

POWERED BY
BNET.com

[FindArticles](#) > [New Mexico Business Journal](#) > [Oct, 1990](#) > [Article](#) > Print friendly

Artesia: New Mexico's best kept secret

Lynn Koenig

Artesia NEW MEXICO'S BEST KEPT SECRET

Artesia's friendly people and its quality of life are what first-time visitors and new residents notice - the friendly face in the checkout line, greetings from total strangers.

It's five-minute drive to work - not an hour-long commute.

It's a small town, but for many who have lived elsewhere, it's also a big relief.

"It's fabulous," says Valerie Blake, deputy chief of the Immigration Officer Academy at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.

She moved to Artesia from Washington, D.C., and has lived in nine states and three foreign countries.

"I wanted to get away from the traffic, the stress and to have more time with my husband," she says. "I've done that. The climate is great, too."

Deputy Chief Patrol Agent Larry Mohler moved to Artesia from Minnesota.

"I've lived in cities along both borders. Of all the places I have lived, I really like Artesia best," Mohler says. "I like everything about it. It's family-oriented and has friendly people."

As Artesia enters the 1990s, it looks forward to a decade of economic growth and expansion, while keeping its friendly, small-town atmosphere.

The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center enters its second year expecting to double the number of trainees.

The Artesia Veteran's Administration Community Clinic treated 7,000 veterans in its first year and expects to keep on growing.

Navajo Refining Co., the state's largest refinery and Artesia's largest industrial employer, has begun construction of an \$18 million unit and plans to re-open its Lovington refinery.

Dairies were the big news in 1990 for area farmers and agribusiness people. One dairy opened in August and at least four more dairies are expected to relocate here.

Disturbing events in the Middle East did not cause local independent oil producers to rush madly to the fields, but oilmen were ready to move. There was some stirring in the area's fields in 1990, with more drilling anticipated.

Artesia voters - always supportive of their schools - continued that tradition by voting for a five-mill tax levy on property in a tough economic year. The money will go to renovate buildings and replace equipment.

The City of Artesia expanded its services to take care of new growth. City water connections increased by 150 households during the year, city clerk-treasurer Shirley Walker says. Gross receipts increased 15 percent, reportedly the largest increase in the state.

"It's the first time in five years that the city has not had to dip into reserves to balance its budget," Mayor Ernest Thompson says.

Federal Law Enforcement

Training Center

With a mission to train experienced federal law enforcement officers, FLETC (pronounced FLET-SY, like Betsy) hopes to double its classes this fiscal year. In mid-August, 114 classes with 2,887 students had been scheduled.

The center's 49 employees include 27 FLETC staff members and 11 members each from the U.S. Border Patrol and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, the agencies that conduct most courses here. Another 68 persons are employed in support services.

FLETC staff members train agents to become instructors in firearms, defensive driving and physical techniques. Agents then return home and pass that training along to fellow officers.

Renovations of the former college campus continued this year with remodeling of a classroom building. At a complex west of Artesia, pistol and rifle ranges and driving course were built.

Groundbreaking is set Oct. 20 for a 19,000-square-foot, \$1.2 million physical training facility.

The city meanwhile plans to expand North 13th Street to five lanes, including a turning lane, adjacent to the FLETC campus and four lanes as far as the money will go, Mayor Thompson says.

David McKinley, FLETC deputy director and director of the Artesia facility, says he's pleased with progress at the center.

"We are making good progress in bringing the facility on line, consistent with our master plan," says McKinley. "The reputation of Artesia as a quality training facility is growing and this should attract even more interest."

Community support has been gratifying and consistent through the center's first year, administrative chief Howard Goetsch says.

VA Community Clinic

The Artesia Veteran's Administration Community Clinic with an annual budget of \$650,000 treated 7,000 veterans from the surrounding area in its first year.

The staff grew from seven to 11, with two part-time physicians. The clinic provides specialized services in podiatry, psychiatry and social services. In December, the clinic will add neurology, director Bonnie Muncy says.

"It was sad to see the elderly because they didn't have the money to get the medication they needed and to have some type of treatment," Muncy says, "I believe we have given them a prolonged, more productive life."

Business

Navajor Refining Co. has let an \$18 million contract to Flour-Daniels of California to construct a continuous catalytic regeneration unit, says senior vice president Bill Gray. The unit should be completed by early summer.

In 1988, Holly Corp. of Dallas, which owns Navajo and a Montana refinery, purchased a closed refinery in nearby Lovington. The Lovington refinery is being renovated. Once its goes on line, it will produce asphalt, diesel fuels and naphtha, but the plant is unable to produce gasoline, Gray says.

Plans are to transport products manufactured there by pipeline to the Artesia refinery, where gasoline will be produced from the naphtha. The other products will be distributed through Navajo's regular marketing channels. Gray says studies indicated that the Lovington refinery should be ready to go into operation in another year.

The Artesia refinery produces three grades of gasoline and diesel, jet fuel, propane, butane, carbon black oil and asphalt.

"We are very optimistic," Gray says. "Our company is 21 years old. We started out using 16,000 barrels of crude per day and now we're up to 40,000. We look for future expansion."

Artesia native Joe Pemberton, owner of Desert Driveline, says not being located next to an interstate hasn't hurt his business.

The firm manufactures exhaust systems for Corvette enthusiasts and General Motors and prototype systems for GM's racing program. The firm is the only New Mexico owned company to manufacture drivelines for Greyhound Manufacturing in the U.S. and Winnipeg, Canada.

The bright outlook for Artesia's future caused local restaurant owner Debbie Haines to invest about \$200,000 to move and expand her business, the Catered Affair.

"It just seemd like a good business move," Haines says. I feel like Artesia is trying to diversify, not just waiting for the oil field to come back around."

The alfalfa market in Artesia should be in excellent shape for the next decade, says John Wilson, general manager of Artesia Alfalfa Growers Association.

County Line Dairy, north of Artesia, began milking its 1,800 cows in August. Co-owners Mike McCloskey and John deJong relocated here from Hanford, Calif. Zia Dairy has doubled its herd to 750 milking cows. At least four more dairies are expected to relocate in the area.

Riggs Chiles, a chile processing plant north of Artesia, is slated to open in October. About 1,000 acres of chile have been contracted. The plant will produce paprika used in food coloring, cosmetic dyes and as a spice in frozen Mexican dinners.

The area's farmers continue to concentrate on their strengths - high-quality alfalfa and cotton. But vegetable growing is cropping up with about 2,000 acres planned in cantaloupes, onions, cabbage and bell peppers for the fresh vegetable market.

Area farmer Bob Mayberry, who heads an organization of growers called Pro-Ag, says the vegetable crops are high earners, but require about 300 farm laborers for harvest through most of the year.

"We figure we're sending about a \$1 million payroll into Artesia," Mayberry says.

Recreation

Whether you enjoy jogging, playing volleyball or developing your more dramatic talents, residents can find much to do if they are self-starters.

The school system opens its indoor Olympic-size pool to public use daily. The high school auditorium is one of the finest facilities of its type in this area, and the high school's football stadium, Bulldog Bowl, rivals those found at many colleges and universities.

The city's recreation center, the Artesia Center, has been expanded. Volleyball and basketball leagues and other activities are organized for children and adults.

Jaycee Park has a number of baseball and softball fields and a jogging/walking track that is popular.

For senior citizens, an active calendar of events is planned at the Senior Citizens Center.

In addition, bowling leagues are organized at Tumbleweed Bowl.

The Artesia Arts Council promotes the visual, cultural and performing arts. It sponsors about 10 concerts a year, along with workshops in painting, photography and writing.

An active drama troupe performs three plays annually. The council also sponsors a writers' group and the Artesia Chorale. The council's biggest event is Art in the Park, an annual arts festival, scheduled each October.

For those who enjoy fishing, boating and the outdoors, Brantley Lake State Park is located about 20 miles south of Artesia.

The Artesia Historical Museum and Art Center offers art and historical exhibits. Shoppers get a mini-view of Artesia's history from murals along Heritage Walkway.

For rodeo lovers, Artesia is becoming something of a rodeo capital. The Artesia Horse Council Arena now boasts a covered arena. The council hosts the 4-H State Rodeo Finals and the New Mexico High School Rodeo Finals as well as an annual cutting horse show.

The Artesia Chamber of Commerce, under the direction of Dave Malkowski, has expanded its operations to include tourism, promotion, beautification and economic development.

Lynn Koenig is news editor at the Artesia Daily Press and a free lance writer.

COPYRIGHT 1990 The New Mexico Business Journal

COPYRIGHT 2004 Gale Group