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"Keeping Our Beaches Bare"

Everyone but Palm Springs excited about naked bridge *Laissez-faire locals already used to span*

By Darrell Smith

The Desert Sun

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Palm Springs

The people are the city, Palm Springs' motto goes.

Some of them just happen to be naked.

Folks from Los Angeles to London have had their fun with the so-called "naked bridge," the span connecting the clothing-optional Desert Shadows Inn on Chaparral Road with its newly built condominiums across Indian Canyon Drive.

And owner Stephen Payne couldn't keep the phone from ringing. A live interview with the BBC. A drive-time radio jock from Vancouver. Calls from Newsday.

They all love the naked bridge.

Even Jay Leno from "The Tonight Show" got in on the fun during a January broadcast.

"Right now, in Palm Springs, construction crews are completing the world's first nudist bridge," Leno said. "It's a nudist bridge. Well, there's a job you don't want, being a toll collector on a

nudist bridge. 'Hey, this quarter's warm.' "

Ba-dum-bump. Comedy gold, right here in Palm Springs.

But, as Desert Shadows prepares this morning to officially open the span, folks in this city don't seem to mind – the bridge, that is.

"Well, there's a job you don't want, being a toll collector on a nudist bridge. 'Hey, this quarter's warm.'"
– Comedian Jay Leno

"We've gotten used to it," said Allen Sundermann, an auto technician at Yousef's Mobil just around the corner from the bridge on Palm Canyon Drive. "Once the shock factor wears off, then you just shrug your shoulders. It's kind of a Palm Springs thing. You're just like, 'Yeah?'"

Some seem to care more about whether the bridge looks cool – it's got to look cool, we're in Palm Springs after all – than about who is crossing it.

"Everybody really likes the design of it," said Mike Clark, a manager at Baker's Square restaurant at Vista Chino and Palm Canyon Drive, another business in Desert Shadows', well, shadow.

"A lot of people are talking about it," Clark said, then added, "Maybe it will bring in business. That's what I'm hoping."

When Payne talks up the bridge to locals, sometimes his only response is a blank stare.

"We'll say, 'We're the nude bridge people' and they don't know what we're talking about."

And Payne thinks that's pretty cool.

"This is the only place I've ever lived where you have this laissez-faire, accepting attitude. We've got gays, seniors, blacks, Hispanics and, by and large, we make this town work," Payne said.

"Some think even for screwy California, (the bridge) is off the wall, but it isn't. The lack of response is something I'm really proud of."

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