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Teardrop Trailer Business Expands Manufacturing in New Mexico

LEDA Grant Set to Assist as Earth Traveler Relocates, Hires 23 employees

SANTA FE, N.M. – An innovative outdoor recreation business that expanded in Santa Fe to ramp up production of ultra-light camping trailers has been awarded LEDA assistance from the state Economic Development Department, Cabinet Secretary Alicia J. Keyes announced today.

Founded in Santa Fe in 2017 by Angel Irlanda and wife Laura Esteves de Irlanda, [Earth Traveler Teardrop Trailers LLC](#) (Earth Traveler) is a manufacturer of light-weight teardrop trailers. Models start at just 250 pounds and are custom-made to meet client specifications. Their travel trailer is designed for paved and smooth terrain use, but it can take some rough paths with a maximum of 13” clearance and can be towed by an array of small vehicles. Earth Traveler also plans to design an off-road version.

The business recently relocated from a family garage to a 5,000-square-foot production center at 3217 Richards Lane, Santa Fe to meet increasing demand for its trailers. Over the past year, the company had inquiries from consumers, dealers proposing to be distributors, and many interested parties from different parts of the world, including Germany, Australia, Britain, France, Turkey, as well as the United States.

The Economic Development Department (EDD) has pledged \$100,000 from the Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) job-creation fund to assist Earth Traveler as it moves forward with hiring 23 employees over the next five years. The City of Santa Fe has also pledged \$25,000 from its economic development fund to assist with company expansion and hiring.

The LEDA assistance is New Mexico’s first investment in an outdoor recreation manufacturing business. Growing the state’s outdoor economy is a priority for Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham,

who led efforts to create a new Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD) in state government and signed a bill establishing the new office in April 2019.

“Gov. Lujan Grisham’s focus on growing the outdoor economy is attracting businesses to New Mexico and giving outdoor entrepreneurs new confidence to expand and add jobs. Earth Traveler is the first outdoor manufacturer to benefit from LEDA, but it won’t be the last,” EDD Secretary Keyes said. “We are developing an ecosystem for outdoor recreation that will benefit communities across the state.”

“Laura and Angel of Earth Traveler Teardrop Trailers have built an innovative outdoor recreation manufacturing business in Santa Fe,” ORD Director Axie Navas said. “It’s an honor for EDD/ORD to invest in their vision and their industry-leading product. They are integral to the thriving, fast-growing cohort of entrepreneurs who make up the backbone of New Mexico’s 2.4-billion-dollar outdoor recreation economy.”

The company is now handcrafting its trailers, but in order to meet demand, it will look at 3D printing as well as other fabrication options with a more diverse supply chain. There is currently no delivery option for the trailers, so customers come to Santa Fe for pick up.

“We are proud to see this entrepreneur team, a graduate from one of our last Biz Mix accelerator cohorts, gain new momentum with the LEDA expansion application,” Rich Brown, City of Santa Fe Community and Economic Development Director, said. “They kick start a unique triple play for business growth in Santa Fe: outdoor recreation, tourism opportunities, and job training. Entrepreneurs are impressively resourceful. They were seeking light and durable RV trailer material that their compact car could pull, and ended up with a new business idea with support from LANL, and state and local economic development officials. The future is bright for Angel and Laura.”

The company has also qualified for \$25,840 in employee training assistance from EDD’s Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP). In August 2021, the company attended the Denver, Colorado, Outdoor Retailer Trade Show as part of an Outdoor Recreation Division initiative to raise awareness of the state’s growing outdoor economy.

“Currently, we aren’t even marketing, people are finding us by pure coincidence when they search for information, and they also personally come to Santa Fe to get their trailers,” Esteves De Irlanda said. “I think we are in the right place at the right time. New Mexico values outdoor businesses and we think that’s key to being able to invest, to expand, and hire employees.”

De Irlanda and her husband are avid campers and had their first New Mexico camping trip in 2014 at Elephant Butte Lake State Park. But the wind and the water made for a disappointing experience, so they wanted to find a lightweight camping option that would also work for families with children. She had a Fiat 500 and explored how to build a trailer weighing less than 450 pounds that could comfortably sleep a family of four.

Founder Angel Irlanda experimented with different materials in order to find something aerodynamic, weatherproof, and with a rigid solid structure. He learned about biomimicry design, where production and materials mimic natural entities.

He liked carbon fiber, but that was too expensive for the target market. With technical help from scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory, through the Small Business Assistance program, Earth Traveler is now using a combination of lightweight materials including resin reinforced feathers for a super lightweight and cost-effective core trailer structure.

The LEDA agreement is pending Santa Fe City Council approval and the money would be paid out as Earth Traveler achieves economic development benchmarks established in a Project Participation Agreement.

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Photos courtesy of Earth Traveler Teardrop Trailers, LLC

The New Mexico Economic Development Department's mission is to improve the lives of New Mexico families by increasing economic opportunities and providing a place for businesses to thrive.