is negotiating with Diamond Shamrock for a cleanup of petroleum from a 1968



Michael J. Gallagher/Tribune

**FAMILY HISTORY** is why Adela Brito, 28, and her father, Herman (not pictured), choose to stay in their house on the edge of San Jose and only a mile from the AT&SF Superfund site. The house, built in 1914, still has a private well, but the Britos only use it for watering and cleaning. They drink bottled water.

**SAN JOSE** from A1

wire fences.

The pollution that companies dumped on the ground as many as 40 years ago is likely to linger for several decades more. Authorities concede that they may never be able to remove it all because some of it has a dense, thick consistency that is hard to remove from soil by conventional pumping and treatment techniques.

But companies responsible for the pollution — several oil companies, General Electric and Public Service Company of New Mexico — are slowly starting to pump out toxic solvents and petroleum



**Pride is returning to the neighborhood, where the effects of 40 years of industrial**

ed groundwater later this year. Last month, the state Environment Department signed a cleanup agreement with Texaco for its bulk terminal on 3209 Broadway S.E. It is already removing contamination from the soil and will start pumping out tainted groundwater later this year.

The state is negotiating with Diamond Shamrock for a cleanup of petroleum from a 1968 pipeline leak. Cleanup costs and timetables for the petroleum facilities aren't known.

**Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe sites:** The abandoned AT&SF wood-preserving facility at 3300 Second St. S.W. joined the Superfund list in December. Creosote, a thick, tarry dark brown substance used in wood treatment, has contaminated soil and groundwater in the area.

The extent of contamination is still unknown, but it's not nearly as serious as at the South Valley site.

A cleanup might begin in two years. The cost and timetable for cleanup are unknown.

**PNM Power Generating Station:** PNM is currently removing contaminated soil and pumping out contaminated groundwater from beneath the now-closed power plant at Broadway and Bio Bravo boulevards. The contamination comes from solvents that seeped into the ground from an unlined storage tank and has spread to east of Interstate 25.

It has pumped out most of the shallow contaminated groundwater but hasn't started pumping out the deep well contamination that reaches at least 500 to 800 feet deep. PNM expects to spend \$10.5 million on cleanup there through the year 2018.

**Sources:** New Mexico Environment Department, General Electric Co., Public Service Company of N.M.

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But companies responsible for the pollution — several oil companies, General Electric and Public Service Company of New Mexico — are slowly starting to pump out toxic solvents and petroleum from contaminated groundwater. They'll be spending tens of millions of dollars in the coming decades to correct mistakes.

The neighborhood, plagued for years by graffiti, crime, drugs and gang problems, also is getting a fresh face and help from the city's community policing program, neighborhood leaders say.

Approval rates for bank loans in the area are low compared with other neighborhoods, federal records show. But residents say they're easier to obtain than they were five or six years ago.

Complaints about low property values and slow home sales are still high. Some residents speak with bitterness and anger and wish they had never lived there.

But overall, "We are in the restoration stage," said Dolores Herrera, who has run the activist San Jose Community Awareness Council for two years. "We are coming up. Things will not stay as they are."

"I believe in people and I know that through the power of people and the spirit of people, even though it will take years, as long as we persevere, things will improve. Every little victory is celebrated."

Herrera, a San Jose resident for 23 years, works in a low-slung red brick building in the San Jose Catholic Parish complex at 2401 Broadway Blvd. S.E. Her bookshelves are filled with inch-thick loose-leaf notebooks labeled "Chevron," "Environmental" and "Superfund."

Her vocabulary is filled with phrases such as "building bridges" and "forming partnerships." She is an unusual breed among environmental activists, one who spends more time throwing bouquets than blasting industry and government.

"When I started here about two years ago, people kept telling me, 'Dolores, you're not going to make a difference,'" she said this week. "They said the council has been here a long time but things haven't changed. But now I don't hear that anymore."

Instead, she talks of how neighborhood cleanup efforts have removed abandoned vehicles from the streets and cleaned garbage and weeds from vacant lots.

"We send out letters to property owners, to absentee landlords and they're very receptive. They clean the streets up," Herrera said.

Today, she is receiving an award for the council's efforts in pushing for environmental and neighborhood cleanups. The



**55-GALLON DRUMS** of groundwater and soil samples sit on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Superfund site in San Jose. From 1908 to 1972, a wood-preserving facility at 3300 Second St. S.W. treated railroad ties and other wood products with creosote and oil, which were disposed of in an unlined impoundment covering about 3½ acres. The site was added to the priority cleanup list in October 1992.



**WATER SAMPLES ARE TAKEN** every 45 days from the treatment plant at General Electric, which pumps contaminated water from seven extraction wells, five on the GE site and two in the neighborhood. Greg Bosworth (left), engineering technician with Denver-based Smith Environmental, puts on gloves before taking a water sample. The groundwater is filtered and used for cooling in the plant.

site, solvents have spread east in the groundwater almost to Interstate 25.

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"When banks first found out we were a Superfund area, the banks didn't want to lend, but now they are working with us," Salas said. "My neighbor got a loan and my brother next door got his home refinanced. On Bethel Street north of us, houses are renting and selling."

"On Descanso (Road) south of us someone built a new home bigger than mine. People are building on empty lots and filling them up."

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But in 1992 and 1993, while Albuquerque's overall housing market boomed, lenders turned down 33 percent of all home loan applications in San Jose, according to federal home loan statistics analyzed by The Tribune.

That's the second-highest denial rate of any neighborhood, the records show. It's three to 10 times higher than West Side and far Northeast Heights neighborhoods.

Diana Dorn-Jones, who runs a non-profit agency helping low-income home buyers, said it's quite possible the pollution still scares off lenders.

"I would think that banks, being conservative as they are, that they would not be looking favorably to do loans in an area with a Superfund site, and that's unfortunate because that's an area of tremendous need," said Dorn-Jones, executive director of the United South Broadway Corp.

ans Administration, can guarantee loans, "and when I talked to our underwriters, none of them had any adverse information about the neighborhood," said Allen, whose bank approved four of five loans there in 1993. "We know the Superfund site is there, but that's no reason not to lend."

Bill Nordin, vice president and residential real estate manager for Sunwest Bank, said he hasn't seen any loan problems in San Jose influenced by contamination problems. His bank is one of the heaviest lenders in the San Jose area, federal records show.

But selling homes there remains a big problem, according to several residents.

Gillie Garcia, who lives in a green frame stucco house along Descanso Road north of GE, said he couldn't even persuade his son to accept a free house in the neighborhood in the late 1980s.

Debbie Hicks, who lives on Abajo Road, said she and her husband put their home on the market seven years ago and found no takers.

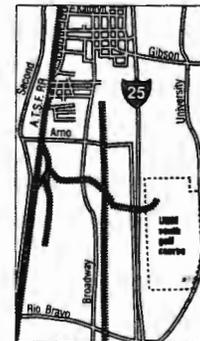
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Pam Baca, Garcia's next door neighbor, said she and her husband today are having trouble finding buyers for their home of 10 years. A staff member of the Bernalillo County assessor's office, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the office has given some properties in the area lower values for tax purposes because of contamination.

Hicks, 38, a native of the area, said her family had to boil its well water while she was growing up in the 1960s because it smelled bad.

Today, she, like the rest of the neighborhood, is hooked into city water, but many residents are angry because they couldn't use their wells if they wanted to.

to the neighborhood, where the effects of 40 years of industrial contamination made home loans hard to come by and property hard to sell. Community improvement efforts are increasing as the pollution cleanup progresses.



Charlotte HB/TRIBUNE

wood-preserving facility at 3300 Second St. S.W. joined the Superfund list in December. Creosote, a thick, tarry dark brown substance used in wood treatment, has contaminated soil and groundwater in the area.

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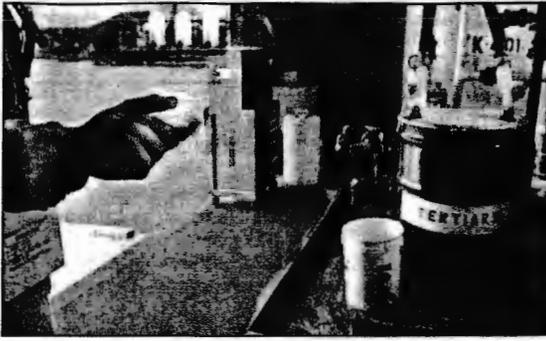
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"We send out letters to property owners, to absentee landlords and they're very receptive. They clean the streets up," Herrera said.

Today, she is receiving an award for the council's efforts in pushing for environmental and neighborhood cleanups. The award is coming from the Archdiocese in Santa Fe, and she's accepting it in Chimalayo as part of the archdiocese's 13th annual Prayer Pilgrimage for Peace festivities. In August, the council and several other groups will sponsor a three-day conference on environmental justice, the Superfund program and government contracting.

James Salas, 33, shares Herrera's optimism. He lives in a dark brown house on Abajo Road, two blocks north of the General Electric aircraft parts plant. From that

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"On Descanso (Road) south of us someone built a new home bigger than mine. People are building on empty lots and filling them up."

Leroy Candelaria, Salas' neighbor, was turned down six years ago by the ABQ Bank for a home-improvement loan. The bank, which collapsed a year later in the savings and loan industry crash, told Candelaria and another San Jose homeowner it didn't want the risk of lending in a Superfund area.

Candelaria, a city water department employee, later managed to get refinancing and remodeling loans from the City Hall credit union and the former First Nation-

al Bank.

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"I would think that banks, being conservative as they are, that they would not be looking favorably to do loans in an area with a Superfund site, and that's unfortunate because that's an area of tremendous need," said Dorn-Jones, executive director of the United South Broadway Corp.

Two bank officials, however, say they're unaware of any lending problems in that area due to contamination. Typically, bank officials say, income and credit-worthiness are the biggest factors in granting loans.

The Federal Housing Administration cannot guarantee loans on homes within a mile of a Superfund site, according to Debra Allen, a quality control compliance officer for Charter Bank for Savings.

But other agencies, such as the Veter-

ans Administration, can guarantee loans, "and when I talked to our underwriters, none of them had any adverse information about the neighborhood," said Allen, whose bank approved four of five loans there in 1993. "We know the Superfund site is there, but that's no reason not to lend."

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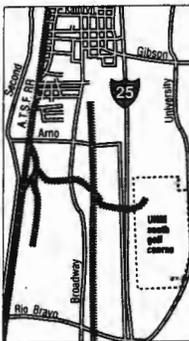
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Today, she, like the rest of the neighborhood, is hooked into city water, but many residents are angry because they couldn't use their wells if they wanted to. High solvent levels are found in the groundwater east of the GE site; low levels have been found several blocks north.

But Connie Martinez, the awareness council president, talked in brighter tones as she sat in her living room across the street from Hicks' house.

"It's improving at a very slow pace," said Martinez, 47, a 28-year San Jose resident. "We wonder will the pollution ever be cleaned up, but at least they're doing something about it."

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Charlotte HBI/TRIBUNE

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