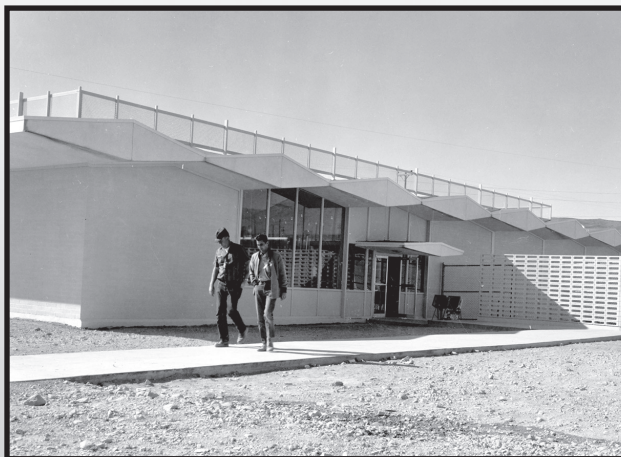


Mercury Bowling Alley

Introduction

For decades during the nuclear testing era, thousands of Nevada National Security Site

(NNSS) employees enjoyed several places of amusement in Mercury in-between and after experimental shots. One of these entertainment venues was an eight-lane bowling alley with a full-service snack bar. The bowling alley was the principal recreation building in Mercury and was a social hub where employees relaxed after a hard day's work.



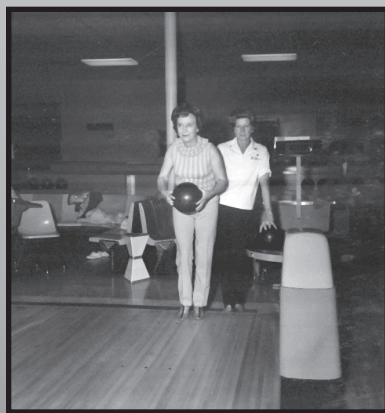
The bowling alley building was distinctive with its geometric Googie architecture.

Mercury, the Cold War and Nuclear Testing at the NNSS

Because of the Communist insurgency in Korea during the 1940s—and the emerging Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union—the U.S. federal government had to consider better options for nuclear weapons testing on the continent. On

December 18, 1950, President Harry Truman signed an order establishing the Nevada Proving Grounds (now the NNSS) as the nation's on-continent nuclear weapons testing area. Mercury, a desolate place 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas, was established as the site's base camp.

In 1962, an Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) supplemental appropriations bill provided funds to add to or replace most of the earlier temporary buildings in Mercury and included a \$15 million request for permanent NNSS construction. With this approved funding, new facilities for both business and recreation sprang up across



Employees not only scored points at the lanes but also at the snack bar (right), famous for its burgers and milkshakes.

the town—including the famous bowling alley. While most of the buildings in Mercury were not integral to the nuclear testing mission requirements, ancillary facilities were critical for operational support and the well-being of the NNSS workforce.

From 1951 to 1992, a total of 928 nuclear tests, both atmospheric and underground, were conducted at the site's forward areas. Naturally, employees needed a place to wind down.



Recreational Facilities Development Trends



Occasionally the bowling alley hosted families of NNSS workers.

Facilities in Mercury were very limited and did not provide for “a wide range of diverting interests.” So came the bowling alley, a non-combustible, permanent structure with futuristic Gooogie architecture (the only such one at the NNSS). Constructed south of Trinity Avenue, the bowling alley opened February 1, 1964, and soon became the most popular gathering spot in Mercury where workers commingled, played and ate. (During normal nights, the bowling alley hosted 20 to 50 people.)

Of all of the recreational facilities built in Mercury, only the bowling alley and the nearby pool and its changing room were designed to make them appear different from the other utilitarian buildings in Mercury. The mid-century modern bowling alley stood out due to its flamboyant accordion roof and matching front porch. Also, prior to being repainted tan with dark purplish trim, it was a brilliant white with turquoise trim, which included all of the prominent fascia and pilasters. In addition to the bowling alley’s trim, the bright turquoise color was used inside the building for built-in furniture, the trim on the ball return and scoring machines, and the ball return gutters. The alleys were constructed of solid maple wood.

Many of the current and retired workforce have fond memories of the bowling alley, the friendships they forged, and the work they performed in defense of our nation.

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