

College of Santa Fe Worth Saving Now

By Senator Pete Campos

The College of Santa Fe is New Mexico's oldest institution of higher education, having been founded in 1859 and chartered by the territorial legislature as the College of the Christian Brothers in 1874. We should not allow 2009 to be the year it closes its doors.

We have said it so often that it has become a truism: a good education, including post-secondary education, is critical to an individual's success and, by extension, our collective success as a state and a society. Unsaid, but equally true, is that a good education must be affordable and available. Policymakers and taxpayers have an opportunity right now, right here, to give real meaning to that rhetoric. We can join together to keep the College of Santa Fe open, bring it under the auspices of the state's higher education system and continue to make a good, affordable education available.

The College of Santa Fe is known as a performing arts college. The college's resources are remarkable: a faculty of accomplished artists, Garson Studios, the only professional sound stage on a college campus, a 500-seat, fully equipped theater and a costume shop that is second only to the Santa Fe Opera in northern New Mexico. The college recognizes and caters to the diversity of New Mexico's student body by making classes available to working New Mexicans in the evening and on weekends. The campus itself is a wonderful asset: 90 acres, centrally located in Santa Fe, that include four residence halls and two apartment complexes.

New Mexico Highlands University is poised to bring the College of Santa Fe under its management. The university recognizes the importance of making higher education available throughout New Mexico by ensuring that those opportunities are available in our small and mid-sized cities. And the university has developed a plan to purchase the College of Santa Fe's assets without taking on its liabilities and to take over the operation of the college with a minimal appropriation.

It is challenging to consider spending any state money to begin a new program or project during these recessionary times. Each dollar collected from taxpayers should be spent wisely, and this is especially true when those tax dollars are scarce. I'm confident that tax dollars spent to fold the College of Santa Fe into New Mexico Highlands

University, to make it a state college and to keep it open, would be money spent wisely. The fact that we might be able to come up with the necessary funds through another round of delaying less critical projects that are funded through the state's general fund makes this proposal even more attractive.

The College of Santa Fe is worth saving. New Mexico Highlands University has stepped forward with a solid plan to save it in a way that ensures a smooth transition with minimal disruption to students. We should not allow the current, relatively short-term troubles in the economy to cause the curtain to fall on the wonderful performance that is the College of Santa Fe.