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UNM med school honors ex-dean

By Rick Nathanson

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Leonard Napolitano, former dean of the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, will be honored at two events in May.

On May 1, he will be lauded at a Washington, D.C., reception marking the end of the Mind Research Network's "Domenici Neuroscience Symposium." Then on May 15, as part of the weekend festivities held in conjunction with the convocation of the UNM School of Medicine, he will become the school's first recipient of the "Living Legend Award." The award will be presented at a private dinner at the Hotel Albuquerque in Old Town.

Also honored at the symposium in the nation's capital will be former New Mexico U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici and Nobel laureate John Nash Jr., the mathematician and economist whose battle with schizophrenia was chronicled in the Academy Award-winning movie "A Beautiful Mind."

The Mind Research Network is a private, nonprofit neurodiagnostic facility in Albuquerque. According to its mission statement, MRN is "dedicated to the discovery and advancement of clinical solutions for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness and brain disorders."

MRN was established in 1998 with federal grant money secured by Domenici. Napolitano became MRN's first chairman of the board that year and remains on the board of trustees. Nash has been on the board since 2004.

The purpose of the symposium is for Mind Research Network scientists to join with National Institutes of Health directors and other top investigators "to discuss how research is advancing the ability to better diagnose and treat mental illness and many other brain ailments," says Lisa Breeden, MRN development director.

Julie Weaks Gutierrez, who for 18 years worked alongside Napolitano at the School of Medicine as his special assistant and director of budget, praised him as "incredibly talented, bright, dedicated, empathetic and cordial," as well as a "master at working with the Legislature."

"Leonard brought the prestige of having been a dean of the School of Medicine to the Mind Research Network," says Weaks Gutierrez, who is also a member of the MRN board of trustees. "He was well-connected so he was able to get people from the community to participate, and he used his incredible administrative skills to get this whole thing organized."

Dr. Paul Roth, the current dean of the UNM School of Medicine, says Napolitano came to the medical school in the mid-'60s, shortly after it was established, and served as a teacher in the Department of Anatomy. In 1972, he became the third dean of the school. He retired in 1994.

"During the period of time that he was dean, the school developed an international reputation for its innovations in medical school curriculum and

education," Roth says. "Most of all, Leonard represented a stable and sound seat of leadership that permitted the faculty and students to grow, and the medical school to develop into the institution that we know today."

Roth, who joined the faculty in 1979, says he "grew up professionally" at the UNM School of Medicine and under Napolitano's watch. "In many ways, he was my mentor," he says.