

## Santa Fe Clay ready to expand

Kiera Hay / Journal North Reporter

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Santa Fe Clay is on its way to a brand new expansion in the Santa Fe Railyard.

The popular ceramic arts studio and retailer has raised more than \$50,000 through a campaign on crowdfunding website Kickstarter.

Altogether, 328 people donated \$57,526 to Santa Fe Clay between Oct. 7 and Nov. 6. – several thousand dollars more than the studio was seeking.

“It was really our community being able to tell the world we’re an important part of the Railyard. They were backing a construction project that’s going to happen right here in the Railyard. It’s such validation,” Santa Fe Clay owner Avra Leodas said.

The expansion will be an 80-by-20-foot addition running the length of the building. Slated to have skylights, four large windows and a glass entryway on the northeast corner, it will house the company’s kilns, including a new soda kiln, and a classroom.

The expansion will face the Santa Fe Farmers Market, opening up an area that currently consists of a long, mostly blank, wall.

“I think the most wonderful thing for us is that we’re going to have visibility we never had before,” Leodas said.



Bonnie Lynch, an artist with a studio at Santa Fe Clay, does a smoke firing outside the building Friday. In the background is an excavator on the site of a new movie theater.(Eddie Moore/Journal)

“We’ve been like this mystery building. I think people walk by and have no idea what goes on. I think it’s really going to differentiate our section of the building. It will be very clearly Santa Fe Clay,” she said.

The studio will use the Kickstarter money and \$50,000 of its own funds to pay for the expansion.

Leodas said Santa Fe Clay could apply for a construction permit as soon as next week. Since the Santa Fe Clay building is technically owned by the city, the studio will seek a permit from the state.

“I think we could be pouring our construction slab before Christmas,” she said.

Santa Fe Clay includes a retail supply business, gallery and fully equipped studio, and is home to 20 resident ceramic artists.

It offers year-round workshops and classes.

The studio has been a part of the Railyard area since 1974, although its existence during the past several years has been marred by uncertainty.

At one point, it was thought Santa Fe Clay would move out of the Railyard. To pave the way for another potential developer, the Santa Fe Railyard Community Corporation, the nonprofit that runs the Railyard for the city, even got pre-emptive approval in 2010 to demolish the Santa Fe Clay building.

For the past few years, Santa Fe Clay has been on a short-term lease with SFRCC that included a clause allowing SFRCC to terminate the lease with nine months’ notice in exchange for lower rent.

Earlier this summer, however, Santa Fe Clay finally signed a long-term lease. The impetus for the move came when SFRCC chose Austin-based Violet Crown Cinemas this spring to develop a movie theater on vacant property adjacent to Santa Fe Clay’s building.

Violet Crown was the only one of four bidders that didn't want to build on Santa Fe Clay's property.

Leodas said she's been astounded by the generosity of Santa Fe Clay's local and extended community. She said she believes donors were predominately from New Mexico.

"They got grabbed by the project, and they were passionate, and they were watching it daily and asking me every single day I walked into the building," she said.