



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## Editorial

### **After the mine closure, what's next for the village of Questa?**

*The Taos News, 6/12/2014*

The village of Questa got hit in the gut when Chevron permanently closed its mine June 2.

Chevron cited poor market prices for the molybdenum mined there and increasing operational costs as reasons for the closure.

The economic ripple effect of that decision will be enormous. Three hundred people have lost good-paying jobs. Business that supplied the mine and those patronized by employees will be impacted. Local governments will see a substantial loss in tax revenue.

We foresee an exodus of people as they try to find employment elsewhere. The mine and its nearby tailings facility — a Superfund site — will undergo a federally mandated cleanup expected to cost as much as \$800 million. The cleanup will generate jobs and protect the Red River from further pollution, but it's unclear when those jobs will be offered.

After decades of ups and downs, this looks like the end of major mining in Questa. The mine had layoffs in 1971, 1973, 1986, 1999, and 2009. In 1992, then-owner Molycorp announced the mine was done for.

But this time we are not counting on the mine to reopen. The best and most accessible ore has long been removed. Current rules for closure now mean taking permanent steps — like removing buildings and other infrastructure — to shut the operation down.

We believe it is best for Questa to become more than a company town.

Yes, things look grim. But we also know Questenos are a tough and determined lot when faced with a difficult challenge.

In 2008 the 175-year-old San Antonio de Padua Church was closed after its walls partially collapsed. The Santa Fe Archdiocese strongly resisted any appeal made by parishioners to take over its reconstruction.

But parishioners persevered three years until the archdiocese gave its permission. Now, volunteers are rebuilding San Antonio de Padua adobe brick by adobe brick. Their hope is to reopen the church by Christmas.

We hope Questenos can apply this same level of commitment in deciding the future of their community.

Since Chevron's announcement, we have heard village leaders mention the possibility of making Questa a destination for recreational tourism. This is a promising idea. Certainly, its proximity to the R'o Grande del Norte National Monument is a plus. Current efforts to restore the Red River could play a key role. It would also be a cause behind which village residents could rally.

Chevron is dedicating \$320,000 per year for the next eight years plus another million in 2015 to help Questa's post-mining economy. It plans to offer other assistance.

We urge the village to continue to use this money to make Questa desirable to those who want to fish, hike and explore its wilds. If the federal government eventually builds a visitor center for the monument, Questa would be in a great position for its location.

Questa residents no doubt have their own ideas to help their community. We encourage village officials to hold a series of town hall meetings to hear what they have to say.

After all the people who have the most to gain or lose are the people who call Questa home.

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