

Turning the spotlight on rural artists

By Anne Constable
The New Mexican

New Mexico Arts wants to put artists who live in rural areas on the map.

The division of the Department of Cultural Affairs is asking the state Legislature for \$250,000 in annual funding to continue developing cultural tourism loops that will bring buyers to the homes of weavers, potters, painters and

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Rural: Artists submitted applications to be part of trail

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crafts people living a long way from the state's major tourism centers.

Next spring, New Mexico Arts plans to publish a guide and map to the New Mexico Fiber Arts Trails. With subsequent funding, it hopes to develop trails focused on other arts. The idea is to promote tourism and arts-based economic development in cooperation with the state's tourism and economic development departments.

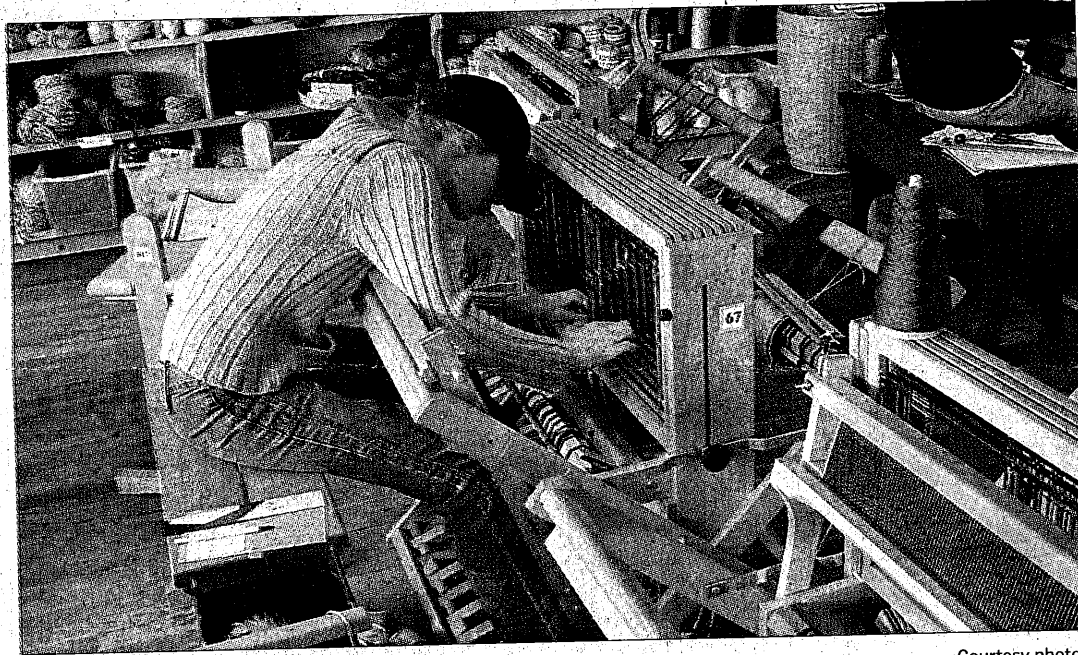
In 2005, New Mexico Arts used some of the money it received from the National Endowment for the Arts to bring guru Rebecca Anderson, executive director of Hand-Made in America, to New Mexico for a conference on cultural tourism. Her organization provides business and financial support to arts-based businesses in western North Carolina to nurture the region's craft culture and build its hand-made industry.

And in the last legislative session, the agency got a one-time \$250,000 appropriation for the pilot fiber-arts trail.

In the summer and fall, New Mexico Arts invited fiber artists to submit online applications to be on the trail. The group hired two regional coordinators, including Diane Bowman, director of the Española Valley Fiber Arts Center, to visit the 70 applicants, view their work, double check driving instructions and make sure everyone is "ready for company."

The loops are not yet "set in stone," according to New Mexico Arts director Loie Fecteau. But there will be one in Northern New Mexico that includes the Española center and Tapetes de Lana, which is based in Mora and Las Vegas, N.M., as well as loops around Silver City and the Gallup/Farmington area.

Fecteau said there will be



Courtesy photos

Ashleigh Oldenberg concentrates on her weaving in an adult education class at the Española Valley Fiber Arts Center.

some spurs off these trails to choice spots, like a fiber-artist coop in Chloride west of Truth or Consequences.

The trails incorporate people involved in fiber arts from "sheep to shawl."

New Mexico Arts also hired a writer/researcher for the guide and, just last week, a designer. The trail is generating excitement in the national fiber community, Fecteau said, and will be featured in a tourism article in *Fiberarts Magazine* in the spring.

New Mexico Arts hopes to spend some of the new state appropriation on workshops for artists that would help teach how to spruce up studios, improve signage and prepare for questions from the public about where to eat or sleep.

And the group is gathering baseline information on artists'

incomes so it can determine if the arts trails have a beneficial impact. Fecteau said everyone believes this initiative will "boost artists' income so they can stay where they live."

"Artisans in rural areas may, if they are lucky, have one sales opportunity per year in their home community in the form of a weekend studio tour. Otherwise, they sell their work in galleries (who take 50 percent or more of the retail price) or must travel to craft shows — a choice with considerable monetary costs and time away from the studio. The Fiber Arts Trails system will bring the market to the artisans, who can thus retain more of the proceeds from sales of their work and continue to stay home and be productive as an artist," Bowman said.

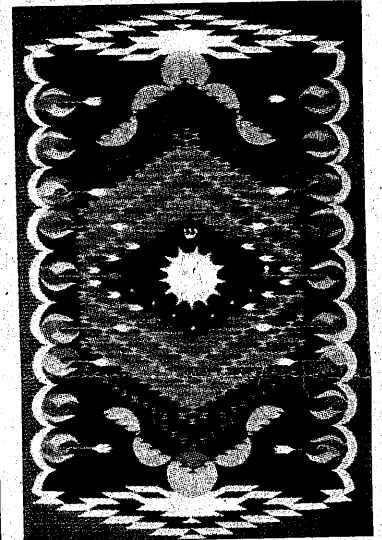
She also pointed out the

gross-receipts taxes collected from these sales will go to the counties where the artisans live, and bringing customers to rural communities means these visitors also will buy gasoline, food and accommodations that benefit the local economy.

Already the fiber artists are networking and have created their own statewide professional organization.

"I think these income opportunities can make a real difference. Perhaps a woman can remain at home to care for children or elders, or perhaps an artist will be able to devote time to develop their skills and inventory because of the income that the trails will bring," Bowman added.

Fecteau also would like to spend some of the new money on workshops for groups interested in their own tours, "so if



Centinela Traditional Arts gallery of Chimayó showcases Irvin Trujillo's contemporary interpretation of a Rio Grande Saltillo.

we get recurring money we will have another group (of artists) ready to go."

The Art Trails project is one of \$3,296,000 in program initiatives the Department of Cultural Affairs is proposing to the Legislature in the upcoming session.

Other requests include \$1 million for an artists-in-the-schools program; \$806,800 for six new full-time employees to develop exhibitions and educational programming and some operations costs at the new state History Museum; \$145,000 for the development of a film museum; and \$100,000 for the second year of a work force development program to teach media arts and exhibit design to students at New Mexico Highlands University.

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