

MY VIEW:
JOHN F. ANDREWS

A focal point for the Railyard

I share *The New Mexican's* enthusiasm for the latest addition to Santa Fe's vibrant arts scene; moviegoers will be delighted by the Violet Crown Cinema ("Santa Fe Railyard comes of age," Our View, April 26).

But I'd like to think that our beautiful Railyard Park and Plaza will be regarded as complete only when it provides another attraction that visitors expect to find when they venture into the district's historic depot: a museum to celebrate an extraordinary partnership, a bold venture that made the Southwest a globally renowned destination and inspired *The Harvey Girls*, a resonant film whose popular theme song immortalized "The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe."

I love the displays in the New Mexico History Museum that touch on this fascinating legacy. I'm delighted by the emphasis that is now being placed on Fred Harvey and his company's role in creating today's hospitality industry. And I'm charmed by the museum's inclusion of posters and magazine ads that bear AT&SF's iconic logo: a cross-and-circle motif with intriguing similarities to the Zia sun symbol that adorns our state flag.

But based on discussions I've had with railroad executives, model-train buffs, preservation experts, and civic and political leaders, not to mention nostalgic oldsters who recall what it was like to dine on the Super Chief and marvel at the vistas to be seen from the train's classic observation car, I'm now persuaded that we'd all benefit from an additional, more thematically focused, museum in the complex that is now being managed by the Santa Fe Railyard Community Corp.

Whether the museum I envisage should be an extension of the state's New Mexico History Museum or an unaffiliated institution to be supported by a combination of public and private funds is, of course, a matter for the corporation to address. All I wish to do at this point is suggest that it be designed to transport viewers back to an era when the most appealing way to experience the Land of Enchantment was to obey a nattily attired conductor when he cried, "All aboard!"

A Railyard museum near the depot would foster a deeper appreciation of how Santa Fe became "Santa Fe." This is a complex story, and one with ironies aplenty; but natives and newcomers alike would find it amusing. They'd also enjoy learning about the resonance of a "brand" that continues to be applied to everything from South Korean SUVs on American highways to tuna-melt bagel sandwiches in London's venerable Paddington Station.

I'm convinced that a bustling Railyard museum, particularly if it accommodated "rolling stock" such as locomotives, Pullman cars and cabooses, would be a magnet for both new and returning visitors, not only in the summer months but throughout the year. It would entice many of its patrons to linger in our city for an extra day or two, thereby augmenting the revenues for local galleries, restaurants, gift shops, performing-arts venues and hotels.

And perhaps most important, it would stimulate further initiatives, among them new forms of creativity, entrepreneurship and civic engagement. I can't think of a better way to revitalize a capital that could use a new burst of energy.

John F. Andrews is a Santa Fean whose publications include articles in The Atlantic and The New York Times about the Civil War as a Shakespearean tragedy.