

CHANGING WORLDS

— the CAMPAIGN for UNM —

UNM People Changing Worlds: Earth Data Analysis Center

BY ALEXANDRA SWANBERG

The Earth Data Analysis Center (EDAC) is putting the University of New Mexico on the map, literally and figuratively.

EDAC, a UNM-affiliated research organization, is charged with analyzing, visualizing and creating data sets for various local, state and federal agencies. EDAC may also host their data, such as interactive maps, online.

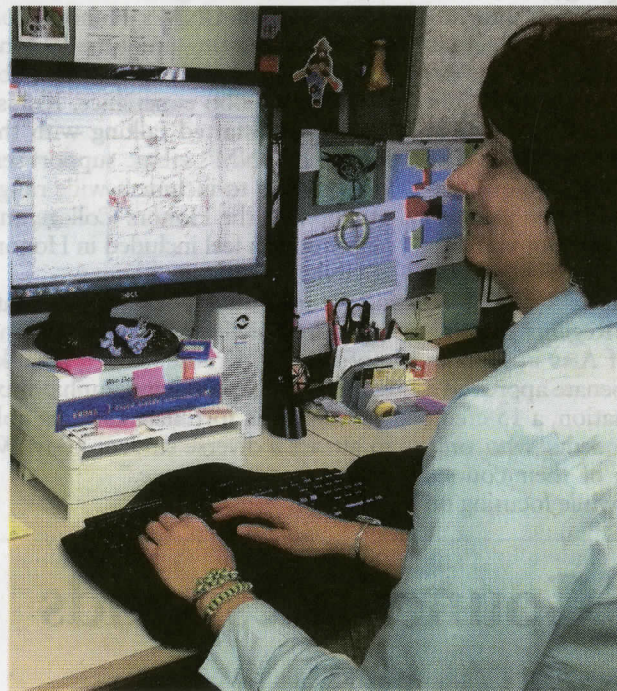
The center started in 1964 as the NASA-funded Technology Application Center, focused on identifying additional uses for the technology and products NASA was developing in the 1960s.

Over time, the organization narrowed its focus to geospatial information, such as satellite imagery and GPS, and changed its name to EDAC in the '90s. Evolving digital innovations have provided even more aspects for representing the state in ways the human eye can't see just by looking out a window.

For example, staff and student researchers at EDAC created NM Watch (NMWatch.org), an interactive map showing state data, such as the locations of schools and fire stations, and marks areas with weather watches and warnings. When EDAC began the project, it was simply to demonstrate the value of broadband internet access.

"It's sort of taken on a life of its own, as it turned out to be a nice tool for aggregating wildfire and other hazard-related data of interest," EDAC Director Karl Benedict said.

EDAC uses information technology and develops applications and software. In addition to data analysis and visualization, data hosting and identifying key data sets, EDAC is a geospatial data clearinghouse. An



UNM EARTH DATA ANALYSIS CENTER

Shawn Penman, Geographic Information System (GIS) Specialist at UNM's Earth Data Analysis Center, uses GIS to inform the public about wildfires in New Mexico.

overview of the data they produce can be accessed at EDAC.unm.edu.

Most notably, EDAC is responsible for the New Mexico Resource Geographic Information System or RGIS. Anyone can access the database for free at RGIS.unm.edu. It is a valuable resource for a variety of research communities. The center has taken calls from people all over the country inquiring about it.

"The RGIS program, alone, does a lot for empowering for local, state and federal researchers, and businesses to take advantage of all the resources we have," said EDAC staff member and UNM student Mike Camponovo.

"EDAC is an important part of the geospatial community."

— Mike Camponovo

Recent legislation to make RGIS the designated geospatial data clearinghouse of New Mexico passed the Senate in March and was signed by Gov. Martinez.

EDAC also plays a significant role for students interested in pursuing a career in the field, and because EDAC is a well-respected research institution, UNM students' reputations benefit from their connection to the center.

I think that speaks a lot to the reputation EDAC has and the types of work that it does," Camponovo said. "EDAC is an important part of the geospatial community."