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Filmmaking focus shifts to Santa Fe New studios call for more action in the area

By Peter Debruge | Assistant Editor
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Boasting a major airport, Hollywood-caliber studio facilities and a full third of New Mexico's 2.5 million residents, the Albuquerque area seems like the natural hub for the state's filmmaking operations.

But plans are under way that could shift a significant amount of production to the Santa Fe area, widely recognized as the creative culture center of the Southwest. In addition to the many artists and musicians represented there, the capital (with its relatively modest 80,000 population) is home to nearly half the state's crew base. In the past, those pros have had to commute to Albuquerque (a 45-minute drive) or far-flung outdoor locations like Ghost Ranch or White Sands for work, with gas and lodging eating into production budgets.

That may change thanks to a number of major initiatives in the works. Earlier this month, local government gave the Hool family, established players in the Mexican and independent film scene, the greenlight to proceed with building **Santa Fe Studios**, their proposed 600,000-square-foot, six-stage facility just south of the city.

In keeping with the style of most Santa Fe architecture, the Hools looked to indigenous traditions as they planned their eco-conscious campus. "It turns out the Anasazi design principles map one-to-one with the lead green principles: orientation of buildings on a north-south axis, take advantage of shade for the summer and passive heating for winter, capture rainwater, things like that," explains Jason Hool, who left a job working with Guy Hands at Terra Firma to assist his father, producer Lance Hool, with the project.

By the time **Santa Fe Studios'** projected late-2009 completion date rolls around, Angelenos should be able to fly directly into Santa Fe with the same 90-minute terminal-to-terminal convenience currently available between the LAX and ABQ airports.

"American Airlines and Delta are in the process of getting clearance from the FAA," claims Eric Witt, head of Gov. Bill Richardson's media arts development initiative. "They're looking to direct 70- to 100-seat passenger jets from L.A., Denver and Dallas."

To make things even more accessible, construction is already under way on a high-speed "Rail Runner" train between Albuquerque and Santa Fe. At this rate, crews could be commuting effortlessly between the two cities by the end of the year.

