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The Buffalo Thunder Resort in Pojoaque provides more convention space than had previously been available in the Santa Fe area. Below, the new resort's exterior.

Room for all

Study says Native resorts only add to NM's convention allure

BY MEGAN KAMERICK | NMBW STAFF

The Hyatt Tamaya Resort and Spa is the glitter for Albuquerque. At least that's the way Jerry Westenhaver sees it.

Westenhaver is the general manager of the resort — the city's first high-end, destination resort when it opened in 2001 on the Pueblo of Santa Ana near Bernalillo.

The Tamaya tends to attract well-heeled leisure travelers and corporate meetings for companies

like Toyota and Sony, he says. And those niche corporate meetings can be particularly lucrative.

"They tend to have much bigger budgets on a national basis," Westenhaver says. "They can drop \$1 million in four days."

The Albuquerque Convention and Visitors Bureau has worked with the Hyatt Tamaya to attract such meetings and in turn, expose those corporate executives to all that Albuquerque has to offer, with the hope they'll return with larger conventions.

"We've had excellent success with that," says Dale Lockett, president of the ACVB.

Such a model holds great potential for boosting Albuquerque as a regional destination, according to a study by an economics professor at the University of New Mexico that was commissioned by the ACVB. Philip Ganderton found that the Native-owned resorts around Albuquerque have had a positive impact on the city's hotels in terms of the average daily rate and had no negative impact on occupancy rates. In fact, rather than stealing



business away from Albuquerque's facilities, the rise of Native-owned hotels and resorts means an increase in city business, Ganderton found.

Developing these niche convention and meeting markets targets travelers with higher expectations and more money to spend, according to the report. And while pueblos do not pay lodgers' taxes, there is spillover from this increased business to the greater Albuquerque area, Ganderton maintains.

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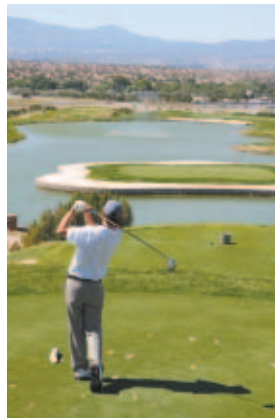
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Buffalo Thunder Resort & Casino

Hotel opened: August 2008
 Development cost: \$300 million
 Ownership/management structure: Casino is owned and operated by the Pueblo of Pojoaque. The hotel, the Hilton Santa Fe Golf Resort & Spa, is managed by Hilton Hotels Corp.
 Number of rooms: 395 in Hilton resort, 81 in adjacent Homewood Suites
 Rates: \$199 - \$359
 Amenities: Spa; golf; seven restaurants including Chef Mark Miller's Red Sage, as well as lounges with live entertainment; indoor and outdoor swimming pools; retail shopping; children's activity center; business center; tennis; walking trails; wedding chapel
 Amount of meeting space: 66,000 square feet
 Largest meeting space: 16,200 square feet/1,350 seating capacity
 Smallest meeting space: 1,280 square feet (can be divided) /100 seating capacity
 Meeting room amenities: Fiber-optic cabling for high-speed Internet; permanent office/storage area; loading dock at meeting level; outdoor terrace; private vestibule entrances
 Past and upcoming meetings: U.S. District Courts; National Academy Foundation; Northern New Mexico Annual Business Fair



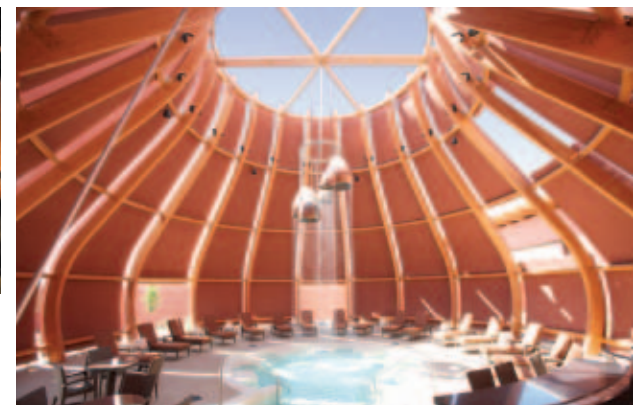
Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa

Hotel opened: January 2001
 Development cost: \$80 million
 Ownership/management structure: Ownership, Pueblo of Santa Ana; management, Hyatt Corp.
 Number of rooms: 350
 Rates: \$175 - \$475
 Amenities: Spa; fine dining at several restaurants; iHome stereos with iPod docks; swimming pool; tennis; stables; cultural museum; golf; patio or balcony rooms; video on demand; dual-line phones; high-speed Internet access; video checkout; refrigerator; concierge; dataport; morning newspaper
 Amount of meeting space: 32,000 square feet
 Largest meeting space: 12,000 square feet / 1,000 seating capacity
 Smallest meeting space: 500 square feet / 27 seating capacity
 Meeting room amenities: Outdoor meeting space; onsite destination management company; meeting concierge; wedding coordinators; audio visual services
 Past and upcoming meetings: Toshiba; Toyota; SafeCo Insurance; First Affirmative Action Network; KFC; Sony; Western State Tourism; PGA of America



Isleta Casino & Resort

Hotel opened: July 2008
 Development cost: \$100 million
 Ownership/management structure: Isleta Pueblo
 Number of rooms: 201
 Rates: \$99 - \$335
 Amenities: Spa and salon; high-speed Internet and wireless; robes; 24-hour room service; onsite shops; flat-screen TVs; iPod docking stations; onsite restaurants; golf; bowling alley; kids' activity area; appetizers and drinks in afternoon; Isleta Lakes recreation; concert venues; 24-hour shuttle
 Amount of meeting space: 30,000 square feet
 Largest meeting space: 6,000 square feet
 Smallest meeting space: Four breakout rooms that hold 50 people each and boardroom that holds 15 to 20
 Meeting room amenities: Acoustically-built rooms that don't require microphones; televisions; business center; event management; audio-visual services.
 Past and upcoming meetings: National Indian Gaming Association; New Mexico Gaming Association - Class Two Bingo conference; local and regional groups



Route 66 Casino Hotel

Hotel opened: December 2007
 Development cost: \$40 million
 Ownership/management structure: Laguna Development Corp.
 Number of rooms: 154
 Rates: \$79 - \$109
 Amenities: Flat-screen televisions; wireless Internet; resort-style waterfall swimming pool; business center; four restaurants with food available 24 hours in some and at travel center; nightclub; child care facility; non-violent arcade; theater
 Amount of meeting space: 8,000 square feet
 Largest meeting space: 500 seating capacity

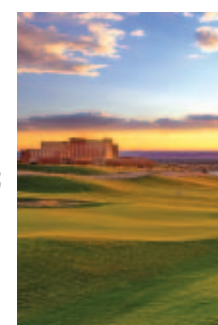


Smallest meeting space: 20 seating capacity
 Meeting room amenities: Outdoor patio; audio-visual equipment
 Past and upcoming meetings: University of New Mexico Lobo Club Board Retreat; Sprint; Verizon; New Mexico Student Loans



Sky City Casino Hotel and Conference Center

Hotel opened: 2000
 Ownership/management structure: Pueblo of Acoma
 Development costs: Did not disclose
 Number of rooms: 131
 Rates: \$89 - \$139
 Amenities: Swimming pool; hot tub; shops; nearby restaurant; wireless Internet; nearby cultural center Sky City and museum
 Amount of meeting space: 8,490 square feet
 Largest meeting space: 5,850 square feet in VIP showroom/800 seating capacity
 Smallest meeting space: 750 square feet/40 seating capacity
 Meeting room amenities: Outside patio; catering featuring Native dishes; audiovisual equipment
 Past and upcoming meetings: Tribal meetings; Navajo Nation; New Mexico Meeting Planners Association; FIBEA - Fostering Indigenous Business and Entrepreneurship in the Americas; New Mexico Taxidermy; Tourism Association of New Mexico



Sandia Resort & Casino

Hotel opened: December 2005
 Development cost: \$80 million
 Ownership/management structure: Pueblo of

Sandia
 Number of rooms: 228
 Rates: \$129 - \$250
 Amenities: Spa; golf; amphitheater; extra large guest rooms and bathrooms; high-speed Internet; refrigerator; flat-panel televisions; four restaurants, including fine dining; lounge; coffee bar; swimming pool
 Amount of meeting space: 50,000 square feet
 Largest meeting space: 35,000 square feet/2,200 seating capacity

Smallest meeting space: 1,500 square feet/50 seating capacity
 Meeting room amenities: All audio-visual; wireless Internet; teleconferencing; custom menus; largest ballroom stage in state
 Past and upcoming meetings: Fiery Foods Show; Hispanic Cultural Center's Maravilla; Seminole Tribe; Intel; International Brotherhood of Electricians; National Crime Investigators; Bureau of Indian Affairs; New Mexico Broadcasters; Air Force's 60th Anniversary; AAA Allstar Game

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From 2001 to 2006, the occupancy rates for luxury properties — a category that includes the Tamaya and the Sandia Resort & Casino — steadily rose to 71.1 percent, according to data from Smith Travel Research in Ganderton's report. By comparison, the occupancy rate during the same time was at 60.8 percent for the up-scale/mid-price category and 58.8 percent for the budget/economy category.

Those findings are important, Lockett says, because there was concern about having enough increased demand to justify more hotel rooms coming into the market. There were similar concerns about an influx of limited service hotels. But occupancy rates and lodgers' tax collections indicate occupancies have not suffered.

Lockett says the ACVB wanted to do the study to better understand the impact of Native hotel development in the Albuquerque area. The results reinforced plans made by ACVB to continue its shift to marketing Albuquerque as a regional destination and to work with pueblos on joint marketing efforts.

"Native American investment groups have invested a lot of money into improving Albuquerque's overall attractiveness as a destination and that has had a positive benefit from the customer viewpoint," Lockett said.

He adds, however, that competition has also increased for area events that are not driven by hotel rooms.

"It makes everyone work harder to compete for local weddings and local meetings," he says. "That's ultimately good for the customer."

Mark Gundlach, general manager of the Embassy Suites Hotel in Albuquerque, said Native-owned developments have motivated local hotels to step up their own efforts.

"Our approach has been to be more creative on the food and beverage side and look at our service levels," he says.

Charlie Gray, executive director of the Greater Albuquerque Innkeepers Association, agrees the proliferation of Native-owned properties has brought more competition. But it has also brought new business to the market, he says.

"There's no question that with the entertainment venues and gaming, they're bringing people to our city that have never come here before," Gray says. "In a competitive world — where we compete against Tucson, we compete against Phoenix, we compete against Denver — we need every advantage we can get."

Tim Nichols, general manager at the Sandia Resort, says his property has been successful attracting regional groups interested in golf, since the resort's course is part of Golf on the Santa Fe Trail (eight courses promoted jointly). Sandia markets aggressively on a regional basis and brings in visitors and meetings from southern Colorado, east Texas and southern New Mexico.

Sandia has also been successful luring local groups to the property, such as the Fiery Foods Show, which previously was at the Albuquerque Convention Center (see story, right), and the National Hispanic Cultural Center's Maravilla gala. Most of its meetings business is during the week, he says. The resort's strategy for weekend marketing is different and targets gamers, the group for whom it reserves most of its room block.

The resort is also working to boost its marketing to Mexico, says Sandia Pueblo Gov. Stuart Paisano. That includes not only leisure travelers, but business meetings for maquiladora facilities and other industries in that country. He is eager to see plans for direct flights to Albuquerque from Sonora on Aero Mexico come to fruition.

Even the newest resort property in Albuquerque, Isleta Casino and Resort, which just opened in July,

already has 300 meetings and functions scheduled through 2010, says Rodney Ferguson, general manager of the hotel. Designed by Cunningham Group Architecture, it includes a full spa and concert venues and family activities like bowling and laser tag, in addition to the existing casino.

Another relatively new property — the Route 66 Casino Hotel at Laguna Pueblo, which opened in late December — has attracted a number of groups, even though its meeting space is smaller than other Native-owned hotels at 8,000 square feet, says Maria Esquivel, advertising and public relations manager for Laguna Development Corp.

The newest Native-owned resort, the Buffalo Thunder Resort near Santa Fe, will have a major impact on the meetings market in northern New Mexico, Ganderton believes. The 390-room resort has 66,000 square feet of meeting space, which is more than double the indoor event space at the new Santa Fe Community Convention Center. It also has the world-wide marketing power of Hilton Hotels Corp.

Ganderton recommends in his study that, given the increased visibility these properties are bringing to New Mexico, the ACVB should actively pursue more of the niche convention and executive meeting business. This could be the direction tourism officials take. They have expressed concern the city is becoming noncompetitive due to the lack of a convention headquarters hotel and an event center Downtown, near the existing convention center.

A recent draft report by PKF Consulting found there is a market for a 550-room convention headquarters hotel there; the city is exploring building an arena or events center to keep Albuquerque a competitive convention destination.

Ganderton, however, says that nationwide there has been a contraction in demand for super large convention spaces, even as that type of space has increased. Given that, he suggests redirecting marketing efforts toward working with the surrounding pueblos to attract niche conventions and executive meetings.

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One that got away

BY MEGAN KAMERICK | NMBW STAFF



DeWitt

Dave DeWitt moved his Fiery Foods Show & BBQ Show from the Albuquerque Convention Center to Sandia Resort & Casino in 2006, where it has flourished and attendance has increased every year — to about 14,000 in 2008.

DeWitt had been at the convention center since 1976 and said the decision to move the show was difficult. A number of factors were behind it, one of which was the parking situation.

"My people, exhibitors included, were paying \$5 to park with no in-and-out privileges and they'd didn't like that," DeWitt says. "Then we saw attendance not growing and most of the people complained about the parking and having to walk long distances and pay for parking."

DeWitt has nothing but good things to say about the management of the Albuquerque Convention Center, SMG.

"Tom Morton is a great guy and a good convention center manager," he says. "I'm not upset or bitter or anything. But also, the city agencies don't really communicate very well with each other — I'm talking about different parts of the city. And it was difficult to get problems resolved."

Plus, he says, Sandia made him a very good offer.

"I don't want to seem like I'm knocking the city or anything, but Sandia makes it really easy on a show producer," DeWitt says. "For one thing, their security, because it's a casino, is incredible. Their security people even helped my people move in."

DeWitt's show takes up every square foot of exhibit space in the complex. His expenses are comparable to his costs at the convention center, but since admissions have increased from 10,000 to 14,000,



he has been able to raise booth rates slightly. The convention center management approached him this year with a proposal to lure the show back downtown; Sandia matched it. What was most important to DeWitt's decision was his exhibitors' reaction. He interviewed them when he got the offer and they told him they wanted to stay at Sandia.

"You sort of have to do what your customers want," DeWitt says. "Also, Sandia is really an up-scale place to have a show."

Sandia is the only property in the area that can compete with the convention center for a show the size of his, DeWitt says. For larger meetings, he believes no other venue can beat it.

Morton echoes that sentiment. Most of the events coming to the Convention Center won't fit in other properties around the city, he says, and they're coming from outside the market. The first goal of SMG, working with the Albuquerque Convention and Visitors Bureau, is to bring in large conventions that fill many hotel rooms, Morton says. But occasionally it does enter the more competitive market for smaller, local meetings.

"From a pragmatic standpoint, if we have gaps in the schedule, we're open to other types of events, whether local or regional," Morton says.

He considers the loss of the Fiery Foods Show an anomaly.

"They had a unique opportunity to go to that venue and [Sandia] welcomed them there with open arms," Morton said. "It has free parking and freeway access. It's just a good fit."

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