

GUEST COLUMN

A tale of two New Mexico cities

Today there is a growing awareness among local business leaders that a community's quality of life is, in fact, one of its chief economic assets. New businesses choose to locate or expand in locales that offer enjoyable places in which to live.

Tourists are attracted by natural beauty and by a soul-nourishing sense of continuity with the past.

Communities that allow these assets to be degraded suffer a competitive disadvantage when trying to attract new employers or visitors.

A comparison between Santa Fe and Albuquerque proves this point. Santa Fe preserves its past. By not following the pattern of conventional development that has made most cities in America so homogeneously sterile, Santa Fe capitalizes on its unique history and sense of place. Santa Fe demonstrates the value of having a unique selling proposition to help differentiate itself in the market of desirable places to live and to visit.

Albuquerque, in contrast, embraces the new — often at the expense of bulldozing its past. Unlike Santa Fe, which at times appears to have become a caricature of its history, Albuquerque, in her rush towards progress, has simply wanted to leave her history behind. But she does so at the peril of being seduced by a certain "realist" view that regards the fundamental



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forces of her development as unchangeable. Unlike Santa Fe, most of Albuquerque developed after the automobile. As a consequence, Albuquerque lacks the charm of Santa Fe's central walking district. Albuquerque's heart is not so much a plaza as it is a crossroads: El Camino Real and The

Mother Road; the Railroad Tracks and Central Avenue; Interstate 40 and Interstate 25. This vibrant intersection of culture — east and west, north and south, ancient and modern, Pueblo, Hispanic, Anglo, and Other — is what gives Albuquerque its heart and soul.

The great potential advantage of Albuquerque may be the verve of its contemporary cultural institutions. The University of New Mexico, for example, provides a model for enlightened development. It celebrates its identity and sense of place by remaining true to an indigenous architectural tradition. In so doing it suggests an antidote to the homogenizing influence of corporate

America. A Taco Bell looks the same whether it is in Atlanta or Albuquerque; the University of New Mexico doesn't look anything like the University of Georgia. The university shows how Albuquerque can preserve its soul by remaining true to its history.

The Indian Pueblo Cultural Center and the National Hispanic Cultural Center are two other institutions that deserve our respect and attention because both celebrate a living history rather than a caricature of the past.

When it opens, the new Explora Science Center and Children's Museum will be an exciting addition to an already exciting cluster of museums located around or near historic Old Town.

By actively promoting the vitality of such contemporary cultural institutions, Albuquerque can capitalize on this advantage.

Albuquerque will only be respected as a place if people choose to care. Two recent private-sector developments and one public-sector development point towards a revitalization of this community spirit and a revival of the old-fashioned idea that good business is based on serving the public good rather than making a quick buck. The preservation of the old Albuquerque High School is one. The development of the new movie theater and adjacent park-

ing complex in Downtown is another.

Both of these projects are examples of development premised on seeking a profit for the entrepreneur as well as on providing a benefit for the community.

Perhaps most hopeful of all is the recently completed Alvarado Transportation Center. Designed to look like the old Alvarado Hotel, which was demolished in 1970, the new building helps to heal a long-festering wound in Albuquerque's civic pride.

Given Albuquerque's identity as a transportation hub, it seems somehow historically fitting that a transportation center created in the image of the old Alvarado would herald a shift in our city's cultural self-awareness.

Thirty years after the original building's demise, Albuquerque mustered the political and economic will to transcend a tragedy of its architectural history and reclaim part of its lost cultural heritage.

Albuquerque seems to have finally realized that we need places like the Alvarado — even if only imaginary — as a point of reference, not just to tell us about the past or to provide a link with previous generations, but also to provide perspective on the present and on the future.

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