



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## Data shows low wages, high home prices for Taos County

By Elizabeth Cleary

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The Bureau of Labor Statistics released last month its quarterly report on average weekly wages in New Mexico by county, and the data shows Taos County has some of the lowest weekly wages in the state.

Taos County's average weekly wages were the eighth-lowest in the state among New Mexico's 33 counties for the fourth quarter of 2013, according to the BLS. Meanwhile, Taos County has some of the highest home prices in the state, the third-highest in New Mexico behind Santa Fe and Los Alamos counties, according to data retrieved from CensusReporter.org. When compared with wages, Taos County has the largest gap between weekly wages and median home price of any county in the state, meaning it had the most expensive homes when compared with average weekly wages.

The data from the BLS shows the average worker in Taos County made \$586 per week. According to Census Reporter, which used data from 2012, the median home price in Taos County was \$208,900. This means a home with a median value in Taos County costs a worker earning an average wage in Taos County 356 weeks' wages. That is nearly seven years worth of wages.

While Santa Fe and Los Alamos counties have median home prices of \$270,200 and \$285,800, respectively, the average weekly wages in those counties was \$947 and \$1,539, respectively. This means a worker earning an average wage in Los Alamos County, where average weekly wages were the highest in the state, would pay 186 weeks' wages for a home at the median price there. In Santa Fe, a worker would pay 285 weeks' wages.

After Taos, the largest gap between median home price and average weekly wage is in Catron County, where the average weekly wage is \$512 and the median home price is \$151,300. This means a worker earning an average wage in Catron County would pay 295 weeks, or about 5.7 years worth of wages to afford a home at the median value there.

The smallest gap between average weekly wage and median home price is in Harding County, where the median home price was \$59,400 and the average weekly wage was \$745. This means a worker earning an average wage in Harding County would pay just 80 weeks, or about 1.5 years worth of wages to afford a home at the median price.

Taos could see its average weekly wages decline now that Chevron's Questa Mine is set to close next month.

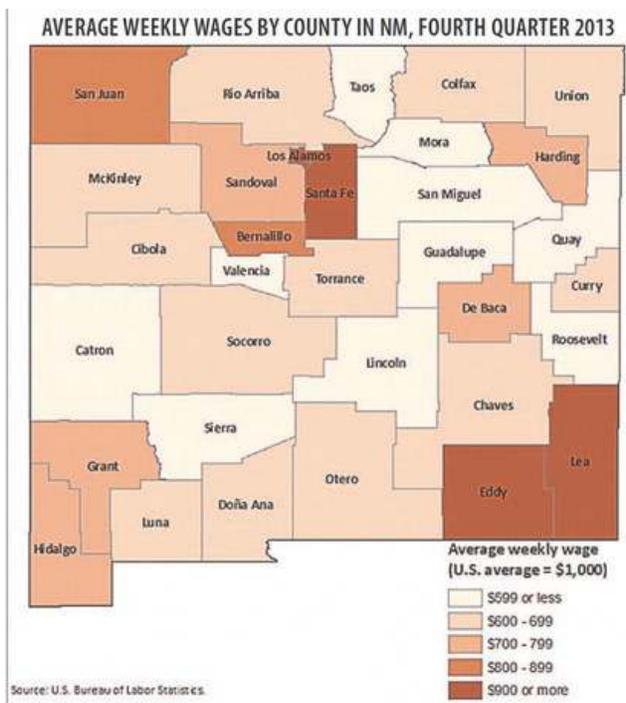
James Howard with the Bureau of Labor Statistics told The Taos News that Taos County's jobs were concentrated in the natural resources and mining sector at twice the national average at the end of 2013.

The vast majority of those jobs were no doubt at the Questa Mine. Howard said Taos County's jobs were concentrated in the leisure and hospitality sector at 2.5 times the national average, and those jobs tend to pay less than those in the professional business and services industry, for example. Furthermore, jobs in the professional and business services industry, which includes architecture, management, engineering and consulting, have significantly declined in Taos County recently, Howard said. Across New Mexico, counties with a high concentration of jobs in the oil and gas industry reported average weekly wages significantly higher than the rest of the state. In Eddy and Lea counties in southeast New Mexico, workers earned on average weekly wages of \$1,001 and \$1,023, respectively.

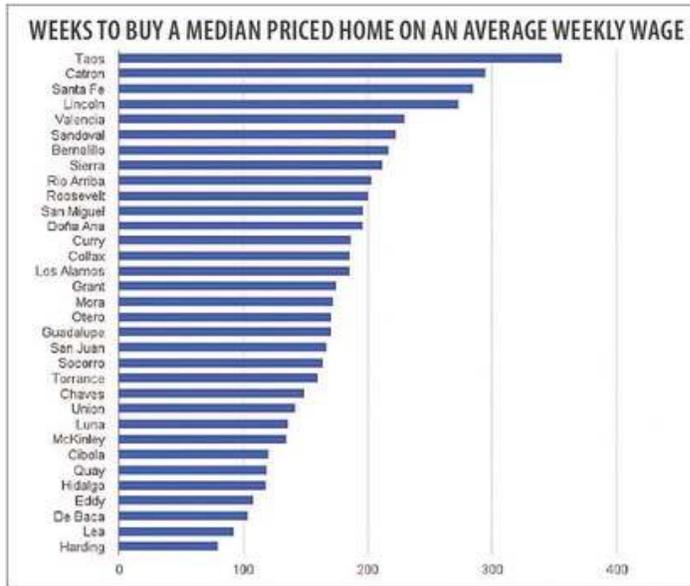
Howard said those counties' jobs are concentrated in the natural resources and mining sector, which includes oil and gas, at about 19 times the national average.

Los Alamos county, where wages were the highest in the state, has Los Alamos National Labs as its major employer. The labs employ engineers and other scientists earn high salaries performing highly technical and specialized work.

The national average weekly wage for the fourth quarter of 2013 was \$1,000, according to the BLS. The average for all of New Mexico was \$814, and New Mexico ranked 40th for weekly wages among the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.



**AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGES BY COUNTY IN NM, FOURTH QUARTER 2013**



**WEEKS TO BUY A MEDIAN PRICED HOME ON AN AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE**

Graphic by Andrew Oxford