

The Santa Fe New Mexican
September 27, 2008

Railyard revitalized: Santa Feans come out in force for Railyard grand opening

By Carmella Padilla

"The grand opening of the revitalized Santa Fe Railyard in mid-September had an estimated 20,000 people of all ages attending the weekend festivities to visit with friends and loved ones and enjoy live entertainment (on two stages), the Farmers Market, great food, shopping and a variety of fun-filled activities in the unique indoor and outdoor spaces.

The weekend was a mammoth joint effort produced by the city of Santa Fe, the Santa Fe Railyard Community Corp. and The Trust for Public Land. Event-planners extraordinaire Janey Potts, Frank O'Mahony and Jamie Lenfestey brought all the details seamlessly together with the help of nearly 100 weekend volunteers. Even the previous week's cool, rainy weather cooperated, with clear skies and a late-afternoon rainbow appearing over the Railyard Plaza during the afternoon setup for the event.

Here are some of the highlights as well as comments heard throughout the weekend: The weekend kicked off Sept. 13 as crowds gathered at the new Farmers Market, tempted by the smell of freshly roasted chile and a kaleidoscope of fall flowers, vegetables and other products from throughout Northern New Mexico. Across the Railyard Plaza at the new Market Station, other visitors came en masse to be the first to explore the just-opened REI store.

Down the tracks at El Museo Cultural, model-train displays enticed railroad aficionados of all ages. Many children found their way to SITE Santa Fe's back door, where they created "frogmobiles" and other creative artworks from old toys. Next door, Warehouse 21 was hopping with music, art and other activities.

It didn't take long for kids from throughout the city to discover the new children's play

area in the Railyard Park, where they climbed, spun, crawled, splashed and laughed the weekend away with their families and friends. One teenage girl found a shady spot under a tree near the play area to do her math homework. Throughout the park, volunteers from the new Railyard Park Stewards, which will provide enhanced care for the 10-acre space, were on hand to recruit other interested park-lovers to the group.

Meanwhile, the Circular Ramada at the Railyard Park fell silent as the lieutenant governor of Picuris Pueblo joined religious leaders from the Sikh community, the Presbyterian Church and nearby Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in a profound multi-faith blessing asking that the park continue to grow into a vital, beautiful and sustainable community gathering place. On Saturday afternoon, thousands cheered as the Santa Fe Southern Railway and Rail Runner Express trains made a rare joint appearance on the tracks beside the Railyard Park, each carrying federal, state, city and county dignitaries to the official Railyard dedication ceremonies. The dedication was followed by the Santa Fe Community Foundation's burial of a time capsule in the Railyard Park. The capsule, which is filled with wishes for Santa Fe's future, is scheduled to be unearthed in the year 2031.

Early in the evening on Sept. 13, some 400 people converged for a community dance on the Railyard Plaza, featuring music by Santa Fe favorite Lumbre del Sol. Later, some 500 people watched Looney Tunes cartoons and sang along to the Wizard of Oz under a glowing full moon at the Railyard Park Performance Green. One teen chatted with friends and enjoyed takeout food as the Wizard of Oz appeared on the inflatable outdoor movie screen, saying, "We live in the best city in the world."

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Sept. 14 got off to an energetic start with the happy arrival of nearly 100 bicyclists who paraded from the historic downtown Plaza to the Railyard Plaza. The group was greeted with a powerful vocal welcome by Nidia Martinez and Mariachi Fiesta. Two wheels were a popular sight throughout the weekend as bicyclists traversed new bike paths from one end of the Railyard to the other. Santa Fe police officers also tested the bike paths as they patrolled the site on bicycles and spiffy electric two-wheeled Segway vehicles.

For those who preferred train travel, free tours of the Rail Runner Express were offered Saturday during the festivities, while Sunday, the Santa Fe Southern Railway's free train rides were filled to capacity. Other visitors walked the Railyard. With carnitas, hot dogs, Frito pies, gyros, ice cream and other local treats on hand, no one seemed to mind the exercise.

Sunday afternoon, countless children gathered in the Railyard Park's Storytelling Circle and listened with rapt attention as storyteller Joe Hayes spun a summertime vision of a tortilla snowstorm. Nearby, other kids enjoyed old-fashioned gunnysack and three-legged races, while dogs in railroad hats got their groove on in a canine dance demonstration.

Will Rogers, president of The Trust for Public Land, the national land-conservation organization that developed and raised funds for the Railyard Park and Plaza, called the Railyard Park "the most important project we've ever done."

Lenfestey, who coordinated live music and dance performances for the weekend, said: "Getting the opportunity to be in the park as the very first people strolled in, the very first bikes cruised the path along the tracks, the very first kids climbed in the play area, the first dogs frolicked on the grass, and just seeing the look on people's faces as they took in this amazing new addition to Santa Fe, was magical."