

[Emerald Island and Rainbow Club Casino](#) [Photo Gallery »](#)

As he walked the casino floor, Tim Brooks, co-owner of the Emerald Island in downtown Henderson, noticed a couple familiar faces.

“Yeah! You guys are back,” Brooks said as he greeted longtime patrons Bob and Sandy Pelz, former residents back in town for a visit. “Welcome home.”

On this weekday afternoon, the casino floor was abuzz with gamblers, most of them seniors, playing the slots and video poker machines.

The coronavirus pandemic has dealt the tourism and gaming industries a major blow, with casinos statewide closed for more than two months earlier this year and still recovering.

Business remains substantially down on the Strip, with some resorts forced to shut down or close their hotels during the middle of the week.

But there is some evidence that locals casinos — smaller, privately owned ones in particular — are faring better.

The September gaming win for Strip resorts was down almost 40% in September compared to the same month in 2019, according to the Nevada Gaming Control Board.

At the same time, casinos on the Boulder Strip, which cater more heavily to locals, saw a decline of only about 2%.

“We’ve found through our gaming-use data that private casinos are outperforming the publicly-traded casinos,” said Matthew Jacob, a casino and gaming industry analyst with research firm M Science.

Regulars helping prop up locals casinos during pandemic

Written by Administrator

Monday, 30 November 2020 05:08 -

Brooks said his two locals casinos, which he owns with his brother, Mike, are holding their own, at least for now.

“That said, a lot of our guests do work on the Strip, so at some point, it’s going to have a ripple-down effect,” he said. “As the Strip goes, so go small casinos like us.”

Emerald Island and the Rainbow Club, which the Brooks brothers took over in May, in the midst of the shutdown, employ about 270 people.

Other than the city of Henderson, Water Street Gaming, the parent company of the casinos, is the largest employer downtown.

About 10 miles northwest, another locals casino along Boulder Highway, the Longhorn, is also getting by, co-owner Randy Miller said.

“We’re able to make it, but we’re not able to maximize our facilities,” said Miller, whose group also owns the Bighorn in North Las Vegas.

Occupancy at the Longhorn’s 150-room hotel is “way down” from 2019 levels, Miller said, though people, mostly locals, are still patronizing the casino and its restaurants.

“We’re seeing mostly familiar faces, our regulars,” Miller said. “The hotel is a mixed bag because nobody’s coming through Las Vegas for special events anymore. At the hotel, it’s just travelers stopping by for an overnight stay.”

While privately owned and operated, the South Point, with more than 2,100 hotel rooms and an 80,000-square-foot casino, rivals many Strip casinos. But it also caters to the locals market.

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While the resort's hotel business has been "terrible," with occupancy hovering between 12% and 20%, "our gaming numbers have been OK," General Manager Ryan Gowney said.

"We're not doing great by any stretch, but we're making a little bit of money. We've always appreciated the local gambler," he said.

Part of the reason the locals business has remained steady is that valley residents are traveling less, just like other Americans, he said.

"Instead of taking their entertainment dollars elsewhere, they spending those dollars here in Las Vegas. Casinos in Las Vegas are a perfect place to get that entertainment right now. We think that's a big part of it," he said.

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