

Winter snow points to economic recovery

By Rob Sabo, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

After 21 consecutive months of declining revenues from taxes on hotel occupancy, the Reno-Sparks market saw gains for six of 10 months at the start of this year, leading to optimism that the worst might be over.

The declines in hotel room tax began in March of 2008 and continued through November of 2009. But with many months in 2010 trending up from the same period a year earlier, hoteliers and tourism officials head into the new year measured optimism.

“Hopefully we are past the worst of it and the bottom is behind us,” says Ellen Oppenheimer, president and chief executive officer of the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority. “It appears that we are seeing some ups and downs and a little more general positive findings as we look ahead in the economy.”

Still, the RSCVA planned conservatively for the current fiscal year, Oppenheimer says. Two of the region’s primary markets for tourism – Nevada and California – have the highest and third-highest unemployment rates in the nation.

“Those are key feeder markets for leisure travel to Reno-Tahoe,” Oppenheimer says. “People still want to travel and take getaways, but they are staying fewer nights and trending down in spending. But the good news is that there are still people out there traveling. People feel they are entitled to a getaway or vacation, and when they can afford it and make the time they are going.”

Bill Hughes, director of marketing operations for the

Peppermill Resort, Spa Casino, says the property and others in the region appear to see light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. Large-scale upgrades completed in recent years at the Peppermill, such as the Tuscany Tower, new convention space, and an executive boardroom have helped the property draw new convention business and fill rooms, Hughes says.

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