



# Route 66 Neon Signs

## New Mexico

### Cost-Share Grant Project Spotlight

Neon signs have been a hallmark of roadside commercial advertising since the 1940s. Bright, colorful, and highly individualistic, these signs introduced a revolutionary form of advertising for business owners, as well as great entertainment for travelers. Each sign was unique and handcrafted, reflecting the creativity of the business owner. In the 1950s, however, neon sign production began to diminish in favor of less expensive and easier-to-produce plastic back-lit signs. By the 2000s, hundreds of neon signs along Route 66 were badly deteriorated, replaced by new signs, or completely destroyed.

In New Mexico, the State Historic Preservation Office recognized the historical, cultural, and artistic value of its neon signs. In 2001, they applied for and received a \$50,000 cost-share grant from the National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program. With the New Mexico Route 66 Association serving as project leader, nine neon signs in six different Route 66 communities were selected for restoration. Sign owners participated actively in the restoration of their signs. The transformation of the signs was documented by KNME-TV, and subsequently broadcasted on public television. The project was cited as an example of “Best Practices” by the National Scenic Byways program, and was awarded the “2003 Outstanding Restoration Project” by *Route 66 Magazine*. Hollywood producers have also been attracted to the restored signs, and have filmed several movies at some sign property locations. Most important, the project has increased awareness of neon signs as outstanding examples of American folk art, and ignited interest in their long-term care and protection.

For more information about this project or other preservation initiatives on historic Route 66, contact:

Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program  
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Westward Ho Motel neon sign, in Albuquerque.



El Comedor Restaurant neon sign, in Moriarty.