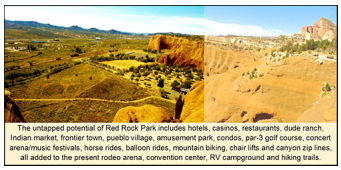
Written by By Joe Schaller Guest Columnist
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The untapped potential of Red Rock Park includes hotels, casinos, restaurants, dude ranch, Indian market, frontier town, pueblo village, amusement park, condos, par-3 golf course, concert arena/music festivals, horse rides, balloon rides, mountain biking, chair lifts and canyon zip lines, all added to the present rodeo arena, convention center, RV campground and hiking trails.

Martin Link's impressive 1981 Heritage Canyon and the development of the Red Rocks into a major tourist attraction never got off the ground, all because of a lack of vision from narrow-minded political leaders, bureaucratic restraints, local apathy, and a lack of private-sector involvement.

Considering its location along the most panoramic scenic stretch of I-40/Route 66, the potential for Gallup and the Church Rock area as an attraction rivaling Sedona, Ariz., Moab, Ariz., or Santa Fe is not far-fetched. Step one has to be the construction of a Church Rock freeway exit and overpass, a huge oversight by regional economic planners of the time. With appropriate freeway exits attached, the poorly located Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort east of Flagstaff, Ariz., would have been a huge success in Gallup — if not at Red Rocks, then on the south side of I-40 or Fort Wingate depot.

East and west entry- and exit-route infrastructure to the Red Rock Park area still needs to be developed. With easy access and proper billboard and Internet marketing, the rest of the pieces could fall into place with hotels, casinos, restaurants, convention center, dude ranch, Native American market, frontier town, pueblo village, amusement park, condos, par-3 golf course, concert arena, music festivals, athletic contests, horse rides, balloon rides, mountain biking, chair lifts, and canyon zip lines all added to the present rodeo arena, museum, RV campground, and hiking trails.

Tourism doesn't just happen; there must be a public investment in infrastructure. The private sector can handle the development, construction, and marketing part, if allowed — not just for

the Red Rocks but for downtown Gallup as well. A thriving Red Rock Village would create hundreds of jobs, many for those living in the Church Rock community, an impetus for BIA cooperation regarding land-swap/sale issues. Private land ownership is pivotal.

To this day, even the spectacular Pyramid Trail is a well-kept secret from the 20,000 vehicles that pass by daily — our city leaders, Chamber of Commerce, and even Adventure Gallup refuse to market the natural attraction after years of prompting. Try finding it with a Google search of “hiking trails in New Mexico” or “Southwest day hikes” or “Gallup tourism.” It’s absolutely mind boggling.

Take it from someone familiar with hiking trails all over the Southwest, the Pyramid Trail is a top-tier blue-chip day hike. Bear in mind that most adventure-themed tourist destinations don’t have the luxury of being located right next to one of the busiest interstate freeways in the country.

That’s my dream. It could happen. However, the primary obstacle is the same force that strangles economic innovation throughout McKinley County: the heavy hand of the federal government. They control 87 percent of our land, and most attempts at economic expansion are met with stiff regulations and legal red tape, which scares away potential development.

The city, county, and BIA need a major attitude adjustment regarding economic freedom. Maybe it’s time for the federal, tribal, and local bureaucrats and politicos to remove their boots from our necks, grant property rights to citizens, encourage equality of effort, and nurture a spirit of free-market enterprise. But I’m dreaming again. Fat chance that will ever happen as long as Democrats and tribal progressives regard business, profits, and wealth creation as ignoble and even dangerous — unless it’s crony favoritism.

The rugged “can-do” individualism of free-market capitalism has been snuffed in favor of the socialist credo “more free stuff” and its track record of the equal sharing of misery. Panhandling for federal and state funding has replaced industriousness and economic vision.

“The Firehouse Capital” might appeal to local union gangs of the old guard, but it just doesn’t cut it for tourist appeal. In order to capitalize on our natural resources, Gallup needs more “outsider” vision like Martin Link’s Heritage Canyon creation, and less of the local status-quo

establishment that beholds the cliffs and canyons of the Red Rocks as “just a bunch of rocks.” Giddy up, Gallup.

By Joe Schaller

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