ALBUQUERQUE
BUSINESS FIRST



COVER STORY

100 YEARS ON THE MOTHER ROAD

How New Mexico planned, prepared and celebrated the Route 66 Centennial

BY DYLAN ORTUNO, PAGE 18

ALBUQUERQUE BUSINESS FIRST
October 23-29, 2026
Vol. 33, No. 37

6565 Americas Parkway NE, Suite 770
Albuquerque, NM 87110

THE LIST

This week's List ranks banks by local deposit shares across New Mexico markets.

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HOTEL

Hyatt Place Uptown to get full renovation

Hotel leadership is also planning to add a new craft cocktail bar in a former conference room space.

MICHAEL COOK, 8

COVER STORY

HAPPY BIRTHDAY ROUTE 66

New Mexico cities along Route 66 have invested millions of dollars in events and initiatives to celebrate the Mother Road's centennial.

BY DYLAN ORTUNO
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A display of Route 66 signs outside an Art Deco-style diner on Historic Route 66 (Central Avenue) in the Sycamore District of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Albuquerque is an attraction for Route 66 tourists in New Mexico.

KRISTY GRAYBILL



The Mother Road's official 100th birthday is Nov. 11, but tourism leaders have been planning Route 66 Centennial celebrations for years.

"The Route 66 Centennial definitely didn't sneak up on us," New Mexico Tourism Department Communications Director Cody Johnson said. "We knew this was coming for a number of years, so from our perspective at the state Tourism Department, we understood that we needed to start planning and supporting communities years ago."

Johnson said the state's Tourism Department has "probably been actively working on the centennial for the past four years, at least." They promoted communities through cooperative advertising models and supported infrastructure and revitalization investments.

As part of that support, the state dedicated $2,819,097 to communities statewide with their Centennial Grant Program: $1,513,000 in 2024 and $1,306,097 in 2025.

"We know that communities across New Mexico's stretch of Route 66 are excited to invest in the centennial so we can share our slice of the Mother Road with the rest of the world," New Mexico Tourism Department Acting Secretary Lancing Adams said at the time of the October 2024 grant announcement. "This grant program was created to provide flexibility in how we can support destinations that best fit their needs – whether it's infrastructure development, promotion or special event support."

Funding for the grant program came from two special appropriations to the New Mexico Tourism Department from the 2024 and 2025 legislative sessions.

"Tucumcari MainStreet is thrilled to have been awarded a Route 66 Centennial grant for our wayfinding

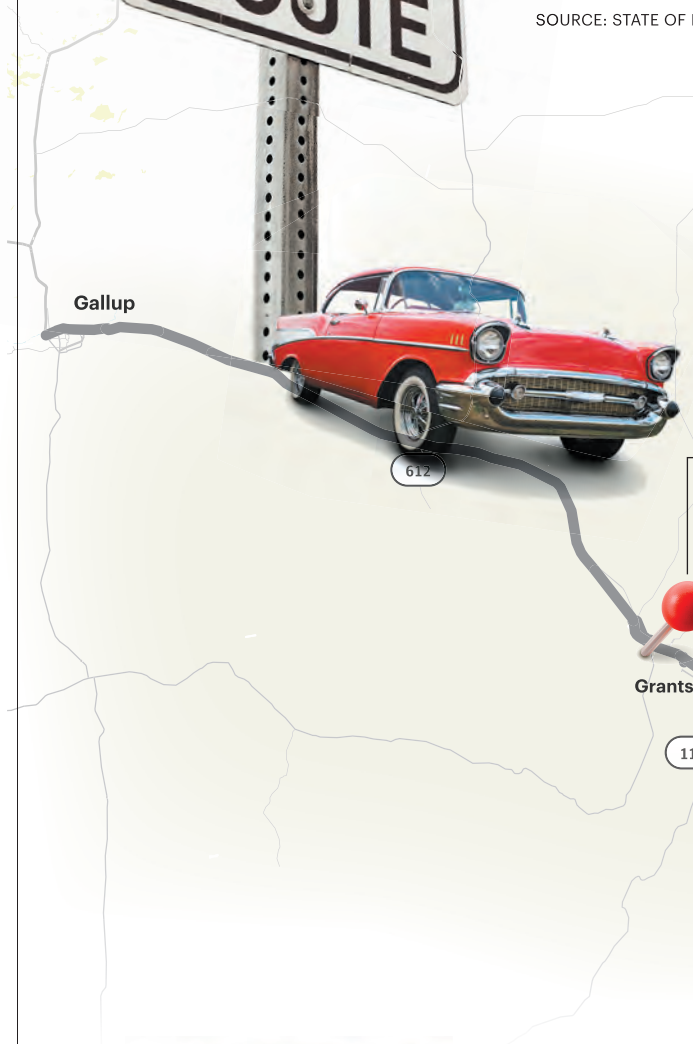
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GRANT MONEY ALONG ROUTE 66

The state dedicated $2,819,097 to communities statewide with their Centennial Grant Program: $1,513,000 in 2024 and $1,306,097 in 2025. Funding for the grant program came from two special appropriations to the New Mexico Tourism Department from the 2024 and 2025 Legislative Sessions. The grant program awarded $200,000 of the $2,819,097 two-year total to the special events below. The rest of the funding was spread across marketing and promotions grants ($1,152,538) and infrastructure grants ($1,466,559).

SOURCE: STATE OF NEW MEXICO





GENERAL MILLS

SNACKS FOR THE ROAD

The Tourism Department even secured a national partnership with Chex Mix, which featured New Mexico on some of its packaging.

"We were actually able to secure a partnership with Chex Mix to feature New Mexico in some of their packaging," Johnson said. "That was a fun kind of creative partnership that ... kind of manifested from some of our partners and included a sweepstakes of an all-inclusive trip to New Mexico."

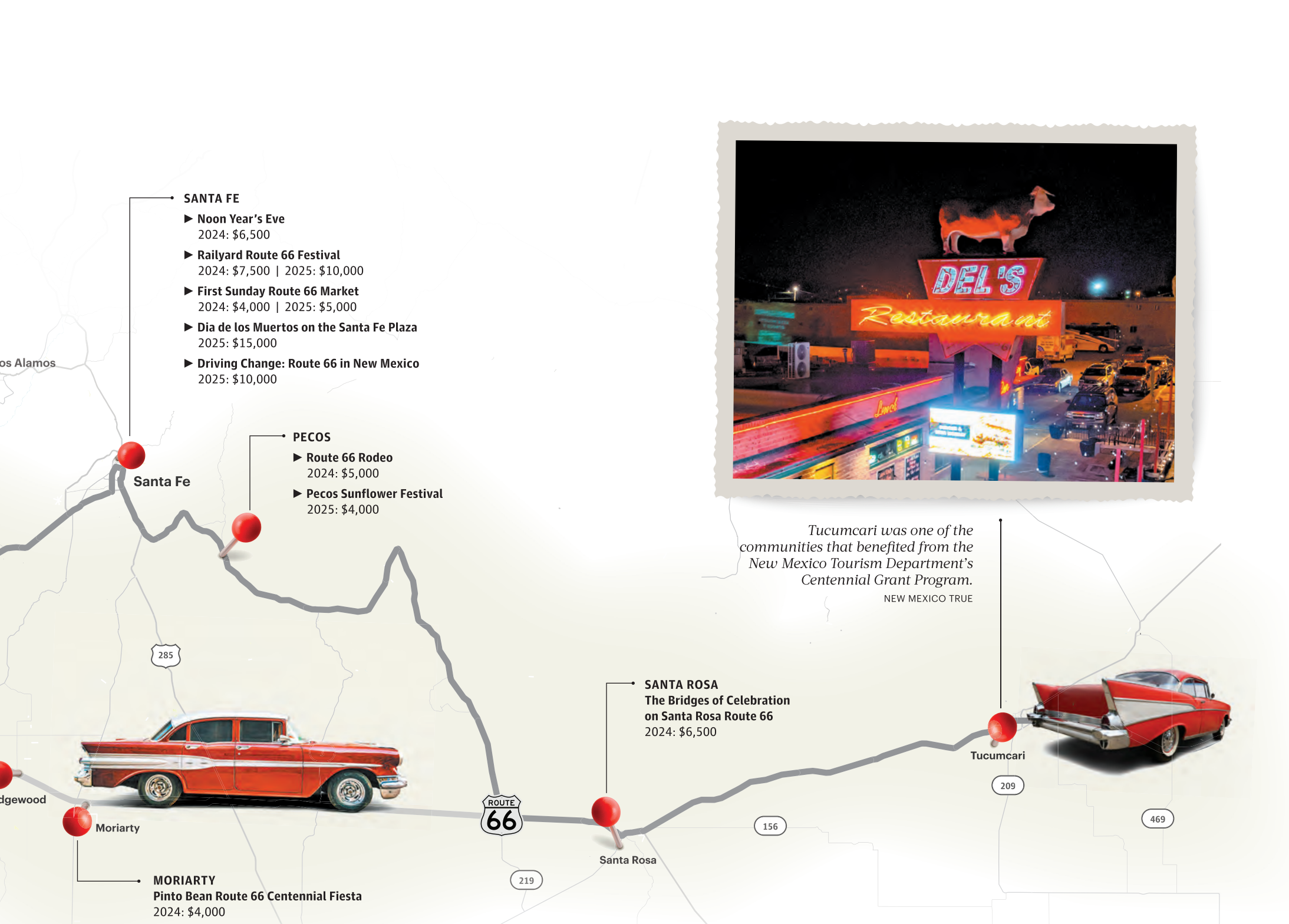
The special edition package was sold in convenience stores across New Mexico.

Johnson said that the partnership itself did not cost anything for the department.

"It was purely promotional," he added. "Chex Mix was interested in the creative opportunity. The only kind of transaction that went down was just on the sweepstakes side (from) the partners, the local amenities and experience providers that offered elements or parts to the sweepstakes."

ALBUQUERQUE

- **Route 66 Summerfest**
  2024: $10,000 | 2025: $10,000
- **Gathering of Nations**
  2024: $20,000 | 2025: $20,000
- **Mothership on the Mother Road**
  2024: $4,000
- **Get your PICKS on Route 66**
  2025: $20,000
- **New Mexico State Fair**
  2025: $30,000
- **Route 66 Centennial Elementary School Program**
  2025: $10,000



Tucumcari was one of the communities that benefited from the New Mexico Tourism Department's Centennial Grant Program.

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project, which will be a vital asset for visitors during the Route 66 Centennial and beyond," Tucumcari MainStreet Executive Director Connie Loveland said after being named a 2024 Infrastructure Grant awardee. "The new way finding signage will not only help guide travelers through town but will also connect them to our heritage, encourage them to explore, and engage with local attractions and businesses."

The Tourism Department helped communities all across the state prepare for the centennial through how they've marketed and advertised each respective community.

"We know that communities across New Mexico's stretch of Route 66 are excited to invest in the centennial so we can share our slice of the Mother Road with the rest of the world."

Lancing Adams, New Mexico Tourism Department Acting Secretary, at the time of an October 2024 grant announcement aimed at the centennial

"There are two main kind of spaces where prospective travelers would encounter (centennial) marketing," Johnson said. "One is through cooperative marketing options through the grants, which means that we worked with communities like Tucumcari, Grants, Gallup, Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Santa Rosa on marketing and advertising kind of shares in the brand and identity of each of those regions, allowing us to be a little more targeted."

For example, New Mexico True helped promote Grants and Gallup across the Arizona border while they helped promote Tucumcari and Santa Rosa across the Texas panhandle.

Nationally, the state's tourism department did some ad campaigns targeting "major fly markets, which includes some major metros in Texas as well as Denver, Phoenix and most major metros in California," according to Johnson.

Johnson did not disclose how much the Tourism Department put into Route 66 advertising campaigns in the above markets.

Cities across New Mexico also launched their own efforts to celebrate the centennial ⁒.



ABF ILLUSTRATION; PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES; NEW MEXICO TRUE; EL VADO

Albuquerque embraced the centennial by installing a number of art installations across its stretch of Route 66, the longest urban stretch nationwide according to Visit Albuquerque.

The city's Route 66 Remixed project, made in partnership with Meow Wolf and Refract Studio, brought approximately 20 public art installations and site-specific digital activations across an 18-mile stretch.

The installations ranged from building-sized murals to car-themed sculptures.

The state of New Mexico allocated $250,000 to the city of Albuquerque for "Art Installation along Route 66," according to previous Albuquerque Business First reporting.

Local businesses were able to feature some of the art on or near their property, such as M'Tucci's Bar Roma at 3222 Central Ave. SE with the new mural "Route 66 Throne," created by Albuquerque artist Nazario Sandoval.

Beyond the art, the city also celebrated the centennial by opening a new Visit Albuquerque Route 66 Crossroads Information Station and hosting a special Route 66 "Globito Glow in the Village." The latter took place on Oct. 5, during the 2026 Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, and featured the launch of 66 globitos – miniature-sized, remote-controlled balloons – in the air.

$250K

The state of New Mexico allocated $250,000 to the city of Albuquerque for "Art Installation along Route 66."



DYLAN ORTUNO

The University of New Mexico celebrated Route 66's centennial with an art mural.



BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG SIGN

The city also notably installed a $328,800 sign on Central Avenue and Tramway Boulevard in July 2026. The funding came from a New Mexico Tourism Department Destination Forward grant.

Wilson & Company, a locally-based engineering and architecture firm, finalized the architectural and engineering design for $10,665. Funds for this came from a GO Bond focused on District 9 community enhancements, according to the city of Albuquerque.

"This sign will be a new icon in Albuquerque that combines art and engineering while recognizing the importance of neon to historic Route 66," Department of Municipal Development Director Jennifer Turner said.

DYLAN ORTUNO

MORE EVENTS TO COME

Albuquerque still has events to come this year celebrating the centennial. Chrome and Neon at 100, an event by the Route 66 Road Ahead Partnership, will bring cars and celebrations to Enchanted Trails RV Park and Trading Post at 14305 Central Ave. NW in Albuquerque on Nov. 7.

The location has been operating since the 1940s, then as Hill Top Trading Post and will be the home to a time capsule, filled with local items donated by a variety local organizations, businesses and individuals, that will be buried during the event. There is no cap for attendees, and the event is free to the public.



ABF ILLUSTRATION; NEW MEXICO TRUE

Farther west, Gallup similarly celebrated the Mother Road's centennial with a handful of events and art installations.

"I would say our flagship event was at the end of July," Gallup Tourism and Marketing Manager Matt Robinson said. "It's called Route 66 Rides. It was a three-day event with balloon flights, classic cars, music and food taking place all throughout the city, primarily historic downtown Gallup."

The event culminated with classic cars driving through a tunnel of fire made by balloon basket burners.

Robinson personally estimated the event drew in 5,000 to 7,000 people this year. Event participants hailed from all over the country.

"We had classic cars coming from Colorado, Arizona, all over the place, including a really great presence of our local community," Robinson said. "They really stepped up. They were stoked about it, and I think they added that Gallup flair to the event you can't replicate anywhere."

Like most of the state, Gallup started preparing art installations in celebration of the centennial years back.

"Going back to 2024, we got our first Route 66 specific mural added to our walking tour for murals that we have in historic downtown Gallup," Robinson said. "We already had 25 to 30 murals in place and we were like, 'Hey, the centennial is coming up. Let's get a Route 66 mural installed.'"

The mural, created by local artist Chris Acevedo, was painted on the city's visitor center.

The city went on to add three more Route 66-specific murals across Gallup from 2024 to July 2025 in anticipation of the centennial.



Gallup's 2026 Route 66 Rides featured a classic car drive through a tunnel of hot air balloon heaters.

NEW MEXICO TRUE

The city also supported an art installation made by local artist Robert Wilson and unveiled earlier this year. The art is a 10-foot-tall, 12-foot-wide steel jackrabbit made out of a 1953 Chevy Bel Air and is located at the We The People Park at 900 Joseph M Montoya Blvd.

"It's a big roadside attraction we have installed in our community now," Robinson added.

In total, the city invested an estimated $50,000 toward the murals and art installations, according to Robinson.

Robinson did not immediately have data on how much Gallup spent in total across Route 66-related events in 2026.

Going forward, Robinson sees the centennial's events and new citywide updates as a means to keep tourism coming.

"We're hearing in our industry that the centennial isn't even going to be our busiest year," Robinson said. "And the reason we're hearing this is apparently, there's a lot of people in Europe who want to come see Route 66 but were afraid it is going to be too busy, with the centennial. ... So, we're hearing people are still booking trips. They're still interested in coming, and they're planning to do so a couple years out. We're anticipating this kind of fervor and buzz is going to continue for at least a couple more years."