

IF GAMING HAD NOT COME

Some loses and some gains

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I had mixed feelings when amendment four passed in 1990. Gaming was on the way in Colorado! As I voted for it I expected the limited gaming available in Gilpin in 1991 would increase, but not by much. Any gaming here was extremely limited. There were bingo nights, a few card games in the back room at the Elks Club, a slot machine or two at the Teller House on special nights. Gaming was a hometown affair.

No one expected it

Mostly there was no expectation that gaming proceeds would gush in as they have. A few building owners in Central City and Black Hawk hoped the new money would allow them to keep their buildings going. A few optimists hoped there might be a million dollar year ahead, but not anytime soon.

Would any of us pundits in 1990 have believed the statistics today? \$59 million in adjusted gross income in January! That's just in black Hawk alone. Most doubted any amounts like that would ever flow from the three gaming towns.

What changed?

Obviously gaming became a significant part of Colorado's economy. It didn't matter what a few of us locals did or did not want to happen. The state government gained needed funds. Historic Colorado got cash to save significant old buildings. Every local government gained. Now Central City could dig up its antiquated water supply and those wooden pipes from 1864. The new water treatment plant worked well. Every home owner gained because of lower taxes. Every job seeker gained as the casinos hired.

Local attitudes often changed

People who had never tried gaming in any form sat at a table and tried out blackjack ("21" as we called it). They liked it and came back for more. Some put a few nickles in a slot machine. It was fun and didn't cost much. Quarters sometimes replaced nickles. Before long many of my neighbors had a positive attitude toward the games of chance.

When out of town guests arrived a new attraction happened. There was skiing and cross country trekking as always. Now there was a new suggestion. Let's go to a casino! The food was good and inexpensive. No matter how bad your luck you weren't going to be out even a hundred bucks. Maybe you could win a jackpot. Somebody had to win, why not you?

Coffee groups lost

One lamentable change comes under the category of "community lost." Most folks in Gilpin had a favorite coffee spot. Many coffee groups met regularly for coffee and local gossip. Our sense of community depended on those groups to some degree.

Once gaming arrived some of the group spots began to disappear. A restaurant that had more or less vacant space didn't mind a coffee group. The local coffee drinkers might not be big spenders, but they were reliable. If you wanted to contact a certain person you'd often begin at the restaurant where they had a regular coffee group.

One of these groups moved to mid county at the gas station, one stuck it out at the store in Black Hawk. Most simply went away. No restaurant could dedicate space to coffee tables. Every square foot was far more valuable as gaming space. There were big debates about what gaming space meant anyway. Did it include cabinets? How about the walls between devices? Arguments about space took up lots of time at the gaming commission. Like it or not, most coffee groups did not survive.

A community center gained

A big gain for our sense of community was and is the community center. While the old coffee groups didn't survive some members still greet each other at the community center. Teens now have a fairly safe spot to play games and socialize. Senior activities provide a busy calendar. Especially nice is the swimming pool. Nothing like taking a swim class to develop a friendship. We have to thank gaming taxes for a really fine community center.

Another big change was available money for historic preservation. Those early gaming checks probably saved a dozen buildings.

Ghost buildings saved

The Gilded Garter was a great spot for lunch. Their jalapeno burger was well known. Unfortunately the building was about to become a ghost. The rear wall was obviously leaning out. It looked like the end until the first gaming checks came in. A building crew set up to replace the whole rear wall.

Apparently the jiggling and jostling was too much. When the crew arrived the next morning the wall was gone. Only a whiff of dust remained. Over the next week a scaffold was erected and the second floor at least was kept intact. No doubt the new money saved that ancient watering hole.

It wasn't the old Gilded Garter. No fancy girl would be lowering her derriere in black mesh stockings through that trap door above the bar. That was a thing of the past. On the other hand there would often be some music like a country western trio.

The tale of the Glory Hole

The new gaming money did save several buildings. One of the most obvious is the Glory Hole. It had an elaborate iron front. It was quite interesting in design. Unfortunately, it was quite out of plumb too. The front doors leaned 8 degrees to the side. As the front was rebuilt the front doors were preserved leaning to the side. It's become a photo shot.

A topic that never grows old

Was bringing gaming to Gilpin worth it? That debate will ever cease. I'd give gaming a plus over all. I wonder what readers think.