



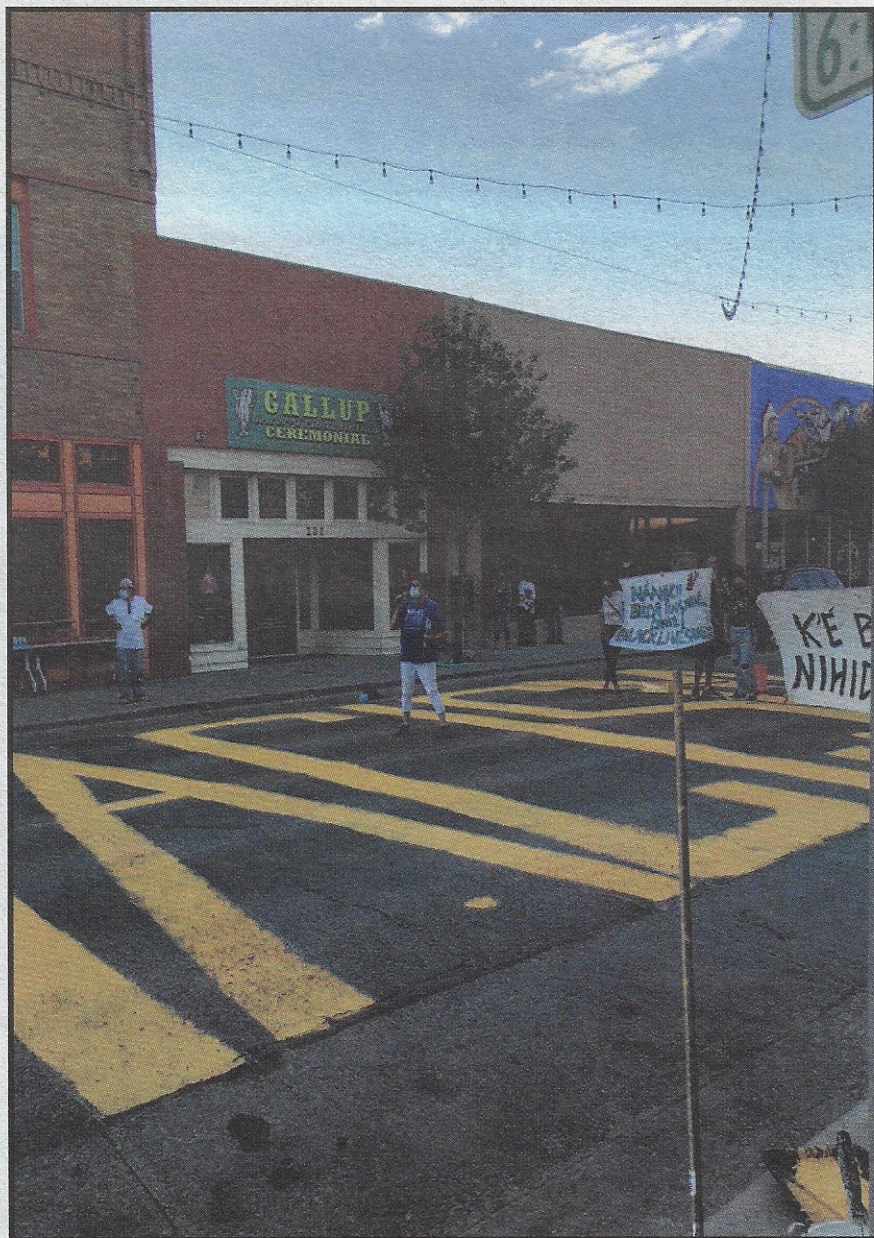
# Downtown, Together

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**A**t our core, Gallup MainStreet Arts & Cultural District (GMSACD) is an organization designed to be flexible and responsive, able to identify and leverage community assets as tools for sustainable (and thoughtful) growth of our downtown economy during any set of circumstances. But we can't do it alone.

What are these assets that inform the work we do? There are many economic advantages that are the foundation of our downtown district: our arts and cultural resources; our historic buildings and structures that have weathered many an economic storm; and, our people—our business owners, artists, workers, and residents. In particular, the amazing folks who operate the small businesses in our downtown district that are the heartbeat of our existence. It is essential that we help them sustain their operations while simultaneously ensuring Downtown Gallup remains vibrant and inclusive.

We have several business-focused initiatives to help support our downtown economy, including: a forthcoming digital marketplace featuring downtown retailers; a grant program that awarded a total of \$7,500 to five businesses to help support



recovery efforts; re-tooling our Downtown Night Out program to support downtown businesses virtually; and launching a robust entrepreneur support program.

In addition to business support, an important part of our mission is to bring together all segments of our community to foster civic pride. Often referred to as 'the heart' of any community, downtowns are places where people come gather and where all should feel welcome. Supporting this type of environment can look like supporting expression, like commissioning two new murals by artists Marina Eskeets and Chris Acevedo in one of our downtown alleyways. Or it could look like bringing our community together for the Levitt AMP Concert Series (which we sadly had to postpone until next year). Or, it could look like supporting a community-led initiative to paint a mural on Coal Avenue as part of the national dialogue around systemic racism in America. In collaboration with artist Jerry Brown, and with help from Chris Acevedo, the large-scale mural reading "Disarm Racism" was painted directly on the street between 2nd and 3rd streets with help and support from businesses, organizations, and community members.



Though its physical existence was designed to be temporary, the hope is that the process of coming together and the importance of the dialogue it created will be long-lasting. Later this month, the same stretch of road that houses the mural will be closed for construction to be transformed into a "commons" area for downtown - with wider sidewalks, welcoming seating areas, and a beautifully-designed street selected by business owners and community members. The ethos of this revitalization project, like the mural project, is rooted in community dialogue and expression. In this spirit, since many voices contributed to the making of the temporary mural, I wanted to include some

of them here, speaking to their experience with and perspectives on the project.

"Our community has great pride in our diversity, but we rarely confront the personal and systemic racism that's also a part of living here. So, I thought it was a great idea to utilize our culture of public art to open up space for discussion. My hope is that these discussions make our community a better and more equitable place to live. It's just the start!" – Rathika

"The rich diversity of Gallup helped to attract Weaving in Beauty to open our store here. We actively supported the mural project as an expression of this community's strengths and aspirations. The collaboration that created this mural shows that we have the tools and resources to disarm the weapon of racism." – Mary

"I'm hoping that we can take this energy from the mural and ask ourselves questions about how our local policies can be reformed to better support anti-racist approaches in our community." – Connie

"This mural is important to Gallup because we are a diverse and close community and racism does not have a place here. Disarming racism is important to me because we all have more in common than we have differences and the more we realize that, the better of a world we can create for ourselves. It was a great experience working alongside the community and a great artist like Jerry Brown to show our unity and convey such a positive message that we are all in this together." – Chris

"This experience for me, from the beginning, has been empowering." – Deanna

"Let's start the healing now." - Jerry