



Downtown Albuquerque awakens

By Sharon Niederman

Like a sleeping beauty, downtown Albuquerque is waking up at long last. After decades of neglect when downtown was abandoned for the malls and suburbs, the area is alive with new construction, cafes, and cinema.

When the railroad arrived in Albuquerque in 1880, it triggered construction of a so-called New Town (some 1½ miles east of Albuquerque's 1706 town site, Old Town). The junction of First Street and Central Avenue is the site of the former Alvarado Hotel, at one time the city's favorite New Town social center. Now it's the location of the new Alvarado Transportation Center, done in the Spanish mission style of the old Alvarado Hotel.

Here visitors may hop on trolleys that traverse downtown and head out to Old Town, the National Hispanic Cultural Center of New Mexico, and the Albuquerque Biological Park.

At Second Street and Central, the new Century Theatre five-block complex is slated to open by mid-November, with shops, 14 state-of-the-art movie screens, and Tucanos Brazilian Grill. The location is fitting: It's next door to Albuquerque's original movie palace, the 1924 Sunshine Building.

Central, downtown's main thoroughfare, was once called Railroad Avenue. When the Mother Road was rerouted in 1937, Central became a lively section of America's Main Street, Route 66.



In Albuquerque: The heart of downtown is coming back to life, and historic structures like this pueblo deco-style building have been renovated.

The recently refurbished pueblo deco-style KiMo Theatre (505/848-1370) at Fifth and Central stands in ornate glory as a reminder of the city's vivid Route 66 past, as do Skip Maisel's Indian Jewelry Arts & Crafts (510 Central Ave. SW; 242-6526) and the classic Man's Hat Shop (511 Central Ave. NW; 239-9871). Nearby, the contemporary, glass-walled 516 Magnifico Artspace (516 Central Ave. SW; 242-8244), a premier exhibition space for local and regional art, achieves a graceful coexistence.

New and Old Towns eventually merged; you can continue west on Central to visit Old Town Plaza. Pause in its 18th-century San Felipe de Neri Church (243-4628), or stroll the surrounding original adobe buildings, now housing restaurants, galleries, and shops specializing in Southwestern wear and fare. It's a great way to end your downtown getaway.

DON'T MISS: The National Hispanic Cultural Center of New

Mexico (1701 Fourth St. SW; 246-2261) just opened last October. **Albuquerque Biological Park** (2601 Central Ave. NW; 764-6200) combines a zoo, aquarium, and botanic gardens. Two great museums are the **New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science** (1801 Mountain Rd. NW; 841-2800) and the **Albuquerque Museum of Art & History** (2000 Mountain Rd. NW; 243-7255).

DINING: **Gold Street Caffé** (218 Gold St. SW; 765-1633) has excellent house-baked muffins and scones. The place for authentic New Mexican food downtown is **M&J Restaurant and Sanitary Tortilla Factory** (403 Second St. SW; 242-4890).

LODGING: **La Posada de Albuquerque** (from \$79; 125 Second St. NW; 242-9090 or 800/777-5732) is a 1939 hotel, newly updated.

CONTACT: **Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau:** (800) 284-2282. ♦