



College of Santa Fe Acquisition Good for Economy

This Op-Ed appeared in *Santa Fe New Mexican* and *Santa Fe Journal*, May 2009

By Kris Swedin

Bold action by our elected and community leaders will provide expanded training and education for our youth and economic opportunities for our future cultural and creative workers in Santa Fe. Governor Bill Richardson, Mayor David Coss, and the Santa Fe City Council recognize this opportunity and are taking decisive action to acquire the College of Santa Fe. We need to thank them and urge them forward in their work.

The intent of the acquisition is to maintain the campus as an educational facility and to continue a world-class arts program to support one of the city's largest economic sectors. Yet, the Cultural and Creative Economy is more than just the arts. It includes all the economic activity created through knowledge workers including architects, engineers, scientists, software and new media developers, designers, photographers, craftspeople, consultants and thinkers of all types. Entrepreneurship training is the key to transforming the knowledge and skills of these workers into businesses, income, and economic activity.

To fully support Santa Fe's Creative Economy, the City should also seek college and university programs that meet the needs of all the target industries identified in the city's economic development strategy. ***Cultivating Santa Fe's Future Economy: Economic Development Strategy*** (AngelouEconomics, April 2004) was unanimously adopted by the City Council in September 2004 and fully embraced by the community. The strategy, along with the accompanying Target Industry Report, set a direction for economic development for Santa Fe.

In addition to a high quality arts program delivered by Laureate Education, Inc., Santa Fe has the opportunity to create an innovative Santa Fe Learning Center that could deliver programs that support the target industries selected by the community. These programs, delivered by the state's colleges and universities, should be available to local students at affordable state tuitions. Also lottery scholarships should be available. Participation by Santa Fe Community College will allow an intensive dual credit program to be offered to high school students providing both high school and college credit for the same course. Local students will gain a head start in attaining a university education and a seamless transition to the programs offered on the campus.

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This opportunity comes with risks. The risks, however, can be mitigated by continuing the collaborative process that will allow the combined financial resources of city, county, state, federal, and Santa Fe Community College governments to make this community benefit a reality. The whole 100 acre campus and its 42 buildings can be acquired for less money than it costs to build one new academic building at UNM or NMSU.

The City of Santa Fe has seized other big opportunities to improve the quality of life for Santa Feans: acquiring the land for Tierra Contenta from the Resolution Trust Corporation, purchasing the Rail Yard, adopting one of the most ambitious affordable housing ordinances in the country, and adopting the living wage ordinance. Valid concerns were raised about each of these actions, but in each case the economic benefits have outweighed the risks.

For more than two decades, Santa Fe has led the nation in the Cultural and Creative Economy. Our economic position is slipping because of increasing competition from other cities that have followed our lead and are offering strong economic incentives to attract artists and creative workers to their communities. Governor Richardson, Mayor Coss, and the Santa Fe City Council are on the right track in providing bold leadership to support our cultural and creative workers and creative enterprises. Their actions deserve our support.

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