



The Birth of Laughlin

The now thriving resort town of Laughlin, Nev., began with a boarded-up motel on the edge of the rugged Mojave Desert, 90 miles south of Las Vegas.

Don Laughlin, a native Midwesterner and former owner of the 101 Club in Las Vegas, flew over the area in his private plane in 1964 and had a vision for the future. Below loomed piles of hot, desolate sand; the 11-year-old Davis Dam; a sparsely populated town named Bullhead City, Ariz.; and a dusty stretch on the Colorado River called South Pointe that was vacant except for a boarded-up motel at the end of a dirt road.

Laughlin bought the boarded-up motel and 6.5 acres of riverfront property for \$250,000. In less than two years the bar/motel offered all-you-can-eat chicken dinners for 98 cents, slot play on 12 machines and two live gaming tables and accommodations in four of the motel's eight rooms (the Laughlin family occupied the other four rooms).

That same boarded-up motel purchased by Laughlin in 1966 evolved into the lucrative 28-story, 1,440-room Riverside Resort Hotel and Casino. It became the cornerstone of one of the fastest growing communities and gaming resorts in Nevada.

Following Laughlin's lead, many developers began building hotel-casinos alongside the Colorado River. By 1972, there were three casinos in Laughlin, 32 condominiums, 10 private homes and nearly 100 permanent residents. Today, the destination is also home to the Golden Nugget Laughlin; Pioneer Hotel & Gambling Hall; Edgewater Hotel and Casino; River Palms Resort Casino; Colorado Belle Hotel/Casino; Ramada Express; Harrah's Laughlin, Aquarius Resort/Casino and the Bay Shore Inn, a non-gaming property.

In 1987, Don Laughlin paid \$3.5 million to build a bridge linking Laughlin with its sister city Bullhead City, Ariz. Laughlin donated the completed bridge to the states of Nevada and Arizona. The bridge cut commuting time for the many Laughlin casino employees who lived in Bullhead City on the Arizona side of the Colorado River. An estimated 40,000 people a day drive across the bridge.

From the mid-1980s to the 1990s, Laughlin welcomed its town hall as well as the first elementary school and junior/senior high school. Previously, students were bussed across the Colorado River each morning to attend school in Arizona

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By 1982, the population exploded to 5,000 and presently stands at more than 8,000. Multimillion-dollar housing developments were rushed into construction to keep pace with the business boom. In 1996, two master-planned communities comprised of 600 homes opened in the city, and developers introduced a new 200-unit townhouse community in Laughlin. In 2005, construction was completed on Nevada's first private marina in Laughlin, and home construction continues at a steady pace.

Residents on both sides of the Colorado River rely heavily on the tourism industry for employment. An estimated 14,000 residents currently work in Laughlin's hotel-casinos, shopping centers, fine restaurants and recreational offerings. Two shopping centers in Laughlin house more than 20 businesses including an auto repair garage, laundrette, three restaurants, an eye care center, a grocery store and local television station KLBC TV-2. A 255,000 square-foot factory outlet mall opened in Laughlin in June 1996. The dual-level Preferred Outlets at Laughlin features more than 55 food and retail outlets, a cinema complex and a 1,220-space parking garage.

"Snowbirds," travelers who migrate from cold weather hometowns to the Sun Belt during winter, are a major component of the Laughlin success story. Their influence is reflected in the fact that Bullhead City and Laughlin have 21 RV parks with 2,463 total sites. Nine mobile home parks provide another 538 spaces. An estimated 10,000 to 15,000 snowbirds have staked out the area as a winter home.

To keep pace with the rapid growth and travel demands, the Laughlin/Bullhead International Airport underwent several remodels and expansions. In addition to doubling passenger capacity, the airport's most recent \$2 million expansion allows for two or three simultaneous flights and provides a heightened security system. The airport also completed construction on new boarding and waiting areas, rest rooms, offices, snack bar, and a covered walkway connecting the current terminal.

The expansion comes just in time to accommodate expanded charter services. Western Express operates open flights on an eight-seat luxury plane from Deer Valley, Arizona (greater Phoenix area) and Riverside, California. Allegiant Air and Sun Country continue to provide scheduled and charter flights while Sun Fest Tours operates charter flights out of Calgary and Edmonton, Canada on a seasonal basis. Construction of a shopping center adjacent to the airport is currently under development and will offer major retail and restaurant establishments.

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For more information about Laughlin, Nev., go to www.VisitLaughlin.com

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