

## Cultural groundbreaking Southern Utes to begin building center, museum

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Arts & Entertainment Editor



Courtesy of Jones & Jones Architects and  
Landscape Architects, Ltd.

An architect's rendition shows the Southern Ute Indian Tribe's Cultural Center and Museum. Ground will be broken for the museum at 10 a.m. today.

### If you go

The groundbreaking for the Southern Ute Indian Tribe's Cultural Center and Museum, including blessings and tribal dances, will take place from 10 a.m. to noon today at Colorado Highway 172 and County Road 517, south of the Sky Ute Casino, near Ignacio.

It took 14 years in the planning. Others say 24. With the last six years devoted to sharpening up the specifics. After all that, today sees the groundbreaking of the long-awaited Cultural Center and Museum of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe.

The 53,000-square-foot building and surrounding gardens are expected to open in 2010. The tribe estimates that the final price tag will top \$35 million.

"I've only been here eight years but board members I know have been planning this for at least 14 years," said Lynn Brittner, the center's executive director, by phone on Thursday. "Having taken so many years, it's truly been planned with a Ute perspective."

Brittner said that during that time, "We've heard from everyone from Head Start kids to elders." Among all the events to gather opinion, the children were once given clay and asked to make what they would think was "yukky" in a museum.

One attraction that should appeal to the young ones, Brittner said, will be that they hope they can find a tribal member to take visitors on horseback rides.

The landscaping will feature a formal meadow for gathering along with footpaths winding through a landscape of native plants and a man-made stream.

The new building will house the tribe's existing collection of more than 1,000 artifacts and provide space as the collection grows. Traveling shows and temporary exhibitions will complement the display of the permanent collection.

Brittner said the museum, in common with other tribal museums, suffers from the absence of tribal artifacts that have migrated to people's homes, private collections and museums in this country and Europe. She is hoping that people will loan or donate the artifacts back to the museum and that a fund can be established to buy others back.

Education will be a key function, said Brittner. Suitcase exhibitions are already going out to local public schools that don't begin to teach Ute history until the fourth grade and then only as part of a generic Indian history unit.

Spaces will be set aside in the new building for tribal elders and other cultural masters to teach Southern Ute traditions to new generations and to visitors. Videotaped interviews with elders will be integral to coming exhibitions.

Johnpaul Jones, of Jones & Jones Architects and Landscape Architects Ltd., wrote Thursday by e-mail that most of the exterior will be Rocky Mountain sandstone from Telluride Stone Co., and part of the roof will be a "living green roof." Jones, who is of Choctaw extraction, has been working with the Southern Utes for three years on his design.

Most of the materials used will be from the region so they don't need to be trucked far, Jones continued. The site excavation is also balanced so no soil needs to be trucked off site.

Brittner added that recycling in the new building will even extend to the furniture and carpet.

The Oakland, Calif., firm of West Office Exhibition Design will create the exhibits within the new museum.

The firm's work will emphasize that the museum isn't simply about history, but it also is about a living culture told from the people's point of view.

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