

Linda Cronk: Hutchinson Fruit Co., Horses & Harleys

By Gordene MacKenzie, Los Ranchos Historical Society
with Leslie Kranz

Linda Cronk's life is a life well lived. Whether heading the Hutchinson Fruit company for 15 years, showing and rescuing horses, ranching, riding Harleys, running restaurants, growing vegetables and selling vegetables, or winning trophies for racing sail boats, Linda did it all with grace and kindness.

Determined she wanted a horse at age 10, Linda tore open a beautifully wrapped Christmas package expecting confirmation of a horse only to find the dirty laundry she left under her bed. Later that day, "dad took me to meet my first horse who bit me and kicked me, but that horse taught me how to ride."



Linda became the top rider in New Mexico and went on to win National competitions,

ultimately turning professional. She was very bonded with two of her national champions, Gabe and Premium Red, who, she said, "would bite you in the ass."

"My first husband and I had a cattle ranch in Northern New Mexico. I was a city girl and went up there thinking things grew in boxes. My husband was a womanizer who cleaned out our bank accounts and fled to Australia to avoid child support. I came down and stayed at the El Camino Motor Hotel in Los Ranchos where I was served my divorce papers. I got a job waitressing at the El Camino Dining Room and noticed many of the waitresses had lost *their* husbands, so I



Above from left to right: Gordene MacKenzie, Linda Cronk, and Leslie Kranz

started a group called Wild Women with Woes and Wine."

"I needed a new start. With help from my parents I started a ranch with troubled horses that I bought from the killer trucks (horses on their way to slaughter) at the racetrack. They were two- and three-year-olds in terrible shape from over-doping and more."

While in Scottsdale, Linda also worked side by side with her second husband, Robin Cronk, who owned four restaurants. It was there she created both the popular pesto and hot mustard that she would later sell at the Los Ranchos Growers' Market.

When her parents retired from the Hutchinson Fruit Company—founded by her paternal grandparents in 1910—in 1981, Linda took over the business, making it even more successful.

"I would put an order in to Los Angeles at 6PM. By 7PM they loaded our huge fleet of refrigerated semis. The produce arrived in the morning as fresh as you can get." They stored it in their new 37,500 square foot red barn on the 7100 block of 2nd street. We sold day old produce in Los Ranchos at a stand on 4th street.

When her parents sold the business, Linda and her

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husband started Jumpstart Farm and Equestrian Center on Rio Grande. Linda rescued 100 troubled horses, many that were destined for slaughter. "With enough love and sweet feed they were rideable." She paired the horses with troubled kids. Linda said, "pick a horse you can love and at the end of the year I will give them to you."



The kids fell in love with the horses. We rescued the horses, and the horses rescued us."

To celebrate their anniversary and a birthday Linda's husband rented a Harley for a trip. Linda resolved, "After he dropped the bike 3 times I resolved never to ride on the back again. I got my own Harley. Later, I



bought and ran a biker bar (Billet Biker Bar) that I gave to my son and his wife as a wedding gift. Bikers are a wonderful community of generous people."

Linda cared for her parents and her husband. She created a beautiful outdoor hospice space so they could be in nature at her farm where she grew 23 species of cherry tomatoes, all kinds of squash, watermelons, cucumbers, 1000 feet of basil to make pesto, and a field of beautiful flowers. "I only water with my well, because irrigation water tested positive for Round Up." During the 14 years she sold at the Los Ranchos Growers Market she generously shared free produce with vendors and customers.

LOS RANCHOS HISTORICAL SOCIETY UPDATE

The Los Ranchos Historical Society in collaboration with Historic Albuquerque and the East Mountain Historical Society created an exciting line-up of speakers who will be talking about various aspects of Route 66 as part of our Route 66 Free Centennial Speaker Series.

The talks commemorate the 100th anniversary of Route 66. They take place every 4th Saturday of the month in 2026 at 11:00AM. The series runs from January through November at sites on or near Historic Route 66.

Different speakers will rotate to each location. The closest location to Los Ranchos is the Raymond Sanchez Community Center at 9800 4th Street.

SPEAKER SCHEDULE FOR JANUARY 24, 2026

Jacqueline Murray Loring *The KiMo Theatre: Fact and Folklore*

Central & Unser Library (8081 Central Ave NW, ABQ)

Roger Zimmerman *Rerouting Route 66 through New Mexico*
East Mountain Library (487 NM 333, Tijeras)

Roland Penttila *Little Beaver Town*

Fred Luna Multi-Generational Center, 197 Don Pasqual, Los Lunas

Richard Ruddy *An Iconic Stretch of Route 66 through Downtown Albuquerque, 1880 to 2026*

Gutierrez-Hubbell House (6029 Isleta Blvd. SW, ABQ)

Abraham Santillanes *Why turn left at Albuquerque? Albuquerque, Route 66, and the many roads that came before.*

International District Library, 7601 Central Ave SE, ABQ

Aimee Tang *Chinese Merchants of Albuquerque's Route 66*
Isleta Pueblo Cultural Center, 71 Tribal Road 40, Isleta Pueblo

Sondra Diepe *Route 66 New Mexico*

Loma Colorado Library (755 Loma Colorado Blvd. NE, Rio Rancho)

Jennifer Bohnhoff *The Civil War on Route 66*

Martha Liebert Public Library (124 W. Malinche St, Bernalillo)

Lynne Peckinpaugh *The Italian's Pathway to Prosperity on Albuquerque's Route 66*

Raymond Sanchez Community Center (9800 4th Street SW, ABQ)

Gary Herron *Motels on Route 66/Central Avenue in Albuquerque*

South Valley Library (3904 Isleta Blvd. SW, ABQ)

Joseph Sabatini *North Fourth Street, Albuquerque's Original Route 66*

Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave NE, ABQ

Hazel Lathrop *Tijeras Canyon Five Miles of Road and Hundreds of Stories*

Wheels Museum, 1100 2nd Street SW, ABQ

More information at www.losranchohistoricalociety.org