



**College of Santa Fe and NM Highlands University:
Support Santa Fe's Future Cultural and Creative Economy**

By Tom Ageson

Globally, according to UNESCO, the Cultural and Creative Economy has been one of the fastest growing sectors, creating jobs, tax revenues and attracting new capital into local economies. Unlike many other sectors, the Cultural Economy increases a community's cultural wealth, enhances quality of life and is environmentally sound.

Nationally, Santa Fe is inspiring cultural investment across the land—from Des Moines to Davenport, St. Louis to Tampa, St. Paul to Indianapolis and Paducah, Kentucky. These cities have studied our Cultural Economy and struck out on their own with new museums and performing arts spaces while recruiting artists to live in their communities and revive their economies. Asheville, North Carolina, calls itself the “Santa Fe of the East” in admiration of our community of creative people.

Locally, the 2004 University of New Mexico Bureau of Business and Economic Research (UNM-BBER) study conducted by Creative Santa Fe determined that 17% of our county's employment and close to 20% of our economy are supported by our Cultural Arts and Industries. In the average U.S. city, the Cultural Economy accounts for 3-5% of employment. Over a quarter of a billion dollars in wages and salaries are paid to Santa Feans who work in these industries, generating nearly 20% of all city and county tax revenues. And an amazing **37% of the fresh capital** coming into our economy annually is generated by our cultural enterprises, for profit and not-for-profit.

Santa Fe is home to filmmakers and screenwriters, musicians and music studios, performing artists and producers, foundries and framers, writers and publishers, artisans and artists, cultural tourism and creative tourism entrepreneurs—all of which makes our city a rich cultural experience. Yet, we found in the UNM-BBER study that we are losing market share in cultural tourism. While the global and national **Cultural and Creative Economy** is on the rise, ours has remained flat over several years.

Nationally, unprecedented cultural investments this past decade have increased cultural competition. Fortunately, we have built the Railyard with all of its wonderful cultural enterprises and park, the Rail Runner is proving very popular, and the Santa Fe Community Convention Center is a marvelous building that will bring people to partake in our cultural experiences. In May, the 96,000-square-foot New Mexico History Museum will open. In a year, the New Mexico School of the Arts will be dedicated.

But there is an important missing piece in our community. Silicon Valley's development was fostered by creative minds at Stanford University. MIT and Harvard University have catalyzed hundreds of new technology firms along Boston's Beltway. As national leaders in the new economy, where is our academic underpinning to develop our future Cultural and Creative Economy?

The **College of Santa Fe** is on the brink of bankruptcy, its future unclear. We have the potential of New Mexico Highlands University stepping in to acquire the College. Naturally, the discussion is all about money. Now is the time to raise the discussion to the level of vision. What is the vision for the College and Highlands in our community? Can the College, under the leadership of Highlands University, become the leading educational institution for our Cultural and Creative Economy, or will it simply be an extension program, with offerings found in our other state universities?

"As a whole new economy based upon creativity and innovation emerges – dawn of the "Creative Age" – the importance of reinventing our business strategies, our corporations, our communities, our schools and more is critical. We need to redesign our high school and college curricula to focus on preparing students for this new competition" Joyce M. Gattas and John M. Eger, Santa Diego Business Journal, February 2, 2009.

There is already a strong faculty in film, creative writing, photography, drama and other areas of the arts at the College. Adding Creative Majors in the multimedia and design fields, which have several specialty areas, can attract more students. Highlands' new Center for Cultural Technology can be a focus of development. The new Global Center for Cultural Entrepreneurship can be linked into cultural and creative enterprise curriculum.

The development of **cultural entrepreneurs** through programs that teach business and management skills to support the Cultural and Creative Economy would make the College the nation's first in this area. In time, Master's and Doctorate degrees can be given to accomplished students in the areas of creativity and culture, making the College an international academic center that brings students from far and wide to enrich our community.

We can create a **Culture and Creative Economy campus** at the new university. Alongside an innovative Cultural and Creative curriculum, the outstanding faculty, the campus is the perfect location to have the Center for Creativity ("Beehive") that is in the planning stage. It will serve as an incubator for our emerging creative and cultural enterprises and enrich the student's studies. The university can be a keystone for our Creative Corridor that extends from Albuquerque to Taos, a concept we must plan and develop.

A larger vision is to bring the Highlands University President together with Presidents from the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe Community College, Santa Fe Institute, and St. John's College to develop a coordinated strategy to build Santa Fe-wide academic opportunities for all interests in the Cultural and Creative Economy. With additional leadership from our outstanding museums, creative community and business community, we will have the strength to become a global center for the future **Cultural and Creative Economy**.

As one of the country's leading cultural tourism destinations and one of the largest art markets, Santa Fe has great resources for a new, innovative university. The National Endowment for the Arts ranked Santa Fe first in the percentage of writers and authors, fine artists, architects, art directors and animators over any other U.S. metropolitan area. Americans for the Arts ranked Santa Fe first for arts-related enterprises per capita. We have an enormous opportunity to be an unparalleled learning center in the expanding fields of creativity, culture and related enterprises. This new approach to education will stoke our economy, create jobs, train and educate our young people, build our tax base and bring in new capital.

Mr. Aageson is Executive Director of the Museum of New Mexico Foundation. He also serves as a member of the board of Creative Santa Fe, Inc., is the Chair of the Global Center for Cultural Entrepreneurship, and is a member of the board of the International Folk Art Market.