

IT Partnership Makes 'Shrek' Pop

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Shrek and magic deal-maker Rumpelstiltskin.

Information Technologies at UNM is one of several partners in a new collaboration that brings Hollywood a bit closer to New Mexico. The agreement, through Cerelink Digital Media Group, the New Mexico Computing Applications Center, National LambdaRail and DreamWorks Animation, provides an ultra high speed link connecting New Mexico to Hollywood.

"We have a great partnership with Hewlett Packard," said Ed Leonard, chief technology officer for DreamWorks Animation, who was in Albuquerque recently promoting the collaboration at a pre-screening of 'Shrek Forever After.' "HP hosted a technical advisory panel about two years ago and

Cerelink's CEO was there and asked if we've ever thought about rendering remotely in New Mexico. He said, 'we're thinking about setting up some capacity there.' I said, 'We'd love to do it with you, let's figure out how to get it done.'"

The Albuquerque Gigapop, or ABQ-G, a project of UNM in collaboration with New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, New Mexico State University, New Mexico Council for Higher Education Computing Communication Services and the New Mexico State Agency of IT, provides high bandwidth connections between Encanto at the New Mexico Computing Applications Center, Cerelink and DreamWorks. Without this connection, the animations in "Shrek Forever After" and "How to Train Your Dragon" could not have been rendered in New Mexico. Rendering is the process for applying light and color to films.

“We create visual targets and visual development artwork that represents how the film should look,” Leonard said. “Then you basically develop computer algorithms to light and color the film under artist control.”

“Making a CG animated film requires a lot of technology,” Leonard said. “The partnership gives us capacity to remotely render, so we don’t have to build out expensive data centers on our campus. For our peak demand, we can actually use remotely the rendering resources here.”

The GigaPop was designed and implemented as a hightech connection for research and education between rural and urban institutions in New Mexico. It serves as an essential link for reservations, schools, hospitals and emergency services, reduces network costs for members and contributes to economic development.

“We like this as a cost effective way of rendering,” Leonard said. “There’s a lot of benefit for bringing it into New Mexico. Cost of power is a lot cheaper here. The state rebates and incentives, all of that adds up to Cerelink being able to offer something that is quite a valuable proposition to us.”