

Beautiful Ruidoso

AMONG TOP 10 SMALL TOWN VACATION SITES IN U.S.

Nestled in the green pines of the southern tip of the Rockies, Ruidoso has long been one of the nation's best kept vacation secrets.

Until now, that is.

When *Woman's Day* magazine hit the streets this summer, millions of Americans got their first hint of

colade, naming the southern New Mexico city as one of the top 10 small town vacation sites in the United States.

That, incidentally, was part of the magazine's top 100 best United States summer vacation sites.

Woman's Day touted Ruidoso as one of the country's great sports vacations at bargain prices, sharing the ex-

clusive listing with resorts such as Palm Springs, Calif.; Sun Valley, Idaho; Aspen, Colo.; Cape Cod, Mass.; and Club Med in Florida.

Vacation magazine meanwhile ranked Ruidoso, in a category of resort communities with a population of 1,000 to 8,500, right along with Branson, Mo.; Mountain View, Ark.; Cody, Wyo.; and New Glarus, Wis.

"It appears our advertising campaign has paid off," says Joan Bailey, executive director of the Ruidoso Valley Chamber of Commerce.

"We've had so many phone inquiries that we've brought in a part-time person to help handle calls," says Bailey.

Ruidoso, a town with only a small industry and commerce base, has

capitalized on what it does best: make visitors (some for a short visit and others for a lifetime) feel at home in the area best known for its nationally renowned Ruidoso Downs where the world's greatest quarter horses race each summer.

More than 5,200 walked into the chamber's office during the first five months of the year requesting information about Ruidoso and surrounding

communities.

Another 10,900 requested information over the telephone and 7,100 mailed in requests for information from all 50 states with the greatest number coming from Texas, Arkansas, New Mexico and Arizona.

Along with the deluge were requests from 22 foreign countries including Canada, Panama, Nigeria, Australia, Spain, Chile and Kuwait.

"Our advertising stresses that you can come to Ruidoso for a day or a lifetime," says Bailey, who has lived in Ruidoso for 16 years.

"It's a great place to visit, a safe place to raise a family, and a wonderful place to retire," she says.

"It's a pearl surrounded by a sea of desert," says Ruidoso Mayor Victor Alonzo without a hint of modesty about his town.

"We are positioned in a state that for whatever reason is popular right now," says Bailey.

Located on the eastern slopes of the Sacramento Mountains on Highway 70 on an oasis between Roswell and Tularosa, N.M.,

**The secret
is out!**

A community profile
written by Aleta Walther



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And the summer edition of *Vacation* magazine tossed out its own ac-

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Ruidoso: The secret is out

Ruidoso has a lot going for it.

Ruidoso, and neighboring Ruidoso Downs and Alto, are bordered by the Lincoln National Forest on the east and north and the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation on the south.

It's 191 miles from Albuquerque; 124 miles from El Paso; 288 miles from Amarillo; and 369 miles from Tucson.

New Mexico, in fact, is so popular that it is the first state to have a permanent exhibit in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

Opened last month, the exhibit examines the dynamics of New Mexico's culturally diverse population.

The exhibition shows how American Indians and Hispanic American people have endured in New Mexico while resisting successive efforts by dominant cultures to absorb them. It demonstrates how the two cultures have survived while achieving coexistence within the Anglo-American culture.

And that, in part, is the charm of the Ruidoso area.

Welcome mat out

BETWEEN MAY and September, Ruidoso's population more than quadruples as the warm days and cool evenings beckon heat-wearers, Texans, New Mexicans, Mexican Nationals and others to the picturesque mountain area.

Also enticed by the mild summers are thousands of horsemen who race their steeds at Ruidoso Downs, annually pumping millions into the local economy.

Located just east of Ruidoso on Highway 70, Ruidoso Downs is the nation's leading quarter horse track and among the top thoroughbred tracks in the Southwest.

The \$2 million All American Futurity, the world's richest quarter horse race, is an annual event.

"Ruidoso Downs has always been an anchor for the community," says Bailey, the executive director of the Ruidoso

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doso Valley Chamber of Commerce.

"It pulls in a lot of horse racing fans, who once they got here, need places to stay and eat.

"It has a double impact in that it creates jobs, even though they may mostly be seasonal."

Although there is much more to Ruidoso now than just horse racing, Bailey says that was not the case 20 to 30 years ago.

"At one time, the only awareness generated about Ruidoso was through the track's advertising programs," she says. "Over the last 30 years the track has brought credibility to the valley while attracting other events, activities and businesses to Ruidoso."

This year, Ruidoso Downs will award more than \$8 million in winning purses while generating millions of dollars more for the village, county and state through pari-mutuel, property and sales taxes.

In 1991, about 350,000 fans wagered more than \$40 million during the track's 78-day season. About \$31 million of the total wagered were returned to the public in the form of winning bets. The state received about \$225,000 in pari-mutuel tax.

During the off season (October through April), Ruidoso Downs employs about 30 full time workers, but the payroll swells to 450 during racing.

Ruidoso Downs racetrack and the

Mescalero Apache Tribe are the area's biggest employers.

Like the villages of Ruidoso and Ruidoso Downs, Ruidoso Downs racetrack has felt the effects of the oil bust and the recession.

Attendance and dollars wagered at the track have been dropping over the last two years, despite millions of dollars in improvements to the grand-

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Ruidoso: Recovering lost tourism and industry dollars after the 1970s oil bust

stands and barn area.

"Ruidoso Downs is like most other racing jurisdictions," says Max Johnson, Ruidoso Downs general manager. "We are struggling to attract fans."

Ruidoso Downs may not be reveling in the glory it experienced 10 years ago, but Johnson says track owners R.D. Hubbard and Ed Allred are committed to Ruidoso Downs and the surrounding communities.

Not only does Hubbard own controlling interest in Ruidoso Downs race-track, he also owns substantial interests in The Links at

Sierra Blanca, an 18-hole municipal golf course in Ruidoso; and the Rui-

doso Horse Sales Company in Glencoe.

Ruidoso is also home for the R.D. Hubbard and Joan Dale Hubbard Foundation, a non-profit entity dedicated to improving educational opportunities for students which funds the new Anne C. Stradling Museum of the Horse at Ruidoso Downs. The museum opened last May.

"All of those things are geared to bringing people to Ruidoso, to make it a destination point," says Johnson.

"That is the most important goal for us to achieve, to make Ruidoso a year-round destination point, whether it be for horse racing, skiing or anything else we have to offer as a community," says Johnson. "What is good for Ruidoso is good for Ruidoso Downs and vice versa."

Ruidoso has always been a vacation destination. However, with this summer's opening of the Ruidoso Civic Events Center, Ruidoso is now a destination for businessmen and women.

"The Civic Center will propel Ruidoso into the convention and exhibitors market," said Alonzo.

"These events bring a lot of money to town."

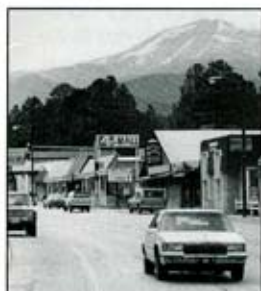
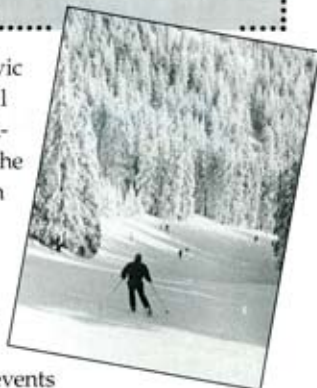
When the oil bust of the mid 1980s crippled Texas and Oklahoma, Ruidoso found itself limping.

"We hit bottom and now we're in our third year of increasing gross receipt activity," Alonzo says. "It's fragile because it's only increasing two to three percent per year."

NMBJ

Aleta Walther is a free lance writer living in Ruidoso.

Photos: At left, Main Street, Ruidoso. Above, Ski Apache.



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