

## Doña Ana County

# High Tech Navigational Tower Going Up

Valley residents will soon see a 70-story tower above the western desert as the U.S. Coast Guard completes a nation-wide navigation system.

The 750 foot tower is part of the Coast Guard's Long Range Navigation (LORAN) system, which will enhance aircraft traveling safety and boost the local economy.

The New Mexico LORAN site, one of five being constructed in the midwestern United States, is located about 18 miles southwest of Berino.

When completed late this year, small aircraft, vehicles, search and rescue teams and government agencies can determine their exact location by tuning portable receivers into the LORAN system.

Five Coast Guard personnel will arrive in the area this fall to operate the LORAN facility, said Coast Guard project officer Charles Toler.

"The facility will pump a lot of money into the area," said Toler of the U.S. Coast Guard. The \$5 million facility will have a \$400,000 annual budget.

Local contracting firms will be employed at the site for repair work, maintenance, fencing, air-conditioning and other services.

Built by B&M Cillesson Construction of Farmington, N.M., the LORAN transmitting tower will be supported by 16 steel guy wires, each forming part of a 2,000 foot circle around the site.

A blinking strobe light on top of the tower will be visible from El Paso to Las Cruces. 120,000 feet of copper wiring will ensure the site is grounded for electrical safety and transmitting efficiency, project director Vic Engberg said.

The local site was selected because it lines up geographically with other LORAN sites, stated Chris Callahan of the Federal Aviation Administration. Each site



*On going construction at the LORAN job site.*

projects radio waves that are used to calculate precise coordinates.

The site will be run by a system of computers, monitored by Coast Guard personnel, and will have seven separate fire suppression systems.

The LORAN system will be transmitting 24 hours a day, and it could be used by hikers to project their location to search and rescue teams, as well as by the Border Patrol and other agencies, Callahan said.

LORAN is operated by the Coast Guard because the agency is funded by the Department of Transportation, not the Department of Defense. The local site will work with others in Oklahoma, Wyoming, North Dakota and Montana to complete the mid-continent expansion of LORAN, Toler stated.

When the New Mexico LORAN site is functioning, the entire nation will be covered with the system's navigational radio waves. Therefore small aircraft pilots will be able to cross the country always knowing their exact location.

The portable LORAN receivers that are placed in aircraft or ground vehicles cost about \$1,000, Callahan said.

The first LORAN systems were developed during World War II, primarily for Navy vessels. With the completion of the nationwide LORAN network, commercial and private aircraft can now use the system's navigational data.

