

Governor announces satellite film school to open in Las Cruces. Here are the details.



LAS CRUCES — Doña Ana Community College and New Mexico State University are getting a bigger slice of the film industry pie. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced Tuesday that the state's Next Generation Media Academy will have a satellite location in Las Cruces.

Lujan Grisham, NMSU Chancellor Dan Arvizu, DACC President Monica Torres, local and state officials and filmmakers were in attendance Tuesday for the announcement at Doña Ana Community College's East Mesa campus.

The satellite campus will be a combined effort between NMSU's Creative Media Institute and DACC's Creative Media Technology program, both of which will be moving to the NMSU Arrowhead Center. The idea is to provide students with the opportunity to learn about all aspects of film while also

providing local crew members for film projects that come into the area.

"The biggest problem we've always had here is crew base. Even with 'Walking With Herb' we had to bring in 68 people and house them for 42 days. It's very expensive. So, without the crew base ... you can only grow so much," said Ross Marks, an instructor in the NMSU CMI program and a filmmaker who directed "Walking With Herb," a movie filmed in the Mesilla Valley starring Edward James Olmos and George Lopez.

"Having (the satellite) in Las Cruces is key because (film students) are going to graduate, they're going to stay here, we're going to grow the crew base and we're going to be able to make movies more effectively, more efficiently, more inexpensive," he said.

New Mexico has become a hotspot for film production in recent years. The state has prioritized investing in the industry, including by offering a film tax credit to productions that film outside of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. This has made Las Cruces a hub of film activity in recent years attracting productions led by big-name actors such as Bruce Willis, Mel Gibson, Clint Eastwood and others.

The New Mexico Legislature this year appropriated \$40 million for the Next Generation Media Academy which will be located in Albuquerque. The project there hasn't broken ground quite yet. However, the Las Cruces satellite academy already has established programs.

Torres said Las Cruces can expect to see the satellite program up and running at Arrowhead Center within the next 18 months or so.

The main academy location is not expected to be complete until 2023.

The academy will offer classes in film, editing, photography, screenwriting, sound and other aspects of film, television and gaming production that expand current CMI and CMT offerings. Bilingual education will be

emphasized and students will be fast-tracked into jobs with professional experience already under their belt, officials said.

Torres said DACC has about 400 students taking classes related to film production. With CMT moving locations, the community college's arts and architecture programs may benefit from expanding within the existing campus building. She called the satellite announcement a "win-win-win."

"New Mexico has just smashed all previous records with \$855 million into film and television production spent (in the recent fiscal year)," said Amber Dodson, director of the New Mexico Film Office. This is a 36% increase from fiscal year 2021.

This spending has brought more film productions into the state, providing higher paying jobs to New Mexicans. Productions also funnel large amounts of capital into local economies, such as monies into hotels, restaurants and small businesses.

The governor's office stated that direct spending grew from \$6.5 million in fiscal year 2021 to \$50 million last year.

"We're diversifying our economy, we're creating a path in the future — not just for young people, but for everyone. And these are other ancillary, strong, small businesses that will continue to anchor this community and every other single rural community," Lujan Grisham said.

The governor said she recently spoke with representatives of Sony, CBS and Paramount about expanding industry to New Mexico.

Marks said he shares a dream with his father-in-law — the late Tony-winner Mark Medoff — for Las Cruces to become a hub for film production.

"I'm sad he can't be here today to see it realized, but here it is. We're here now. Las Cruces has finally arrived in the film industry," Marks said.

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