

# Beyond the drawing board

## Dyron Murphy Architects drafted marketing plan that worked

BY AMANDA C. KOOSER | SPECIAL TO NMBW

Dyron Murphy recently experienced a rare occurrence: a full week in Albuquerque with no business travel.

The president and majority owner of Dyron Murphy Architects in Albuquerque can be found all over the country, visiting the firm's projects on tribal lands. He has no inclination to become just a figurehead.

"I still get involved in design and working with clients directly. I will actually go to the site and look at things. I give the client the assurance that I'm hands on," he says.

Murphy, a member of the Navajo Nation, has been very clear about his vision of serving American Indian tribes since founding the firm in 2000 with two partners.

"One of the biggest things is having a cultural awareness of how to work with Native people. It's very specialized. There is protocol to the culture as to correspondence, communication and how meetings are conducted," Murphy says. "Working with their governments is big. You may have to be there to present your ideas to the tribal council. You have to do it in a way that is respectful, and not come off as a know-it-all."

One major project Dyron Murphy Architects has under way is a \$14 million Division of Transportation office building for the Navajo Nation. Tom Platero, director of the Division of Transportation, has been working with the firm.

"A lot of people that do business with Native American tribes don't realize that there is a certain culture with it. People have the best of intentions, but if you didn't grow up as part of that culture, I don't think you understand it fully," Platero says.

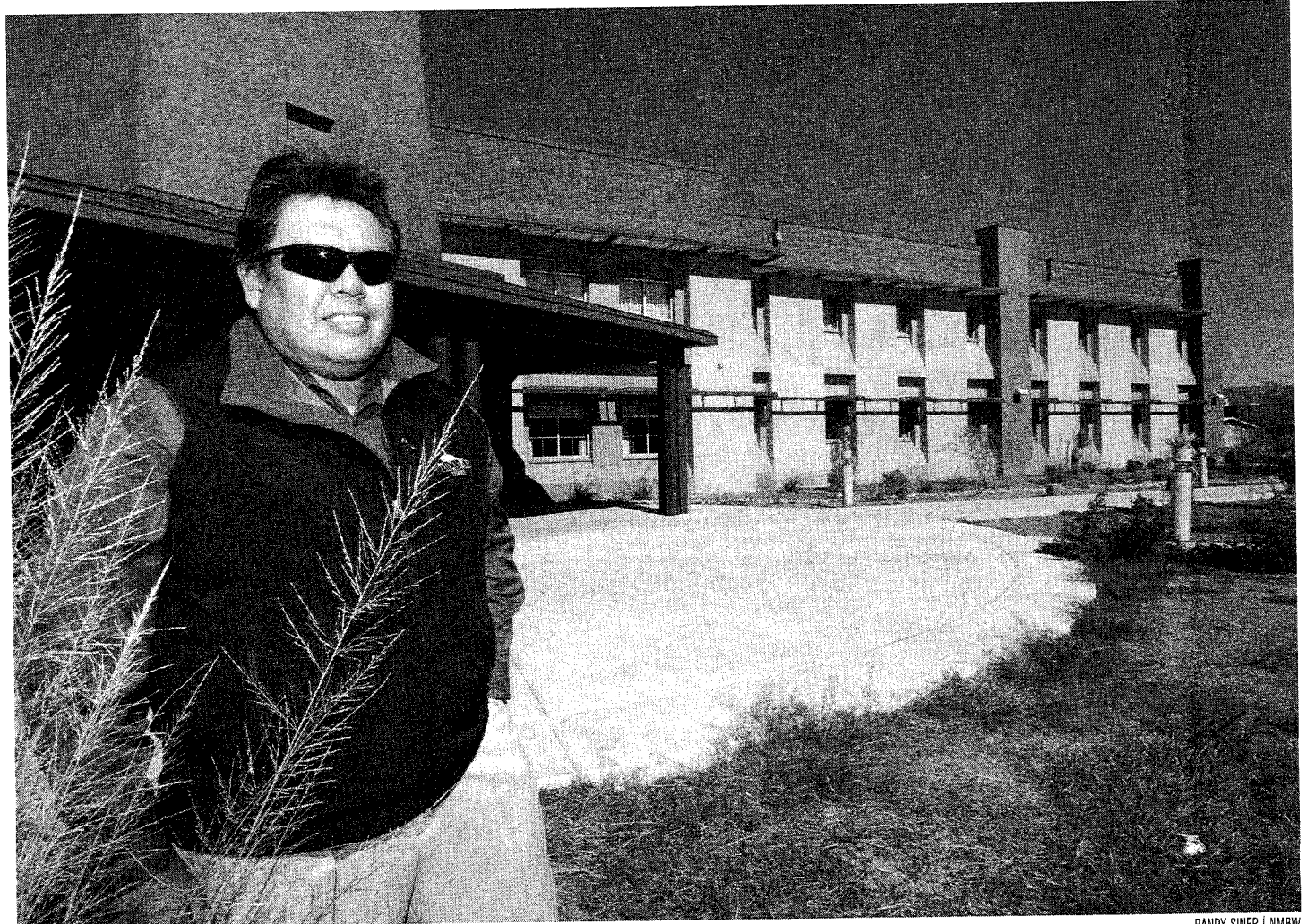
Murphy's extensive experience with creating designs for tribal buildings helped his firm land the contract.

Platero originally planned to use standard construction methods for the office building. But after a presentation from the architectural firm, the agency is pursuing a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building certification for the project. Murphy finds that sustainable design and building practices are a good fit for tribal projects.

"It goes back to a cultural standpoint. Native Americans were very sustainable in their communities and how they conducted their lives. It's a full circle," he says. "There are not too many Native firms out there that can do LEED. We do quite a bit. That sets us apart."

Dyron Murphy Architects was responsible for New Mexico's first commercial LEED building: the Baca/Dlo' Ay Azhi Community School near Prewitt, which received LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council in 2004.

"That was a big feather in our cap, because we were right out of the starting blocks," Murphy says.



RANDY SINER | NMBW

**Dyron Murphy's architectural firm designed this dormitory building for the U.S. Department of Labor's Job Corps.**

The firm has a history of tackling new frontiers. Its list of projects includes schools, clinics, gas stations, convenience stores, retail, housing, hotels and office buildings. Murphy is always up for a challenge.

"If we don't have the experience, we look for a consultant or another firm that does bring the experience," he says.

These partnerships become valuable training opportunities for the 28 staff members at the firm, as they learn the ropes for creating a new kind of facility.

That willingness to seek new markets has helped Dyron Murphy Architects more than double its revenue since 2008. Murphy expects to reach \$7 million this year.

"We've been going gangbusters on projects. It takes a lot of work and effort to keep that momentum," he says.

The firm worked on the stimulus-funded renovation of a high school in California for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Murphy keeps track of where stimulus funding to tribes is going.

"We contacted some of those tribes to let them know that we're here to assist them," he says.

Dyron Murphy Architects' proactive approach is a holdover from its startup days,

### Vital Stats:

**Company name:** Dyron V. Murphy Architects

**Key person:** Dyron Murphy, president and majority owner

**Address:** 4505 Montbel Pl. NE, Albuquerque 87107

**Phone:** (505) 830-0203

**Web site:** dyronmurphy.com

**Employees:** 28

**Revenue:** \$7 million projected for 2009

### Strategies:

1. Having a deep cultural understanding can be a strong business advantage.
2. Partnerships and consultants can help you break into new areas.
3. Approach marketing like a startup, even after many years in business.

when the partners sent introductory marketing letters to nearly every tribe in the United States. They have since handled projects in Washington state, Arizona, California, Oklahoma and Wyoming.

Though Dyron Murphy Architects isn't suffering financial repercussions from the recession, the firm is feeling the effects in terms of competition. Previously, Murphy

would typically see four or five companies bidding on a contract; he now sees 20 to 25. Some are much larger national companies looking to break into new areas.

"It can be a little difficult, but in the end experience wins the day," Murphy says. "Our ability to claim that we work out there, that we know the people and how the process works versus somebody from Chicago that comes in and doesn't know the ropes of working in Indian Country, that's been helping us."

Murphy attributes his firm's success to passion, dedication and the ability to work collaboratively with clients.

"Dyron and his group are very good at listening and valuing the input that we have into the project, rather than giving us a cookie-cutter building. It's more than a project to them, it's a process," says Platero.

Murphy doesn't just design a building and walk away. He makes it a point to revisit the projects to see how the designs are working for the people they are made for.

"We want the building to reflect the community and the people, because ultimately it is theirs. We want them to be proud of what is built," he says.