

## **Eleven Microwave Towers Beaten Out of Northern New Mexico**

On January 26, 2004, the impossible was accomplished.

A rag-tag group of citizens in one village in northern New Mexico beat out eleven radio-frequency towers - one slated to be 140-foot tall, another 110 feet – already contracted to be placed on the grounds of each of the Española School District's eleven campuses.

The school board had already signed a contract with Trillion Partners of Austin, Texas, to erect the towers which, according to plan, would have made already-existing internet services wireless. Trillion would have owned the towers and so could have also used them to attach commercial antennae, rendering the towers more dangerous.

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According to the Telecommunications Act of 1996, corporations rule. Citizens are not allowed to protest the existence of microwave towers and can only protest the appearance of them, for instance their color. Ergo: towers are rarely defeated. The bugaboo for Trillion in this particular situation was that the school board stood in the middle - and because politics in northern New Mexico is a close-knit family affair, elected officials can feel more beholden to respond to earnest neighbors than they do in urban areas.

Hearing of the plan to place a 110-foot tower at Chimayó Elementary School via a flyer posted on school grounds on Christmas Eve, neighbors pulled together what they humorously called the Chimayó Council on Wireless Technology and went to work. The group included a former county commissioner, a Wal-Mart cashier, a Los Alamos engineer, a religious store owner, a teacher, a psychologist, and several parents of school children. In three weeks the council produced a packet delineating the potential health and environmental effects of microwave and reasons why a wireless system would be unnecessary. They pushed the school board to hold a community meeting at the elementary school. They leafleted parishioners at Chimayó's Holy Family Church and, with handmade signs on pickup trucks and in arroyos, roused an unprecedented showing of the community to protest the proposed tower.

After listening to the community's distress, Ralph Medina, who represents the Chimayó district on the school board, boldly proposed that the school board pull out of the contract with Trillion and, with the guidance of the Council on Wireless Technology, rethink the options.

And for now, a group of citizens in Chimayó is thrilled that they not only stopped the erection of a radiation-emitting tower in their own village, but in eleven other villages in northern New Mexico – and made some history for the anti-wireless movement in the process.

--Chellis Glendinning, Chimayó NM