



THE TAOS NEWS

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My Turn

Lack of airport results in smaller facility opening in Questa

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In July 2014 my partners and I filed an LLC in Texas. As a new start-up company we first compiled statistics by choosing our top 10 states and comparing the taxes, infrastructure, ease of doing business, state regulations, schools and transportation. After completing this due diligence we settled on San Marcos, Texas, as the perfect site location.

Then Chevron closed the mine and one partner, who is local to this area, petitioned the other directors to consider opening the facility here in Taos County instead. Because we have investors to whom we are accountable her task was to find ways to even the playing field with regard to the cost of doing business in New Mexico instead of Texas. And for the most part she was able to achieve this through incentives offered by the state and with the help of many government officials who are truly concerned about Questa.

However, 70 percent of our current core group are engineers. (This percentage will change as we hire new employees) This core group are the ones writing code and designing software and hardware products. Members of this group will need to be near to our place of business to do the final testing and support continuing research and development of spin-off products. We need this group in order for our endeavor to be successful.

The product we are manufacturing will be audited and inspected by consumer and regulatory agencies. These inspectors and auditors need to travel to our facilities. They travel long distances to get to our facility and spend long hours at the facility when making their inspections. They stay in hotels and eat in restaurants.

On occasion we may bring in consultants with various specialties. Their rate of pay is in part determined by the ease of getting to the facility and the amenities in the surrounding area. In short, if it is a hardship for them to get to us and the nearest restaurants (not fast food) are miles away their price goes up. A lot. Our cost of doing business goes up exponentially.

After crossing the country by plane the last thing any of these folks want to do is drive an additional three-five hours from a major airport to Taos. It is for that reason that our project almost didn't make it to Questa.

Instead, we opted to compromise with our local partner by choosing to open the assembly portion of our company (a low-to-nonexistent carbon foot print, light-manufacturing facility) in Questa. The departments requiring needed engineering skills will be located in Albuquerque. If Taos had an airport we could have moved our entire operation to this area.

I can only speak for our company when I say the primary reason we made this compromise and plan to open in Questa is because our partner lives here. She saw her friends and neighbors moving away to find work so she fought for Questa. I wonder how many other prospective businesses would have done the same.

Transportation was the number one failure for Taos County. If our engineers could have flown directly into Taos our entire facility could have been opened here paving the way for creation of high skilled jobs. Taos, you need to consider expanding your airport to attract more businesses. And provide better opportunities for your youth to grow into high skilled jobs.

Karon Fowler is the director of regulatory and software for Portal Locks, LLC.