

Downtown's Benny Binion statue to gallop south

Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman says he'll be sad to see the statue of maverick gambler Benny Binion moved from downtown.

But he won't oppose the plan to move the statue to the equestrian center at Michael Gaughan's South Point on the outskirts of town.

„I'm going to miss Benny downtown," said Goodman, a former practicing attorney who represented and befriended the Binion family when it owned the former Horseshoe on Fremont Street. „I used to have lunch with him just about every day."

The statue has been at its home at the intersection of Casino Center Boulevard and Ogden Avenue for 20 years. It depicts the former Horseshoe owner, bootlegger and outlaw Texas gambler on horseback and in full Western regalia.

Goodman is about as connected to the statue in its current location as anyone in Las Vegas.

In his former life as a lawyer, Goodman represented Binion grandson Steven Binion Fechser and Horseshoe employee Steven Dale Witten. They were accused of beating patrons caught cheating and robbing them of their chips in 1985. They were convicted in District Court but the conviction was overturned. A federal court dismissed charges stemming from the same case, although news reports from the time say Binion's paid the gamblers a civil settlement.

In his current life as mayor of Las Vegas, Goodman is far and away the most vocal and recognizable cheerleader for downtown.

„I think Benny Binion belongs downtown," Goodman said. „But I'm sure Michael Gaughan has as much affection as I did (for

Binion).“

Gaughan is the son of Jackie Gaughan, a longtime downtown casino owner and contemporary of Benny Binion.

Binion's son Jack Binion, 71, and Michael Gaughan asked current Binion's owner Terry Caudill if they could move the statue to South Point and Caudill consented.

The move will give Caudill more elbow room if he decides to make big changes at Binion's. In the past, Caudill has said he thinks downtown needs more hotel rooms, but he hasn't yet committed to building any.

The \$ 890 million renovation of the Las Vegas Convention Center is getting all the headlines, but another project with potential to have as much or more impact on the local convention industry isn't getting much publicity.

Las Vegas Sands Corp., owner of the Sands Expo and Convention Center and The Venetian and Palazzo hotel-casinos, has plans for a new convention center with more than 1.5 million square feet of space on a 19-acre site across Koval Lane from The Venetian.

Plans filed with Clark County call for a convention center up to 125 feet high with about 1,800 parking spaces and a pedestrian bridge connection to The Venetian-Palazzo site.

Las Vegas Sands Corp. leaders haven't talked much about the project or its implications.

If they were to use the expansion as a replacement for the existing Sands Expo and Convention Center, a notion that has been rumored in the industry but not confirmed, it would have much less impact than keeping both facilities in operation.

Chuck Schwartz, chairman of Convexx, a convention production company in Las Vegas, said he'd welcome a new center.

„That is a great location. If they have parking and good freight access it will be a big winner,“ he said.

Schwartz said freight access at the existing Sands Expo and Convention Center is constrained to the point that delays cost show managers money.

He also said the Sands facilities pale when compared with The Venetian and, especially, the sparkling new USD 1.9 billion Palazzo.

„It is a five-star hotel with a three-star building,“ Schwartz said.

Sands spokesman Ron Reese said company officials most qualified to talk about convention center possibilities were traveling and unavailable to comment.

Nearly a year ago, the Las Vegas City Council approved wireless Internet service at businesses across the valley. Despite the move, the long-awaited announcement that Las Vegas has a deal for Wi-Fi access citywide has not been made.

That hasn't stopped one of the companies push for the service from beefing up its presence on the Strip, which isn't in city limits.

Cheetah Wireless Technologies, along with NextWave Wireless, announced it has upgraded Wi-Fi hardware on the Strip, making it easier for people to pick up a signal outside or in their hotel rooms.

The announcement was timed to coincide with CTIA 2008, a wireless technology industry show with about 40,000 attendees at the Las Vegas Convention Center.