

Economic Renaissance: North side business boom

Written by By Melinda Russell Sun Correspondent
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New restaurants, businesses to emerge

The northern corner of Interstate 40 and U.S. Route 491 have been bustling with activity. Four new businesses are under construction now and others are in the planning stages. Economic development has hit a new high in Gallup.

Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce Director David Hinkle says new business is essential to the creation of jobs. It also benefits the city's bottom line by significantly increasing the tax base, which brings needed revenue into city coffers.

Nationally, Hinkle explained, an entrepreneurial climate is the number one necessity for economic development. The next most important is retention and expansion of local businesses. Recruitment follows next on the list. Here in Gallup, tourism and hospitality services play a larger role than in other parts of the country.

He said it is important to focus on raising the salaries and income of working people and business owners in an effort to raise the standard of living here. Any initiatives that will increase the number and quality of jobs will also increase the quality of living here in Gallup.

"Every (social) issue will be improved by better economic conditions for all citizens," Hinkle said.

“We are moving the needle,” he added. “That’s why they are choosing to put their businesses here.”

By moving the needle, Hinkle is referring to the positive changes being made in Gallup. He says he sees small improvements in all areas: business, city and county government, the school system and the workforce.

Hinkle said Gallupians should think of economic development as more than just numbers. He described it as braces on a child’s teeth, curtains in the living room or a dependable vehicle in a driveway. He wants the community to see economic development as improvement to the quality of life for the people who live in this community.

Signs of the Times

Smokey’s Roadhouse will be moving into the former location of Furr’s Cafeteria. Of the bigger businesses headed for Gallup, Smokey’s is the only one that is entirely locally owned. Owners Greg McDargh and Willie Roy have visited barbecue houses in Colorado and Arizona specifically looking for the best ideas around the southwest.

“We’re trying to create for Gallup, something we have to go to a city for,” McDargh said.

One of the goals of the Roadhouse is to provide a place for younger people to have birthday and graduation parties and other events. Their 50 seat banquet room will help accomplish this goal.

On the northwest corner of the building, they plan to build a 20-foot fireplace with picnic tables and seating. On the north side of that area will be a horse shoe pit, and just to the west of the horseshoe pit will be an outdoor cornhole game area. Along with their activities, Smokey’s plans to host live bands and outdoor concerts.

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Though the restaurant will serve beer and wine, it will be a family friendly atmosphere. On the menu will be charbroiled and smoked meats along with corn on the cob, coleslaw and baked macaroni and cheese. McDargh says they are creating some surprises to add to the menu.

Roy said they looked at the Alpine Lumber property for the restaurant with the idea of having outdoor concerts. But the Furr's property became available and he says he thinks it is the best location in town. Smokey's hopes to add at least 50 jobs to the local economy.

Rio West Mall Manager Ida Mangum gave an update on recent changes at the mall. Rick's Cyber Lounge recently expanded, adding room for more computers. The increased space will allow more gamers to take part in tournaments.

Serenade Music opened at the north end of the mall. They carry instruments, parts, and sheet music. They also rent instruments. This service is especially beneficial to band students in this area.

De Shelly Tech opened a small repair shop specializing in computer and gaming console repairs. They also do website design and graphic artistry.

Go Girl Bling will be located in a kiosk and will specialize in purses, belts and other items decorated with a variety of bling.

Freddy's Frozen Custard and Steak Burgers will be breaking ground on the east side of the mall near the old car wash. Freddy's is a fast food restaurant with a drive through serving station.

UNM Gallup is adding adult learning classes in mall. They will be located in the area next to JC Penny's.

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Panda Express will take the place of the old car wash on the east side of Route 491, just north of Munoz overpass. Construction is underway with a fence encircling dirt-moving equipment. The restaurant is expecting to hire between 15 and 25 employees said Aris Lim of Panda Express in Albuquerque. At this time they do not have a definite opening date planned.

WisePies Pizza & Salad will be housed in the American Heritage Plaza in the location where the La Fiesta Restaurant formerly occupied. WisePies makes personal size gourmet pizzas in five minutes. WisePies is also the official sponsor of the UNM Lobo Basketball Arena now known as WisePies Arena. In a 2014 press release, owner Michael Baird said, "An important part of our expansion plan is to remain dedicated to reinvesting in our local economy while creating jobs for New Mexico."

Springhill Suites by Marriott is under construction on Lincoln Avenue next to Lota Burger.

Springhill Suites has over 300 locations in the US and in Canada.

Based on *Gallup Sun* interviews, a minimum of 100 jobs are expected to be created with the opening of these new businesses.