

3 Area History

East Gateway has a rich history. Its agricultural past, evidence of early Spanish settlement and strong Route 66 ties can be celebrated now and into the future with public art installations, neon elements, and historical signs.

People from many different cultures lived here thousands of years ago and continue to do so now. The Tijeras Canyon contains evidence of 9,000 years of human presence. The archeological site of an 18th century Spanish settlement lies in Singing Arrow Park. Remnants of a Tijeras Arroyo dam and flume that date back to early 20th century once provided irrigation to farmlands in an area now occupied by Kirtland Air Force Base.

Early Albuquerque settlers travelled through this gateway to other settlements, pastures, and forests in Tijeras Pass and the Sandia Mountains. In 1937 Route 66 was aligned in New Mexico to run east/west on Central Avenue, East Gateway's spine. "Dust bowl" migrants used this route to reach California. Between 1941 and 1945, Route 66 was an important highway for transporting supplies and personnel for World War II efforts.

In the 1944 Albuquerque City Directory, there were no listings east of Louisiana Boulevard, but by 1958 the Albuquerque City Directory listed a variety of businesses on Central between Wyoming Boulevard and the Tijeras Pass. Some businesses were the kind often located at the edge of towns (a wrecking yard, fruit market, tree nursery and drive-in theater). Others served tourists (a trading post, curio shops, motels, the Western Skies Hotel under construction, gas stations, cafes, restaurants, trailer courts and apartments.)

In 1969 Interstate 40 was completed along the north end of the City, replacing Route 66 as a cross-town and cross-country roadway. In 1985 Route 66 was decommissioned and in 1999 Congress passed legislation to create a Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program.

Sales lots for cars, recreational vehicles, boats, and mobile homes dominated Central after Interstate 40 completion displaced tourist-oriented businesses. Only inexpensive short-stay motels were built where Central, Tramway and I-40 converge. During the 2008-9 national economic downturn several sales lots were vacated. These businesses had few permanent structures making land redevelopment an achievable option for East Gateway.

Residential development has been filling in the vacant spaces surrounding Central Avenue and other major East Gateway streets since the 1950's, with the most recent residential development at the southern end of Juan Tabo Boulevard south of the arroyo. Residential infill development may continue along Central Avenue as it continues to transform into a destination for surrounding neighborhoods.

Area military operations date back to the era of World War II. Since then, Kirtland Air Force Base, Sandia National Laboratories and more recently, Sandia

Science and Technology Park, have emerged as an important employment base at the southern edge of East Gateway.

The following historic buildings are still found in East Gateway.



The Enchanted Mesa Trading Post

The Enchanted Mesa Trading Post (9612 Central Avenue SE) is a specialty store and residence built in the Spanish-Pueblo Revival Architectural style. Margarete Chase, wife of an Indian art dealer and John Hill designed and built it in 1948. The building is a significant reminder of Historic Route 66 strip development designed to serve tourists after World War II. Many Albuquerque roadside buildings from this period were built in this style to offer tourists a ready identification with the Southwest and regional Indian arts they sought.



Neon Sign for La Puerta Lodge

La Puerta Lodge (9710 Central SE) is a motel built in the Southwest Vernacular style. Constructed in 1949, it consists of three one-story buildings with flat roofs, white stucco walls, parapets and southwest vernacular details. It has a striking neon sign. La Puerta Lodge is one of the best examples of a largely unaltered tourist court remaining along Route 66 in New Mexico. The neon sign is also historically registered.



Luna Lodge

Luna Lodge (9119 Central NE) is a motel built in segments from 1949 – 1952 in the Southwest Vernacular style. At the time, it was one of the easternmost motels along the East Central commercial strip. The Luna Lodge contains a café across the court from its office.