Revitalizing New Mexico's Historic Centers of Commerce

By Secretary Jon Barela, New Mexico Economic Development Department

Economic development in New Mexico is often a joint effort of
individual communities and the state's Economic Development
Department (EDD), which oversees multiple programs designed to
bolster the state's infrastructure and support the entrepreneurial
ambitions of New Mexicans.

Three high profile initiatives are the New Mexico MainStreet
Program and two programs that fall under its umbrella: the Frontier
Communities Initiative and the Arts and Cultural Districts Program.

MainStreet Makeovers

The MainStreet Program is the oldest and biggest of the three initiatives. Since 1985, it has
provided state support to communities that adopt a consensus approach to revitalizing their core
commercial neighborhoods. Such makeovers are the foundation for creating or strengthening
businesses, stimulating job creation and generating tax revenues — all while preserving local
cultural and historic assets.

Locals are the heart of the MainStreet program, but the state pitches in with free training in
design, promotion and publicity, organization and economic positioning. This "Four Point
Approach" is a creation of the National Main Street Center, an auxiliary of the National Trust for
Historic Preservation.

Tangible benefits have been realized in 23 New Mexico towns that participate in the MainStreet
Program, including Artesia, Belen, Clovis, Deming, Grants, Las Cruces, Las Vegas, Truth or
Consequences, Raton and Zuni Pueblo. In 2012 alone the program was credited with the net
growth of 134 new businesses, 622 jobs and nearly $17 million in private sector reinvestment in
New Mexico.

Small-Town "Frontiers"

Under the leadership of Governor Susana Martinez, our department and the cooperation of the
Legislature, the Economic Development Department launched the Frontier Communities

Initiative in 2013 to boost economic development in rural communities of fewer than 7,500 people. The effort is coordinated by the New Mexico MainStreet Program and, like that program, strives to breathe new life into a traditional or historic commercial district or corridor. It, too, relies on grass-roots supporters — locals who are committed to working together to sustain community development beyond the life of an individual project.

Communities can apply through a government sponsor or an economic or community development organization to refurbish a streetscape, building or other site with historic significance.

The state offers technical assistance and other resources to Frontier communities, but it doesn't provide direct funding. The number of projects selected each year depends on legislative appropriations.

Building on Arts, Culture

New Mexico adopted its Arts and Cultural Districts Program six years ago to consciously promote arts and culture as part of the state's economic development picture. The program aims to draw attention to the state's distinctive cultural and artistic riches and to help communities support and capitalize on those resources to improve their economic vitality and quality of life.

Las Vegas and Silver City were the first towns to establish Arts and Cultural Districts in 2008; Taos, Los Alamos, Raton and the Albuquerque Downtown Action Team later joined them.

EDD's MainStreet Program, the Department of Cultural Affairs and the Department of Tourism are among the state agencies that partner with the Museum of New Mexico Foundation and the McCune Foundation to help the districts with planning. The state also offers tax credits for the rehab of culturally significant structures.

For more information on these and other economic development programs, contact Rich Williams, director of the New Mexico MainStreet Program at 505-827-0168 or visit www.nmmainstreet.org.

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