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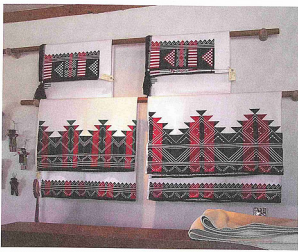
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TRAVEL & TRADITIONS | BY VICKI GADBERRY



Hittin' the Trail in New Mexico

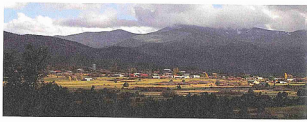
IMAGINE BEING PROVIDED with a map that has premarked destinations. As you contemplate the choices, you become giddy with excitement. With directions in hand, you hit the road. Stops may include galleries, a sheep farm, an old parish hall, a weaving studio, and more. Is it cultural tourism? A fiber enthusiasts' dream come true? An attempt to promote cottage industry? A treasure map? Yes, it's all of the above!

Thanks to support from Governor Bill Richardson as part of his economic-development initiatives for rural New Mexico, the state legislature has approved a special appropriation of \$250,000 to establish arts trails for rural New Mexico communities. The program, administered by New Mexico Arts (a division of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs), is a follow-up to a one-and-a-half-year study that concluded that the 200-plus arts organizations in New Mexico contribute more than \$63 million to the state's economy. The first stage of what is hoped to be a continuing series of statewide loops and trails will feature rural fiber-arts destinations. New Mexico Arts hopes not only to increase awareness of fiber arts in the state

but also to bring additional economic activity to artists' communities.

Serving as the model upon which the New Mexico pilot is based is the trails project of the highly successful HandMade in America organization (www.handmadeinamerica.org) based in Asheville, North Carolina. A nonprofit devoted to promoting western North Carolina's handmade culture in the fields of education, tourism, business, and government, the organization is composed of craftspeople, community leaders, educators, and businesspeople who are united in active partnerships to advance and develop the region's handcraft business. Its executive

director, Becky Anderson, visited New Mexico in 2005 for a two-day gathering sponsored by New Mexico Arts. At the gathering, several rural organizations formed regional and statewide work



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groups to create arts-based trails and cultural-tourism loops across New Mexico. Anderson comments, "By weaving community together through its cultural legacies, this is a type of tourism that can unite a nation with a sense of connectedness." [Ed.—As reported in the Summer 2006 issue of *Fiberarts*, a similar effort in Maine—a tour map of fiber studios and farms sponsored by the organization Maine Fiberarts (www.maineiberarts.org)—was launched in August 2006.]

Working closely with various arts organizations across the state and spearheading the fiber-arts trails program in New Mexico is Carol Cooper, Rural Arts Partnerships and Community Arts Development Coordinator for New Mexico Arts. (Also pivotal in starting the program have been Loie Fecteau, executive director of New Mexico Arts, and Diane Cooper, cofounder and project director for the New Mexico Fiber Artisans.) According to Cooper, establishing the trails is "a direct response to artists' stated needs to continue working in their studios" rather



than traveling to markets and losing time in which they could be creating.

Fiber artisans and suppliers applied to be included on the trails through September, and the first edition of the guide is

LEFT: Julie Wagner's studio in El Rito is on the New Mexico Fiber Arts Trail. Shown is Adrift (2006; handmade paper, glue, bamboo, raffia; watercolor and ink on multi-layered paper over form, bamboo lashed with raffia; 35" x 15" x 11").

slated for publication and release in April. Weaver James Koehler, fabric artist Lauren Camp (*Fiberarts*, September/October 2005), and Julie Wagner, who creates paper sculptures and artist books, are among those whose studios are included.

The potential for this program is limitless and multifaceted. Presenting New Mexico's rich textile heritage, extending cultural tourism to rural communities, providing additional income to rural-based artists, increasing awareness of all forms of fiber arts—these are all great reasons for folks to be hittin' the trail this spring.

For more information, contact Carol Cooper, Rural Arts Partnerships/Community Arts Development, PO Box 1450, Santa Fe, NM 87504-1450. (505) 827-6490 or (800) 879-4278; www.nmarts.org.

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