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Tourism has emerged as a major economic engine in society.

Taking control of the brave new world of tourism

In the 1932 novel *Brave New World*, a futuristic society controlled the minds and lives of people with scientific precision. Author Aldous Huxley spared only New Mexico from this regimentation. Our state served as a curiosity where one could visit and experience something outside “normal” society.

To some extent, that is how New Mexico is viewed even today. The Land of Enchantment theme speaks to the other-worldly qualities visitors from across the country and across the seas expect within our boundaries.

From the time of late-19th century anthropological sojourns, turn-of-the-century Harvey train tours and early 20th century artist migrations, our state’s people have been sometimes willing and sometimes unwilling partners in the tourism industry. While viewing the natives sounds interesting, does being viewed sound as good? In fact in Huxley’s book, one of the New Mexico natives ends up destroying himself when he experiences too much of the tourists’ world.

There is no better way to empower New Mexicans with regard to tourism than with education. Tourism has emerged as a major economic engine in society. It is because of the enormous economic impact of tourism that NMSU’s College of Agriculture and Home Economics has become active through Extension, research and teaching programs in the industry.

In 1988, we initiated a hospitality and tourism teaching program that later became the hotel, restaurant and tourism management department. Two former state Tourism Department secretaries have served as heads of our program. This academic program has been a great oppor-

tunity for New Mexicans to define their role in the tourism industry. Great examples abound, including 1998 graduate Juanita Johnson, who now runs the Acoma Casino and Hotel. She is a great contributor to her community by building capital that is invested in basic services for the pueblo’s people. We hope to soon launch a distance education component from this department to make tourism education even more accessible to New Mexicans.

Since 1992, we have been directly involved in building tourism from the ground up in rural communities in the state through the Rural Economic Development Through Tourism project initiated by former U.S. Rep. Joe Skeen. We work with local community leaders to empower them to define how they want to develop tourism in places that haven’t experienced the tourism boom. The project is a dollars-and-cents success, but more importantly it is a way for local people to have a role in how they are viewed and how the rewards are captured.

Even I have taken an active role in tourism by serving on the board of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum. It has led me to take on a role as a guide on ranch tours and help define how the cowboy culture is viewed.

In all of these instances, our college has worked to move New Mexicans away from being props, pawns and captives in tourism to being proactive partners in an industry that promises tremendous rewards. Support for this ground-up education will assure that New Mexicans will make tourism work for their best well-being. **R**