



More than 100,000 visitors enjoy the Coachella Music & Arts Festival at Empire Polo Grounds in Indio.

# INDIO

## WHERE PROGRESS IS PRESENT AND MEETING THE FUTURE

BY ELLEN PARIS / PHOTOS BY CHRIS MILLER

Indio has arrived. It's a vibrant, amenity-rich city for residents, businesses and visitors alike. From the city's bustling teen center to large residential developers like Pulte Homes and KB Homes to new businesses locating in Indio. The city invested more than \$100 million over the last five years in infrastructure, from miles of newly paved roadways to new and upgraded water and sewage treatment plants. "Indio remains a city on the move with positive present and future growth," notes Mayor Gene Gilbert. "There are examples of all types showcasing this around the city."

The valley's oldest city is also the fastest-growing and the largest city, with more than 84,000 residents and has the valley's second-lowest crime rate. It's no surprise Indio's great diversity of people, places, and activities continues to attract new residents, commercial and residential development, and businesses.

"Residential development is active here, north of I-10. We are seeing Pulte and KB Homes pulling permits for new homes," notes Mariano Aguirre, Indio's development manager. "That tells you that Indio is where builders still want to build and buyers want to buy."

The two super shopping destination centers at Jackson Street and I-10 draw crowds throughout the valley. The Showcase Center with a Super Target, Marshalls, Ross, and Big Lots has increased sales tax revenues for the city, as has the Regency Center located across the way with anchor tenants Winco supermarket and Home Depot. These centers created hundreds of jobs for residents.

"For all the noticeable development around the city, you have to consider the tremendous amount of work and dollars that have gone into roads, water systems, and storm drains to support higher-density development. These are all city assets that you don't see but make a tremendous difference in the quality of life Indio offers," Aguirre observes. For example, the city heavily invested in infrastructure in new landscaping and sidewalks on Miles Avenue, with much of it spent underground constructing a new storm drain system.

The city's aggressive and proactive economic development outreach efforts can be seen in the 80-acre downtown also known as Old Town. City loans resulted in the openings of Big Willie's Old Time Cookin' restaurant downtown and Jackalope Ranch restaurant at the city's west entrance.

The city's planned transportation center is moving forward at Jackson Street and Indio Boulevard. The proposed 10,000-square-foot facility will house both Amtrak and Greyhound stations, as well as a restaurant to serve travelers. As part of the Coachella Valley Enterprise Zone, businesses locating in Indio are offered attractive state tax credits. Indio is also part of the Coachella Valley Empowerment Zone with federal tax credits for new businesses. The city's Redevelopment Project Area can provide further assistance to new businesses. The message: Indio is open for business.

Occupying the former Greyhound site will be the multi-story College of the Desert East Valley Campus. When

renovation is completed in 2012, the 40,000-square-foot building will accommodate more than 3,000 students. The city also is negotiating with a private developer and investors to bring a first-rate law school to the city. That's one more amenity to set Indio apart.

The Indio Senior Center, opened less than a year ago, buzzes with activity starting at 7:30 a.m. It provides a much-needed community resource people 50 and over to socialize, make new friends, share their skills and ideas, learn new things, and gather information. It offers Indio's culturally diverse population a variety of classes and discussions and also serves lunch.

At the other end of demographic spectrum is the Indio Teen Center (ITC), which is gearing up for a full year of activities and programs. One-third of Indio's population is younger than 18. For them, the state-of-the-art center (a block from the Indio Senior Center and across from Indio High School) provides a safe, supervised, and secure place to meet with friends and make new ones.

The ITC serves more than 200 teens daily. It provides high school students an array of educational and recreational activities, including college tours, job search, and career planning. Teens also take advantage of cooking, dance, and boxing classes. The boxing program is taught by professional boxing champ Gabino Saenz. The ITC works closely with the Indio Senior Center integrating multigenerational programs that teens and seniors attend together. It is the only facility of its kind in the Coachella Valley.

As the city has worked diligently to provide more amenities in every way for a diverse population it has one common goal. "Everyone here in the city is working towards having roads we can drive on, parks we can play in, shops we can shop in, and a safe community to raise our kids and grandkids in," says City Manager Dan Martinez.

The heavy investment in infrastructure promises that when residential and commercial development strongly gears up again, Indio stands ready to meet demands. Consider the acres and

acres of prime available land ready for future development along Interstate 10. The I-10 Auto Mall now houses five major dealerships, generating strong sales tax revenues for the city. Once the economy turns, look to it for further expansion.

Infrastructure investment continued this year with the opening of the new Indio corporate yard, a first-class infrastructure and public works facility. It is the backbone of the city for essential services, including emergency response. "We didn't just stop dead in the water with large public works projects. It turned out to be a very advantageous time for us to build the corporate yard when we did. Moving forward with it during a tough economy actually saved us around \$2 million," Gilbert says.

Entering Indio from the west on Highway 111, you'll notice a major difference in the scenery. A desert-scaped median with a natural stone sculpture welcomes you. On the north side sits one of the valley's largest and grandest restaurants: Jackalope Ranch, a destination for diners from across the valley. The lodge-like restaurant sits on 6.5 acres and offers Southwestern and barbecue fare. It features an indoor saloon, outdoor palapa bar, evening entertainment, and Sunday brunch. Next to Jackalope Ranch are 50 prime acres known as Polo Square, a site ripe for commercial and residential development.

Dan Martinez grew up in Indio and recently returned after 24 years, accepting the city manager position. "In the last five years, there was substantial investment in infrastructure improvement and new facilities, positioning the city as a location ripe for both business and people to relocate to," Martinez says. He points to more than 80 miles of newly paved roads, 112 miles of new water lines, and the renovation of six city parks. "Indio is a city I very much wanted to come home to," Martinez says. An additional large public works project in the design stage is the off-ramp at Jefferson Street and I-10. The Sun City Shadow Hills Fire Station and Terra Lago Fire Station have opened.



Miles Avenue in Downtown Indio — home to many new businesses and opportunities



The Indio Municipal Golf Course offers night golf year-round until 10 p.m.



**Mayor**  
Gene Gilbert

**Mayor Pro Tem**  
Ben Godfrey

**Council Members**  
Glenn Miller  
Lupe Ramos Watson  
Melanie Fesmire

**Year Incorporated**  
1930

**Population**  
84,393

**Median Household Income**  
\$53,824

**www.indio.org**

Expansion of the city’s water infrastructure to accommodate growth included adding reservoirs, booster pump stations, wells, pressure-reducing stations, and pipeline improvements. Indio has 112 miles of pipeline, 18.75 million gallons of water storage in three reservoirs, 21 active wells, and five booster stations for ideal water pressure. Additionally, the city is scheduled to activate its first elevated reservoir, Lost Horse Reservoir, located one mile north of the Terra Lago clubhouse. Indio has partnered with water purveyors in the Coachella Valley to establish an integrated regional water management plan in order to manage the water supply throughout the valley.

The Downtown Phase Infrastructure Project is due for completion by year-end. It includes, reconstructed streets, new water and sewer lines, undergrounded utilities, and improved streetscapes. This also includes new utilities to serve existing and future multiuse six-story developments.

In downtown, the continued reconstruction and maintenance of roads and capital improvement projects are contributing factors to Indio’s economic success. In addition to the new COD campus site at Oasis Street and Civic Center Drive, a vacant commercial building with abutting warehouse is slated to become an artist studio.

To cope with issues associated with home foreclosures, Indio has implemented a variety of



One of the entrances to Jackalope Ranch off Highway 111 and Jefferson Street.



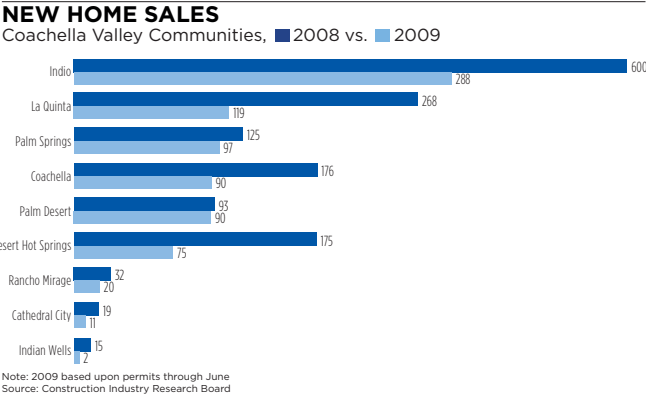
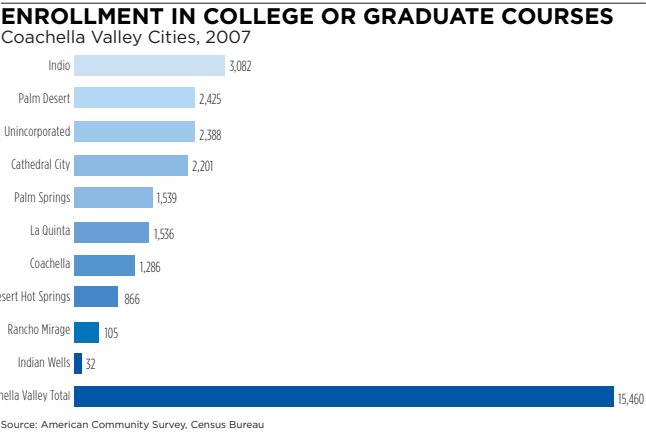
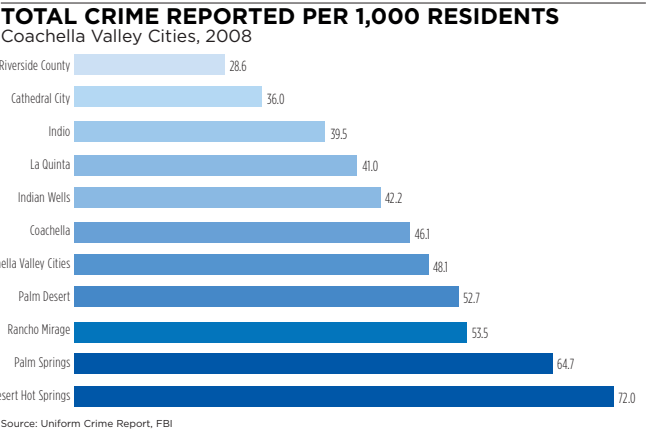
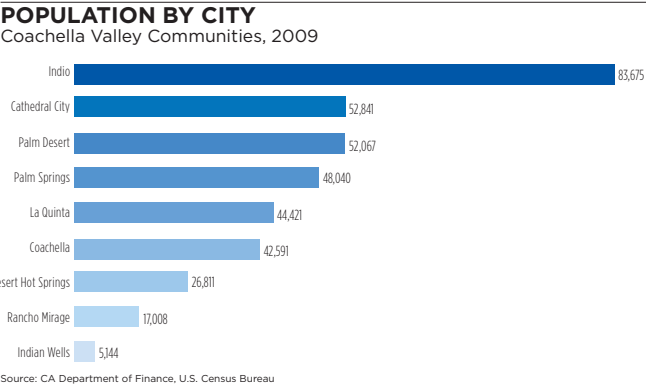
The Indio Senior and Teen Centers — serve Indio’s youth and senior residents.

successful programs, helping residents hold onto their homes and the maintain integrity of their neighborhoods. Some have received national recognition. They include The Housing Resource Center, Neighborhood Stabilization Programs, a Foreclosure Registration and Maintenance Ordinance, Housing Rehabilitation Program, Neighborhood Cleanup Program, and Better Neighborhoods Program. The city created the Coachella Valley’s first and only city-funded Housing Resource Center. As a result, Indio was the only West Coast city to be recognized by the United States Department of Justice.

Indio also offers recreational and entertainment amenities second to none. These include Fantasy Springs Resort Casino, which hosts internationally known entertainment headliners, state-of-the-art bowling, and first-class restaurants. Other attractions include golf clubs and resorts, the Coachella Valley Museum and Cultural Center, murals, polo, and other equestrian events, the Wild Bird Center, and the stunning Empire Polo Club as the perfect venue for sporting and entertainment venues.

The city is well known as The City of Festivals, which attracts, nearly 1 million visitors annually. They include the Riverside County Fair & National Date Festival, Southwest Arts Festival, Kennel Club Dog Show, Motor Coach Rally, Coachella Music and Arts Festival, Stagecoach Country Music Festival, and the International Tamale Festival. Entering its 12th year, the Coachella Music and Arts Festival has become a world-renowned event, drawing such legendary performers as Madonna and Paul McCartney. The Stagecoach festival is quickly achieving the same cachet for country music fans.

With a multitude of amenities and services to serve residents, visitors, and businesses in a first-class environment, it’s evident that Indio has arrived. ■





TAYLOR SHERRILL

# CATHEDRAL CITY

CATCH THE COMMUNITY SPIRIT

BY ELLEN PARIS

**T**hough the Coachella Valley and the State are still dealing with a challenging economy, Cathedral City continues to make economic strides through innovative planning and expediting key business and residential development to grow the City.

Brad and Frances Johnson recently moved from Palm Desert to their new 2,200-square-foot Santoro Estates home in Cathedral City. The Johnsons found their dream home desirably located at 30th and Santoro Drive near the city's soccer park. "We love the house. There is no way we could get this size and quality new home where we were, which is why we made the move," exclaims Frances, who runs an alarm

and cleaning service business with Brad. The couple had been looking long and hard, scouring the MLS and open houses around Palm Desert. When they saw the homes and the value offered at Santoro Estates, they were sold. The city's central location, choice shopping, recreational activities, and family restaurants also helped the Johnsons make their decision. "It's near our church and daughter's school and we're looking forward to discovering small neighborhood restaurants that make Cathedral City a real place to call home," Frances adds.

Look at the city's upbeat downtown and the Fountain of Life across from the Mary Pickford Theater where multigenerational families cool off and come

together. The sense of community and camaraderie in Cathedral City is evident everywhere.

The Johnsons are an example of why developments like Santoro Estates that offer quality affordable living in a family neighborhood are attracting more buyers to Cathedral City. Santoro Estates is a success story. The original developer lost his financing when most of the homes were more than 65% complete. In January, believing in the potential of Cathedral City, builder Cathedral Sun LLC, a subsidiary of Stockton, California-based Florsheim Homes stepped in and finished building the development's 36 homes. Prices were lowered offering great value to home buyers. "We were presented this opportunity by the bank and saw the potential to complete a high-quality family community in a good location and went for it," says Joe Anfuso, Florsheim's president. The buyers were all local who knew what a good deal Santoro Estates now offered. "It was truly a mutually beneficial relationship between us and the city. They wanted the project done and were very accommodating," Anfuso adds.

A similar situation exists at the new sections of the communities of Rio del Sol and Rio Vista. New builders have come in and are finishing the remaining homes, again offering significant value to buyers. "We are in the fortunate position of being able to truly say that our residential development is no longer stalled," points out Jan Davison, the city's redevelopment director. Cathedral City now offers increased inventory of quality new homes despite challenging economic times.

The city's plans for new bike trails promise more family-friendly activities for residents. "Cathedral City is a livable community

that a diverse and active population calls home," observes Allen Howe, communications officer/assistant to the city manager. The city is working with the Coachella Valley Water District to develop water levee banks into bike trails that would in turn, be interconnected with other valley bikeways. The project will benefit bicycle commuters and recreational riders by providing a safe, more direct route to schools and other destinations. One part of the project consists of a one-mile bike path along the east side of Whitewater River Channel and about 3,000 feet of bike lanes along 30th Avenue. Future phases will continue to construct the trail to the south. Phase Two will construct about 6,000 linear feet of bike trail along the east side of the Channel from 30th Avenue to Ramon Road. Phase Three will continue the Bike Trail along the east side of the Channel from Ramon Road to Dinah Shore Drive. Bike riders will have their choice of comfortable and safe trails to enjoy within Cathedral City. One more reason Cathedral City is a desirable place to live, work and play.

Real estate broker/associate Alice Baker and her husband moved to the Cove just minutes above the City's downtown five years ago after 20 years in Palm Springs. "It's centrally located to everything. I love doing business with all the small business owners here. Everyone is friendly and it reminds me of growing up in the Midwest." Except for her real estate business, Baker doesn't have to leave the City for shopping or restaurants.

In addition to being family friendly, Cathedral City continually reaches out to both new and existing businesses. John Kiefer president of the newly opened Palm Springs Kia, is pleased to be the newest



TAYLOR SHERRILL

Above: The newly opened Palm Springs Kia is a welcome addition to the Cathedral City Auto Center.

Opposite page: Santoro Estates adds to Cathedral City's increased inventory of quality new homes at affordable prices.



New bike trails along the Whitewater River Channel will be constructed in three phases.



**Mayor**  
Kathy DeRosa

**Mayor Pro Tem**  
Charles England

**Council Members**  
Paul S. Marchand, Esq.  
Gregory S. Pettis  
Chuck Vasquez

**Year Incorporated**  
1981

**Population**  
65,366

**Median Household Income**  
\$52,403

[www.cathedralcity.gov](http://www.cathedralcity.gov)

dealership at Cathedral City Auto Center. Kiefer, who hails from Eugene, Ore., where Kiefer Kia has operated since 1996, saw a major market opportunity for a Coachella Valley Kia dealership. “There are lots of Kia owners here. Yet there was no longer a dealer here,” he says. Kiefer chose the Cathedral City Auto Center to take advantage of its location, size and scope of dealers. “The draw for us was the auto center represents a great opportunity because it has the largest sales volume in the desert with the most brands.” Kiefer is pleased with Kia’s location next to Lexus and across from Toyota. “It’s a great opportunity for consumers to see all brands and good for us to benefit from cross-shopping,” notes Kiefer, whose 12,000-square foot-dealership sits on 3.5 acres, allowing for a broad inventory.

The city stands to net additional tax revenues from its newest auto resident. “Palm Springs Kia brings a fresh opportunity to the auto center, and we are very pleased to have them. In addition to being the area’s only Kia dealer, there are 4,000 Kias still under warranty needing service,” notes Davison. “The Cathedral City Auto Center increased its market share in the Coachella Valley, which is certainly a reason Palm Springs Kia chose to locate here,” she adds.

When Anthony Liu was looking for a Riverside County location for his Olympic training ice

skating facility, Ice Castle he chose the former Coca-Cola distribution facility on Perez Road as the new home for his second Ice Castle. His first Ice Castle is in Lake Arrowhead, where Frank Carroll is known for turning out Olympic figure skating champions, including Evan Lysacek and Michelle Kwan. The building is scheduled to open by year-end. “We had been looking around the area for a while. It was hard finding a building suitable for an ice rink,” says Liu, who purchased the 26,000-square-foot warehouse last April. He cites the large skating community in the Coachella Valley as a strong reason to locate here.

The Ice Castle is an exciting sports venue for the area. It is a full-service skating facility with an Olympic coach line up offering hockey, figure skating, lessons and tournaments. The city’s “can-do” attitude to both new and existing businesses was evident to Liu from the start. “Everyone I worked with at the city was extremely helpful. Somebody was always there to answer questions and help with permitting,” recalls Liu. “We are expediting the Ice Castle project, because we are business friendly and this is exactly the type of project we want for the city,” explains Keith Scott, project manager. The city implemented a new process for development services designed to expedite projects. “We review the projects as they

come in and get various departments’ comments, pass them on to the developer, and have them meet with us and explain what is going on so we get a clear picture early on of the project and the requirements to make it work,” Scott says. This cuts out a lot of time consuming back and forth between the City and developers. As Cove resident Baker noted. Cathedral City is filled with small unique shops and restaurants. Daniel Webster owner of Big Mama’s Soul Food located next to the IMAX theater has reached out to locals for the last four years to grow his business. “People who live in the city have become our regular customers. We started advertising on Telemundo to reach the Hispanic community. We have a strong following with those residents who are spreading the word about us,” says Webster, whose restaurant has been named Best BBQ in the Desert and also recommended by the Automobile Club of Southern California. Retail “clustering” makes for destination shopping, which can be seen along Perez Road. It is home to all types of home-improvement and design stores, from tile and stone to bathroom and kitchen fixtures to specialized lighting. “People from all over the valley come to Perez to shop. It’s a district we are proud of,” Howe observes. Clustering is a successful, rapidly growing retail concept where by small businesses locate close together to attract shoppers to a specific area. That’s a core part of the Date Palm Drive Corridor Plan, produced in partnership with a grant awarded from the Southern California Association of Governments to Cathedral City, and prepared by the respected Gruen Consultant Team and recently presented to the City Council. The Plan offers suggestions on how to turn the 6-mile stretch that connects the city from Varner Road (north of I-10) to downtown and East Palm Canyon Drive into a vibrant retail and commercial area integrating nearby residential living with cohesive shopping, office, dining, and entertainment offerings. According to Leisa Lukes, Cathedral City planning director, Date Palm Drive will brand retail clusters located along one of the main commercial corridors of Cathedral City. “It’s a big push for our economic development and for the city’s future to give our residents and businesses choices as we move in a forward direction. The plan increases Date Palm’s economic viability while the City continues to pave the way for increased private development in the downtown area to create a cluster of family entertainment and



Pedestrian walkways will connect the retail “clustering” on the Date Palm Corridor.

restaurant choices.” When finished look to the Date Palm Drive Corridor to showcase a progressive and vibrant city. New development is very much on the horizon for Cathedral City. According to Redevelopment Director, Davison, strong interest in locating commercial projects here was expressed by developers at the recent International Council of Shopping Centers convention in Las Vegas. Developers are attracted to the city’s central west valley location. The City is working hard to make it easy for developers to come in and start their projects. “We assemble the sites with clearance activities and get them ready with utilities so they can move forward. We are appreciative of the “time-is-money” aspect to development,” Davison says. The City is also in discussion with a new developer for the commercial development on 20 acres at Date Palm and East Palm Canyon Drives. Andy Hall, community development director who oversees the planning, engineering and building departments points out additional development opportunities in the City. “The City has totally transformed itself with all the new building we’ve done. We’ve also cleared the slate for new economic development on the east side of downtown.” Hall is referring to the 23 prime acres ready for development that is owned by the City’s Redevelopment Agency’s redevelopment located near City Hall and the Fountain of Life. ■



The new Ice Castle Olympic training and full-service ice skating facility is scheduled to open in Winter 2010-11.