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New Mexico Economic Development Secretary Jon Barela Kicks Off Historic Theatre Initiative at Clayton's Luna Theater

Initiative to update historic theatres in rural downtowns with 3D digital media, infrastructure improvements so they may continue to be vital economic anchors in traditional commercial districts

CLAYTON - Today New Mexico Economic Development Secretary Jon Barela kicked off the MainStreet Historic Theater Initiative, an investment in rural downtown theaters to help upgrade movie equipment and make infrastructure improvements. As part of this initiative, the nearly 100 year old Luna Theatre in Clayton was transformed into an advanced digital cinema while preserving and restoring historic architectural details. With the movie industry's switch this year from film to digital media, many of these theaters could not afford the conversion and would sit vacant without assistance from the state. The Historic Theater Initiative is the only MainStreet program of its kind in the nation.

"As I toured main streets throughout the state, I discovered that many of our historic theaters -which are local treasures - were in serious need of repair," Secretary Barela said. "We wanted to do something not only to bring these theaters back to life but to help revitalize traditional areas of commerce as destinations for families to shop, dine and see a movie."

At Secretary Barela's request the Economic Development Department staff developed a plan to support and partner with municipalities to upgrade, reopen the doors and project movies at historic theaters in addition to hosting other performances and community events.

"We are grateful for the efforts by the Economic Development Department to keep these theaters from going dark by assisting the conversion to digital media," said Shirley Carter, president of the Clayton MainStreet. "In doing so, it assists in maintaining the economic vitality of the district that spills over to the other businesses in downtown."

In addition to the \$100,000 allocation for the digital equipment and sound surround system, the state provided additional capital outlay funding for essential infrastructure improvements. In total, the state provided \$630,000 to the Luna Theater project.

The Historic Luna Theater is a property of the town of Clayton and managed by Clayton MainStreet. It operates today as one of New Mexico's oldest movie houses and is the state's best preserved theater from the silent movie era. Merchant and rancher Morris Herzstein built the theater and adjacent business block in 1916 after a disastrous fire wiped out his headquarters mercantile store. Built in a unique fusion of classical and Mission style architectural elements, the Luna's façades survive intact.

The Economic Development Department has plans to expand the Historic Theater Initiative to other rural, historic theaters

across the state. For information on the program or for theater eligibility, contact Rich Williams, director of the New Mexico MainStreet program, at 505-827-0168 or rich.williams@state.nm.us.

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