



THE LONG VIEW

story by **CULLEN CURTISS**
photos by **DOUGLAS MERRIAM**

“You have to put your stake in the ground if you want to preserve what’s important. I think that there is no greater battle to be fought than right here in New Mexico.”
-Jim Long

Jim Long is excellent at romancing New Mexico. As CEO of Heritage Hotels & Resorts, it’s a big part of his job. Presently, the subject of his romance is one box under massive transformation in Albuquerque’s Sawmill District. Back in the early 20th century, the structure was home to the Southwest’s vibrant lumber mill industry and a spur of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway. The Frank Paxton Lumber Company, which in 1958 inaugurated a new showroom and warehouse here, will be reborn as Sawmill Market on March 10 of this year.

Long’s earnest passion and deep sense of responsibility for preserving the cultural and historical ethos of his home state is palpable. With so many “boxes” in his care—Long owns more than 100 standalone investment entities in New Mexico—the romance must smolder. And it does.

Long is a 12th generation New Mexican on his mother’s side. “She is an Aragon,” Long says of his mother. “They came to New Mexico in 1598 with Juan de Oñate, one of the first families to settle here.” His wife Rebecca is also a 12th generation New Mexican on her mother’s side, her lineage also arriving with Oñate via the Martinez family. Long laughs, “I probably married the only New Mexican girl who was not my cousin whom I could have married! Her roots are as deep as mine, and she has the same interests and passions about cultural preservation as I do.” He points out that she recognized the importance of building the relationship with the village of Chimayó before Heritage embraced the identity for the Hotel Chimayó de Santa Fe.

Buying into New Mexico has been Long’s trajectory since 2004. “I began extracting myself from properties elsewhere to bring that capital here,” he says. “Perhaps it’s not the wisest business strategy—to take a diversified portfolio and put all eggs in one basket, where, arguably, the economy has not always shown the greatest potential. But I see New Mexico becoming a very important place.”



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Long sees potential in what he calls "the cultural corridor," the route his ancestors traveled along the Rio Grande, where the soil was fertile, and still is. "We have our most significant settlements, from Las Cruces to Taos in this corridor where the greatest cultural riches are found," Long notes. "We happen to believe that embracing our cultural heritage and traditions is life itself. Our story is so soft-spoken that we have to do a better job."

In part because he was responsible for the tuition, Long chose to go to college in "the modern crossroads" of Albuquerque. "I thought architecture would provide a better outlet for me to make a living than pursuing an artistic path," he says. "I could have been a painter, a sculptor, but I chose architecture to put my stamp on things."

When, in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, architect Howard Roark is asked, "Why an architect?" He responds, "I want to change the shape of things." Long shares a similar sentiment. "I am able to use that training and education and knowledge to hopefully create spaces that excite and inspire, and leave a lasting legacy here in New Mexico," he says. "I am very

motivated by beautiful environments. It's important for us to create them."

Instrumental in developing those are Jim and Rebecca Long's children, also passionate about the work. Their daughter Adriana designs interiors for various properties, including Casa Esencia, Palacio de Marquesa and Eldorado Hotel & Spa. Jordan curates the entertainment for various properties, and Grant, special projects analyst, has most recently focused on market research and as a liaison for various roles required to execute Sawmill Market.

So, that's the home team. And to that list, Long might add Sawmill's general manager, Albuquerque-born-and-raised Brandon Palmer, back from the East Coast where he oversaw large-scale restaurant operations. "He represents a growing trend we are seeing where people who grew up here and moved away are now returning." Long's broader team, well, it's pretty broad, but a handful of individuals have employed their expertise over the last seven years to transform Frank Paxton Lumber into Sawmill Market, the very first food hall in New Mexico.

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"I have to give credit to master planner of the Sawmill District, Stefanos Polyzoides, with whom we have worked for 15 years," Long says. "It was he who identified the Frank Paxton Lumber building as being the right place for the food hall. We thought he was quite crazy, but after we settled down, we realized he was right."

Co-founder of the Pasadena, California-based urban planning firm Moule & Polyzoides, Polyzoides is called the Godfather of New Urbanism, a design-planning approach intended to stem sprawl by building meaningful, walkable, diverse, community-centric, multi-modal neighborhoods. He is also co-author of *The Plazas of New Mexico* (Trinity University Press, 2011), which "analyzes the history of Pueblo, Hispanic and Anglo planning traditions." Polyzoides staffed an office in Old Town for a period of time and was the architect responsible for the renovation of Los Poblanos Inn & Organic Farm. So, is he "crazy"?

"I see the success and gathering energy of Hotel Chaco," Polyzoides says. "Architects like to connect things. It's like chess. I thought we could capitalize on the national trend to put food at the center of culture, which, of course, New Mexico already does quite well. The next steps are to build this district."

Long says, "The building was the inspiration, but we also looked at the rest of the neighborhood—what would it need to be successful? The Market is vital to its success."

Long's son Grant also gives credit to Polyzoides. "Probably the most formative part of my education in urban development (apart from working with my dad) was taking an executive education course on New Urbanism and urban retail at Harvard led by Polyzoides back in 2013," Grant says. On the second day of the course, Grant and Jim learned that their classmate (and future Sawmill Market's principal architect) Juan Romero helmed ArchitecturePlus International, a leader in creating food-retail-driven environments.

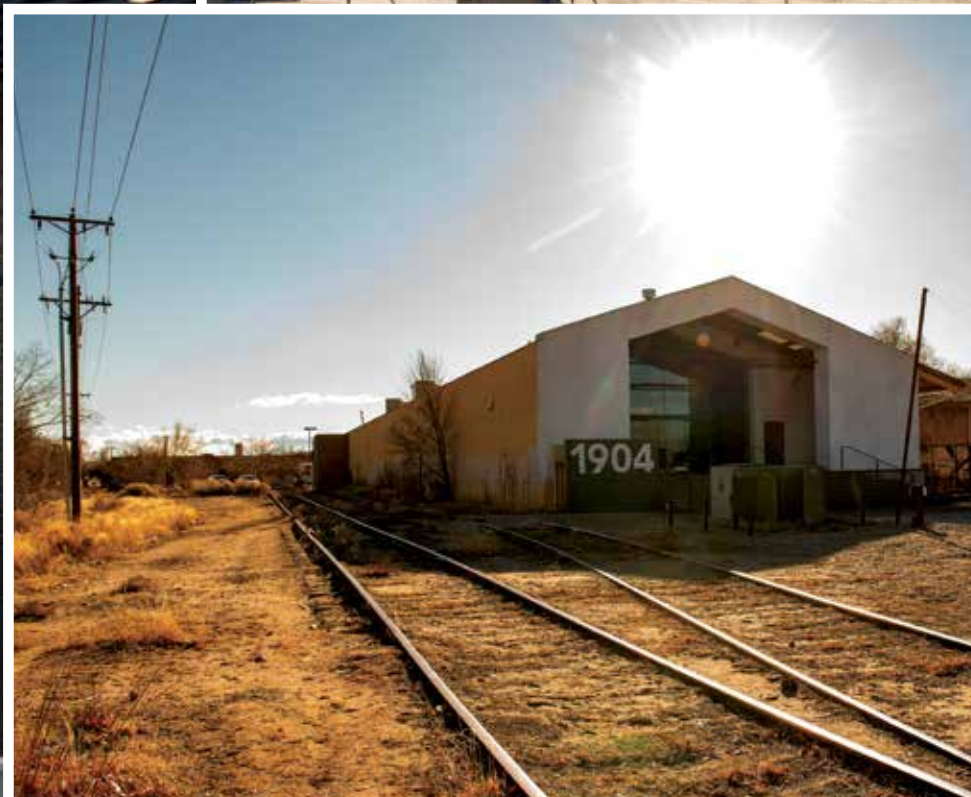
From the inception of his relationship with Grant and Jim, it was clear to Romero that the history of both the area and the building were critical to the design. They walked the property and identified the elements that had to be incorporated—the dust collectors, for instance, and the original tongue-and-groove ceiling and skylights. "I believe we have created a space with a soul," Romero says. "Reflecting Jim on the project has been a joy. He is a friend."

Though Romero's firm also designs interiors, on the Sawmill Market project, they resonated with the approach of Ashley Wilkins of Islyn Studio, a Brooklyn, NY-based hospitality design firm. Wilkins says, "The district has so much history and stories to tell that are visually different from what you are used to seeing aesthetically in Albuquerque. We pulled in elements of its history that are lesser known and helped to develop a modern take on New Mexican design. Every detail of the design is rooted in story and tells of Sawmill's past, present and future."

Seven years ago, when Long's son Grant embarked on the market research regarding food halls, there were just a handful to speak of. Long says, "By the end of 2020, I think there will be 1,200 in the United States." According to him, authenticity will differentiate those that succeed.



Jim Long, Lauren Greene, Brandon Palmer, Jason Greene in front of Sawmill Market



Sawmill Market is located at 1909 Bellamah Ave. NW in Albuquerque, 505.270.4168, sawmillmarket.com. Our story on the Market merchants will appear in our April 2020 issue.

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“You can’t make your decisions about who’s going to be in a food hall based on who’s got the strongest balance sheet because, for the most part, you will not create an authentic food hall,” he says. “We have to be willing to embrace the start-up entrepreneur, without them having to take enormous financial risks. We think our model does that. We think that we can achieve that kind of uniqueness and, most important, that authenticity.”

To thrive in that authentic category, Long made a pivotal choice to partner with like-minded Jason and Lauren Greene, owners of The Grove Café & Market, a bustling eatery committed to supporting local farmers, sustainable agriculture, to curate the Market’s vendors. The Greens, too, have made a passionate gamble to build a business in “a neighborhood that was up-and-coming out from under the rubble.” Over the last three years, the Greens toured the country, surveying 15 food halls in total, and consulted with Steve Carlin, considered the pioneer of the food hall concept, at his Oxbow Public Market in Napa Valley. “It was an incredible meeting that really helped us shape Sawmill Market,” Lauren says.

“Jason and I were thrilled to have the opportunity to continue our mission to raise the bar in the food and restaurant scene in Albuquerque and introduce new concepts into neighborhoods, like EDo and Sawmill District, which we believe are the heart and soul. A great cafe or restaurant can truly change a neighborhood’s course.” She says the Sawmill merchants “are a true reflection and celebration of the diversity and culture in Albuquerque.” Among them are many first-time business owners, minority- and women-owned businesses.

Long expects Sawmill will host up to 30 merchants, and Grant foresees an evolution toward an entertainment and an art exhibition aspect, which “extends the visitors’ engagement.” Grant’s careful to point out, “It’s not another generic city experience. The sense of place is a big draw, with Old Town and the Museum District and Sawmill all playing off each other.”

Long aims to continue imbuing Albuquerque and New Mexico overall with thoughtful projects that celebrate and highlight the cultural, historical, artistic and even spiritual aspects of the region. “All over the United States communities are losing their cultural identities. You have to put your stake in the ground if you want to preserve what’s important. I think that there is no greater battle to be fought than right here in New Mexico. It would be a tremendous tragedy that we would lose that richness of our cultural communities here. It will not just be the work of Heritage, but the work of everyone in New Mexico.”

Even at home Long is conscious of preserving cultural traditions. “In Albuquerque, you learn to appreciate the traditions of your community, your family interactions. Growing up, one of my favorite meals of the year was the Good Friday meal. My grandma would make a wonderful meal of Tortas de Huevos, quelites, sopa, beans with chico, and mac and cheese. Always fond memories of seeing my grandma in the kitchen making tortillas, fresh bread. She was the chile maker of the family, then my aunt, and I am the chile maker now.”