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New Arts and Cultural Districts Celebrated *Taos, Raton, Los Alamos and Albuquerque Achieve Designation*

SANTA FE, N.M. - The Economic Development Department's MainStreet Program welcomed Taos, Raton, Los Alamos and Downtown Albuquerque as New Mexico's newest Arts and Cultural Districts at an event held this afternoon at the La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe. The four new communities join the current Districts of Las Vegas and Silver City.

"Today we had the chance to celebrate the exemplary job these communities have done in reaching the high standards of Arts and Cultural District authorization," stated Economic Development Secretary Fred Mondragón. "We look forward to watching their artistic vision grow hand in hand with their economic development."

The Arts and Cultural District Program provides resources for communities to develop their existing cultural and historic assets, helping them attract cultural and heritage tourism as well as creating self sustaining artistic economies. These assets cover the full spectrum of the creative economy: From architecture to painting, playwriting to photography, theater to sculpture, film and digital media, graphic arts to culinary arts.

"We are pleased to work with the Economic Development Department's MainStreet program and the Tourism Department, as well as our other partners, on this important project," said Department of Cultural Affairs Secretary Stuart Ashman. "These Arts and Cultural Districts put our New Mexico communities on the map and help us celebrate our unique cultural heritage as a state."

The program is a joint effort between the New Mexico Department of Economic Development's MainStreet, the Department of Tourism's Scenic Byways, and the Department of Cultural Affairs Divisions of New Mexico Arts and Historic Preservation. These entities help provide the Districts with benefits that include marketing and promotional help, assistance in attracting incentives, specialized technical assistance and grant funding.

Michael Cerletti Secretary of the New Mexico Tourism Department had this to say, "The Tourism Department is very excited to be a part of this inter-agency initiative and evolving partnership, and is supportive of all activities and events that result in increasing the number of visitors to New Mexico. I thank the state Legislature and the steering committee for its efforts in helping develop new strategies for marketing and promoting our state's incredible assets."

Additionally, Herb Denish, the Chair of the New Mexico Arts Commission voiced his congratulations to the new districts stating, "Our arts and culture are very important economic and tourism drivers in New Mexico."

A Quick Program History: In 2007, the Arts and Cultural District Program was established. The MainStreet Program Director was selected to serve as the State Coordinator and the New Mexico Arts Commission as its "authorizing" governing body. Interested communities submit proposals for a review and ranking process. Las Vegas and Silver City were the first communities to pass the stringent criteria and were approved for designation as Arts and Culture Districts on January 23rd, 2008.

For more information on the Arts and Cultural District Program, please visit www.edd.state.nm.us.

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