

One-on-One with Beth Beloff

FOUNDER AND CEO OF NEW MEXICO CLIMATE INVESTMENT CENTER

BY ELLEN MARKS
FOR THE JOURNAL

Beth Beloff is very stubborn. It's pretty much a requirement when you want to accomplish what she has — pushing ahead on a passion for battling climate change and unceasingly heading the effort if there's no one else to do it.

"I do not give up," says Beloff of Santa Fe, an avid photographer and traveler whose activism started with Vietnam War protests in the 1960s.

Beloff's history of creating and heading new initiatives began at the University of Houston in the 1990s. She wanted to learn how sustainable environmental practices could be used in a business for "top- and bottom-line results."

It was a rather obscure field, and there was no such program at the time, so Beloff raised money to launch what would become the Institute for Corporate Environmental Management.

The rest was pure Beloff: She agreed, at the university's insistence, to become its founder and executive director, drawing worldwide experts to share ideas and strategies.

Yet later, Beloff came to believe something was missing. There was no real way to quantify sustainability practices, so she started the nonprofit think tank Bridges to Sustainability, which came up with "all kinds of ways to measure sustainable development."

From there, she chaired a Santa Fe commission that developed a 25-year sustainability and carbon neutral plan for the city. The plan recommended joining forces with local governments across the state, so Beloff headed that effort as well, on a pro bono basis, and birthed the Coalition of Sustainability Communities NM.

Now, she is spearheading the New Mexico Climate Investment Center, a "green bank" that will loan money for projects supporting reduction in carbon emissions and energy burdens, benefiting mainly low-income, rural and tribal communities. She was its founder and recently became its CEO.

"The population that is most impacted by climate change that I care greatly about are the low-income community households and small business owners that have not created the climate issues, but are most vulnerable to them," Beloff says. "I feel a sense of urgency to come up with solutions."

How did you get started in this field?

In architecture, I cared greatly about



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Beth Beloff, CEO and founder of the New Mexico Climate Investment Center, at her home in Santa Fe in early February.

how the building, the design, would fit in the environment. It was really kind of the beginning of thinking about the green movement in architecture.

But I also realized in getting my master's (in architecture), I really didn't know business. I really didn't know finance or marketing or even strategy. I ended up getting an MBA, but what I realized in that MBA program was that there was nothing being taught about the importance of the environment on businesses, on corporations. And I specialized in strategy and hung out my shingle to help companies develop business strategies.

What motivated you to be a climate activist?

I was drawn into being an activist in the '60s. I was at Berkeley. I was asked by a professor to teach a course in continuing ed on existentialism. It was springtime, and I would teach my students at People's Park.

When the campus decided to close it because there was a lot of anti-Vietnam War activity in that park, I protested very loudly. I went to my graduation with a green armband, was in the stands and wouldn't come down to get my diploma. My stepfather was the associate chancellor of UC-San Diego, so we were sitting in the officials' part of the stands. He was very proud. That was part of my activism. I was very much against the war.

What are the goals of the green bank?

To reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to reduce energy costs through the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency and weatherization and other such means. The loans we make will look for impacts in those areas, among others.

We do have a pipeline of near-term projects that need financing within the next two years that we're targeting. One is low-cost solar lending to low-income households, small businesses and nonprofits. The bank is not positioning itself to compete with other forms of financing. We will fill financing gaps and partner with other financial entities.

What was your impetus in leading the green bank effort?

I do believe that there have been significant financing gaps in this area. If my personal passion is to affect the trajectory of climate change and to help those who are most vulnerable to it in the state I call home, this is to me a very powerful vehicle. It matters to me because I've been on this sustainability journey, personally, for over 30 years. It's ... what drives me. I've been in it, helping build the field, so applying it to my home state is a passion of mine.

What do you do in your free time?

I am a passionate photographer, and I have a few books I've compiled. I became interested in photography really as a kid to capture the essence of the natural environment and the occupants in it that

More on Beth Beloff

THE BASICS: Beth Roxanne Beloff, 77, born in Boston; married to Marc Geller since 1990; one son, Justin Randolph, 41; two stepchildren, Carrie Geller Schein, 46, and Aaron Geller, 51; one dog, Duchess; master's degree in business administration, University of Houston, 1990; master's in architecture, UCLA, 1974; bachelor's in psychology, University of California-Berkeley, 1965.

POSITIONS: Founder, CEO and president, New Mexico Climate Investment Center, founded in 2023; founder/executive director, Coalition of Sustainable Communities NM, 2019-2024; chair, Sustainable Santa Fe Commission, 2015-2018; principal, Beth Beloff & Associates, 2008-2015; sustainability director, Golder Associates, 2005-2008; founder and president, Bridges to Sustainability Institute, 1997-2005.

OTHER: Board vice chair, Coalition of Sustainable Communities NM; board member, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival; board member, Santa Fe Community Foundation, 2016-2022 and board chair, 2020-2022; member, Santa Fe Water Conservation Committee, 2022-2024; member, Northern New Mexico Citizens Advisory Board, 2019-2023, among other activities.

I want to protect. It became my artistic outlet for sharing ... what we have to lose if we don't protect those beautiful and critical landscapes and the creatures in them.

What has made you successful?

I think those who know me would probably say my tenacity. Throughout my life, when I felt that the ideas I generated with others — because I'm a team player — are important for the time and the context, I will not give up.

But do you ever feel like throwing in the towel?

My biggest motivation, always, has been my children and grandchildren. I recognized that sustainable development is about them. That's motivating, even when it's hard. And when it's hardest, I remember this is the world they're inheriting. That got me into this when I had my child and I looked out and asked how I could be part of making this world a better place for him, for them, for their generations.

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