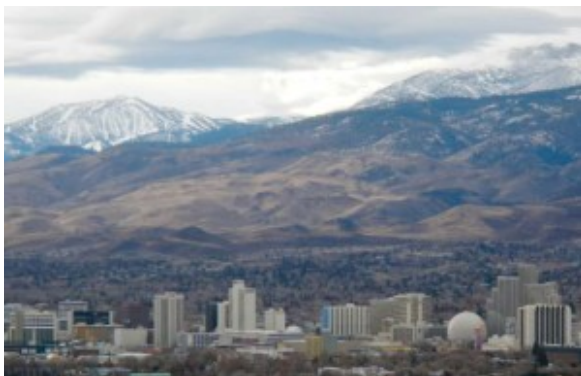


N. Nevada casinos see a resurrection of sorts

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

RENO – The signs of decay linger on Virginia Street, the main casino corridor in “The Biggest Little City in the World.”

Pawn shops and cut-rate motels line up alongside the high-end hotel towers. The strip is still pocked with shuttered casinos, victims of the recession and burgeoning competition from Northern California’s Indian tribes.



Reno casinos are seeing an uptick in business and are reinvesting in their product. Photo/LTN file

But signs of comeback – slow and steady – are evident as well. Construction crews are turning the old Fitzgeralds casino, closed since 2008, into the outdoor-themed Whitney Peak Hotel. A small slot-machine parlor called Siri’s Casino soon will open next door.

In nearby Sparks, the Grand Sierra Resort is pouring \$30 million into new amenities, including a chic \$15 million nightclub. The new owners of the venerable John Ascuaga’s Nugget are spending \$50 million on a honky-tonk entertainment

venue, a new sports-betting operation and other upgrades. Closer to the California border, Boomtown Casino is putting \$20 million into an overhaul.

Even among casino executives, the optimism is growing. Many say they think Reno has withstood the worst that the California tribes can dish out. With the overall economy improving, combined casino revenue in Washoe County, including the North Shore of Lake Tahoe, rose almost 4 percent last year. That was the first increase since 2006.

Ken Adams, a Reno gambling consultant, said California's casinos remain a potent threat to Northern Nevada. That's especially true at Tahoe, which is more at the mercy of the weather than Reno and has taken a bigger hit in recent years. In the main casino corridor at the South Shore, gambling revenue has fallen one-third in the past decade and, unlike Reno, hasn't bottomed out yet. Hotel occupancy at the South Shore, on both sides of the state line, also has dropped by one-third since 2003, although overnight stays have improved slightly the past two years.

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