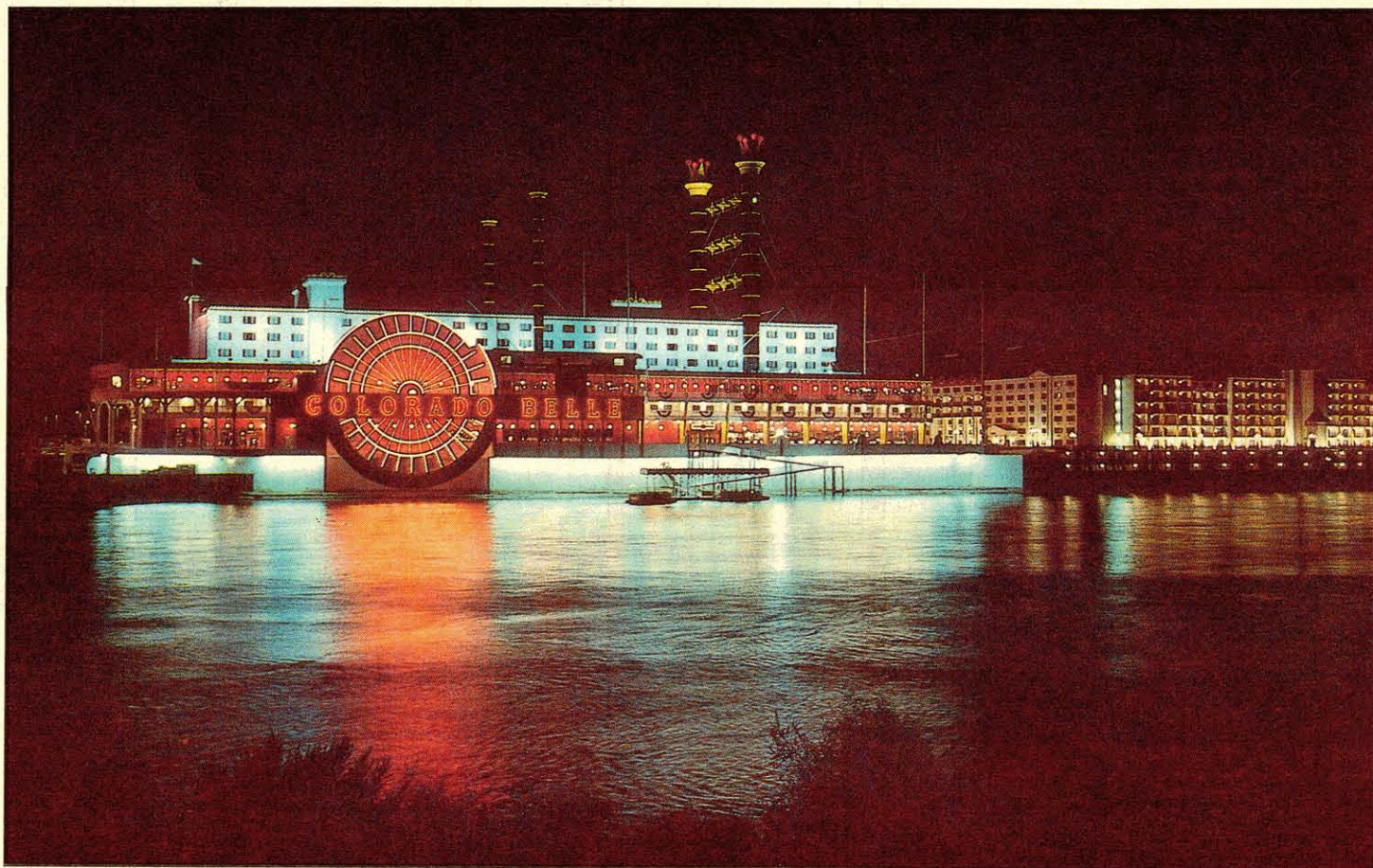


SHOWCASE

★ ANTELOPE VALLEY PRESS, July 21, 1989

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Arts•Entertainment•Travel•Dining



Miniature Vegas

Laughlin, Nev., reminds some people of what Las Vegas was 40 years ago. It has many of the same attractions as Las Vegas, but is much smaller — ideal for those who are turned off by the congestion of the larger city. And Laughlin has a river, which Las Vegas lacks. Business has skyrocketed recently; Laughlin has replaced Tahoe as the No. 3 gaming spot in Nevada. Karla Tipton reports on page 2.



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This week

"PIPPIN," Antelope Valley College's summer musical, opens 7:30 p.m. Thursday, July 27, in the campus theater, 3041 West Ave. K, Lancaster. Performances of this musical, suggested for adult audiences, are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. July 27-30 and Aug. 2-6. Admission is \$5 and \$6, with presale tickets available in the campus bookstore as well as at Lancaster and Palmdale chambers of commerce.

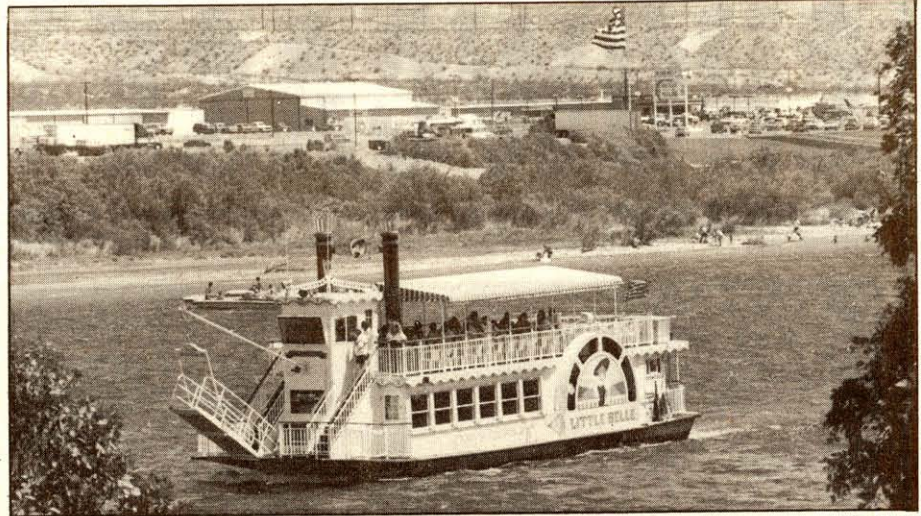
FREE CONCERTS in Lancaster City Park continue Sunday with Surf City, a band playing 1960s surf songs. Concertgoers may take picnic dinners and lawn chairs for the 6 p.m. performance. The concert series will run through Aug. 20 at the park, located on 10th Street West near Avenue L.

TEST FLIGHT, a band of musicians from Antelope Valley College's Music Performance Club, will perform in an easy listening concert 7 p.m. today in the AVC Choral Room 334, 3041 West Ave. K, Lancaster. Ad-

mission is \$4 for students and seniors, \$5 general or \$15 per family.

ELEVEN OIL PAINTINGS by Ralph Sarosi, depicting aircraft of the 1930s and 1940s, are on display through Wednesday in the Lancaster Museum/Art Gallery entrance, 44801 Sierra Highway, Lancaster. The gallery's regular hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, 1 to 4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. There is no admission charge.

COMING UP: The Desert Opera Theatre's **"MY FAIR LADY,"** July 28, starring Alis Clausen. Call 947-9442 for "My Fair Lady" ticket information. Also on the stage, **"FIDDLER ON THE ROOF"** opens Thursday at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Call (213) 480-3232 to order tickets. The Center Theater Group/Ahmanson will be using the James A. Doolittle Theatre for a production of **"BYRON - MAD, BAD AND DANGEROUS TO KNOW"** starring **DEREK JACOBI** Aug. 23-Sept. 17.



LAUGHLIN PROVIDES a transportation system down and across the river on free river

shuttles that take visitors from one hotel to another so that gamblers can enjoy the river, too.

Seeds of second Las Vegas may be planted in Laughlin

By **KARLA TIPTON**
Assistant Showcase Editor

LAUGHLIN, Nev. — The reputation of Laughlin precedes it. Already ranked third in the state for gaming revenues (pushing Lake Tahoe into fourth place), Laughlin is known as a boom town. Many have compared it to the Las Vegas of 40 years ago.

Although Don Laughlin's Riverside Resort hotel-casino was the only game in town 20 years ago because of the remote location and competition from Las Vegas 95 miles to the northwest, Laughlin came alive in the early 1980s.

Gross gaming revenues for all of Laughlin's casinos climbed to \$41 million in 1981, doubling to \$80 million by 1983 and hitting \$378 million in 1988.

But this unincorporated town of 3,500 permanent residents — cradled at the very tip of Nevada between the state lines of California and Arizona — has something Las Vegas doesn't have: the Colorado River.

"I think the river has a magnetic quality," said Del Newman, general manager of Don Laughlin's Riverside Resort, the first establishment that comes into view as you descend into the river valley on California Route 163.

"You've got the water, the games and the climate — It's paradise," he said.

The area is picturesque, with the blue river contrasting dramatically against scrub-covered desert mountains. In the evening, the colorful lights of the casinos blink on and off, reflecting off the water and illuminating the night sky like a miniature Las Vegas.

Located on the west side of the Colorado River, Laughlin is just four minutes away from Lake

Mohave (created by Davis Dam) where sailing, water skiing and fishing for trout, large-mouth bass and catfish are popular all year. Those in town for the games can enjoy the river, too. Laughlin provides a transportation system down and across the river on free river shuttles that take visitors from one hotel to another.

Dubbed the "Golden Triangle" because of its geography, the area surrounding Laughlin-Bullhead City, Ariz., averages near-perfect 72-degree temperatures during the winter. Summer temperatures can reach 120 degrees.

More than 20,000 people visit Laughlin in the winter months between Christmas and April, according to the Laughlin Chamber of Commerce. Much of this large influx is made up of "snowbirds," Northern dwellers who spend their winters in warm climates.

For those who like to gamble but are intimidated by Las Vegas' size, the town's slogan — "Lucky For You There's Laughlin" — certainly applies. It's about the same distance away as Las Vegas from most Los Angeles-area communities, including the Antelope Valley.

Compared to the urban realities of Vegas, Laughlin seems to emit a homey, friendly aura. This is especially true at Don Laughlin's Riverside Resort, the only casino there which is family owned and carries the name of the founder of the town.

"We feel that we have a lot better public relations than the big hotel chains do," said Don Laughlin, who makes a point of going into his casino daily and greeting his guests. "In Vegas, big corporations have taken over all the major hotels. And big corporations are like government agencies — they don't have a personality."

"Down here, we're a family operation. We're on top of it. We're available 24 hours a day. We all live on the property: me and my son, the general manager, the casino manager. Everybody lives right here. If there's a problem, we're ready to take care of it before it gets to be a big problem."

"Las Vegas has become very big, very cold, very expensive, a lot of crime," he said.

That's one reason Laughlin left Las Vegas back in 1964, after spending 10 years operating a casino in North Las Vegas.

"I was used to operating with six casinos on each side of me and I wanted to get out on the state line where there was more opportunity, and of course there was," he said. "I wanted to be a big frog in a little pond, and it kind of worked out that way."

One other thing brought him to the place that would eventually come to be named after him: "I fell in love with this area," he said.

When Laughlin first happened across the remote location in a private plane 25 years ago, the "town" consisted of a run-down saloon, a blackjack table, a dozen slot machines and eight boarded-up motel rooms at the end of a dirt road. He bought the property for \$225,000 and moved his family into four of the eight rooms. In 1966 at age 35, he opened his bar and restaurant.

Now at age 58, Laughlin has an establishment that offers a 660-room tower, as well as two swimming pools, two showrooms, convention rooms, a children's game arcade, twin movie theaters, a dance studio, a gift shop and a beauty salon. The resort's Celebrity Theater features performances by artists ranging from Steppenwolf to Roy Clark and the Oak Ridge Boys. On the

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Seeds

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gambling side, there's 1,500 slot machines and 43 live table games. Among his assets are the River Queen, a 100-room resort and restaurant located on the Arizona side of the river, and stock in the Laughlin National Bank.

But Laughlin has given back to the town, too, spending about \$13 million of his own revenues over the past two years on projects designed to benefit the community. Among those he funded or partially funded are the Laughlin/Bullhead Bridge which connects Nevada and Arizona just north of the hotel (\$3.5 million), the Bullhead/Laughlin Airport (\$2.6 million for the land) and flood control measures to protect the airport and a 5,000-acre parcel of his own property (\$5 million), as well as a swim-

ming pool for the kids in Bullhead City.

Unlike the corporate heads who operate the Laughlin casinos from offices located in other cities, "I intend to spend the rest of my life here and I would like to see the money spent here," said Laughlin.

Many people consider him the personification of the American Dream and Don Laughlin agrees: "This kind of success would only happen in America."

Nowadays, Don Laughlin's hotel-casino is no longer the only game in town. Visitors can choose from a wide range of lodging, eating and gambling establishments, including the Edgewater Hotel, the Pioneer Club, the Colorado Belle, the Ramada Express and Harrah's. There are four towers under construction now and four in the planning stages, according to Laughlin, who predicts by that by the year 2000 there will be a permanent population of 35,000.

Rooms in Laughlin average in price from about \$20-\$40 during the summer months to \$40-\$60 in the winter, but reservations should be made well in advance: "We're running like 98, 99 percent occupancy," said Laughlin of his hotel. "There's very few nights that we're not 100 percent full."