



# RIPTCORD REPORT

For Friends and Survivors of the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord  
Republic of Vietnam • 12 March – 23 July, 1970



Number 74

Fall, 2007

# SPRINGFIELD 2007

by Lee Widjeskog

The reunion held this passed July was great as all have been and will continue to be in the future. Many people were able to arrive on Tuesday and Wednesday so they could take in a show in nearby Branson or just see the sights around the area. By Wednesday the hospitality room was filling up in the evenings even though Frank Marshall had not yet arrive!!

First timers such as Joe Connally (D 1/506), Bill Boles (D 2/506), John Carr (A 2/506 & HHC), Ron Hoskins (E 2/506), Ron McCrory (E 2/506), Ron Gunyan (B 2/506), John Beadle (A 2/11), Harold Day (17th Cav) and Dorian Alexander (A 2/506) were entertained by the great set of aerial and location photos taken in 1970 by Robin Graham. Robin's photos plus his knowledge of the geological aspects of the terrain we fought in gives the battle a whole different view. If you haven't seen these pictures talk to Robin when you come to next years reunion in Nevada.

The golfers this year were without the competition from Fred Spaulding who had other commitments. But they were reminded of the Army life when they were told to meet at 0700 in the lobby but didn't leave until 0900 for a 15-minute trip to a golf course that did not serve alcohol. A thirsty gang descended upon the hospitality room that day.

Thursday night was fairly quiet as everyone got to chatting with old and new friends and acquaintances. By midnight the hospitality room was closed. However, by the end of the week the Ripcord guys were taking over the Karioke Bar in the hotel and in spite of their singing, the hotel allowed them to stay till the end.

Friday evening found everyone enjoying hors d'oeuvres of vegetables and dip, cheese, fruit and crackers, chicken fingers, fried ravioli, chicken wings in BBQ sauce and egg roles at the hospitality room before the Ripcord Raffle was held. This worked out well an all had a good time before



*The latest recipients of the Ripcord coin pose for a photo. From left to right are John Carr, Bill Boles, John Beadle, Carol Ebrite, Ron McCrory, Dorian Alexander, Ron Hoskins then Ron Gunyan, Joe Connally and Harold Day in the back.*

retiring for the night.

Following the Saturday business meeting, the semi-formal dinner was held in the banquet hall. As a special treat this year Eric Deffenbaugh played guitar music during the cocktail hour. He later played the song he wrote telling about how the family learned of Capt. Tom Hewitt's death on hill 902. It was extremely touching to listen to the words and understand how young Eric was when this all took place.

This year Fred Spaulding started what will become a ritual for our dinners. At the start we light two candles a red and a white. The red to remember those who died during the Ripcord battle and the white to remember those who have died since. The lighting of the candles is followed by a moment of silence to remember those who have passed before us.

As has become tradition, General Harrison presented the Ripcord Coin to those who were attending their first reunion.

The dinner was excellent and all swore they would come back again next year.

# FROM THE EDITOR

What can I say? It was another fantastic reunion with a lot of new faces of Ripcord veterans and guests. National Geographics was there to interview a few of the Ripcord veterans for an upcoming TV special due to be aired sometime in January or February 2008. More about this will be told in future newsletters and on our website.

Continue to check out our website to see more photos of the reunion and new updates about Ripcord veterans.

I am trying to get everyone's biography onto our website, so please send me your biography and some photos. Don't be shy, soon everyone will be on it.

Lee Widjeskog has done a great job writing the articles for this newsletter and Dennis Bloomingdale always does a fantastic job designing the layout, formatting, and publishing this newsletter.

Also, very important! I need your e-mail address. If you are not receiving updates and information about the Ripcord Association via e-mail, you may be missing out on a lot of news.

## ARTICLES

Deadline for the Jan issue will be Dec 1st 2007. Please send all articles, photos, incoming mail and interesting reading to:

**Frank Marshall**  
224 Derry Hill Ct  
Mt Laurel, NJ 08054  
or e-mail to: [frankmarshall@comcast.net](mailto:frankmarshall@comcast.net)

## DONATIONS:

Checks payable to "Ripcord Association".

Mail to:  
**Lee Widjeskog,**  
493 Stillman Ave.  
Bridgeton, NJ 08302

## RIPCORD REPORT

**Ripcord Report** is a publication of the **Ripcord Association**, and is the authoritative voice of history for the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord.

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**Donations, the life blood of our Association** came from the following generous members during the past three months:

Bill Williams, G. Madsen, Jim Neff, Ben Harrison, Joe Guerra, Phil Marchaud, Dan Esposito, Erik Koenigsbauer, Jim Harris, Tommy Webster, and Dale Falconer.

Dear Mr. Widjeskog,

Please accept this donation in Herb Koenigbauer's name. He and his wife Vroni's wedding anniversary is this month (May) and we would like to mark it in this way.

Thank you!

Beth & Erik Koenigsbauer (Herb's nephew)

## Ripcordette Report

Once again the women of the Ripcord Survivors put on a Chinese Auction (aka Bucket Raffle) on Friday night. The winners took home items made and /or donated by the men and women of Ripcord and the proceeds go towards keeping down the costs of holding the reunions. In 2006 the auction brought in over \$800, but this year we made over \$1100. One of the most unusual items offer this year was a set of steer horns donated by Mike Chiarelli (from Texas of course). This was won by "Tex" Campbell from Oklahoma. What's with that???

The evening was better than ever due to the excellent hot and cold hors d'oeuvres ordered from the hotel which got everyone started before the raffles began.

If you are planning to attend next year and are able, **try to bring an item for the Chinese Auction**. Crafts are welcomed and they do not have to be military in nature to be popular.



*Attendees look over the items offered in the Ripcord Raffle on Friday night.*

# News From New Jersey

by Lee Widjeskog

Well, we had another successful REUNION! I had 113 people signed up for the event in Springfield and most were able to make it.

While there was no formal bus trip to Branson, many of the attendees found time to get in a show while there were in town. Others went to the BassPro Shop. Kathy and I went there for lunch in the Hemingway Café. The food was very good and made the trip a unique experience for a sporting goods store.

But the best thing for the week was of course seeing all the guys once more. We ended up with 10 new attendees!



***Ripcord gang gets acquainted with old friends in the hospitality room.***

We were pleased to have them and hope they will be able to attend next year. All in all the Clarion Hotel in Springfield did a wonderful job for us at the reunion. Their food was excellent and the service prompt and courteous. The hospitality room was well located for us so we did not disturb others and our smoking contingent was able to exit to the smoking area without trouble. We will be back here again in the future!

At the business meeting a number of things were discussed. The important thing is what the future holds for our reunions. Fred Spaulding continues to travel back and fourth across the country in search of good deals for the reunion. This last year he covered over 8,000 miles in his wheeling and dealing. This is taking its toll on Fred so we have a plan to cut this down. Next year our reunion will be in Laughlin, Nevada October 9 -12 2008. This will be followed by Myrtle Beach, SC October 7-10, 2009, Des Moines, Iowa October 6-11, 2010, then probably back to Springfield, MO in October 2011, Laughlin in 2012, and Myrtle Beach in 2013.

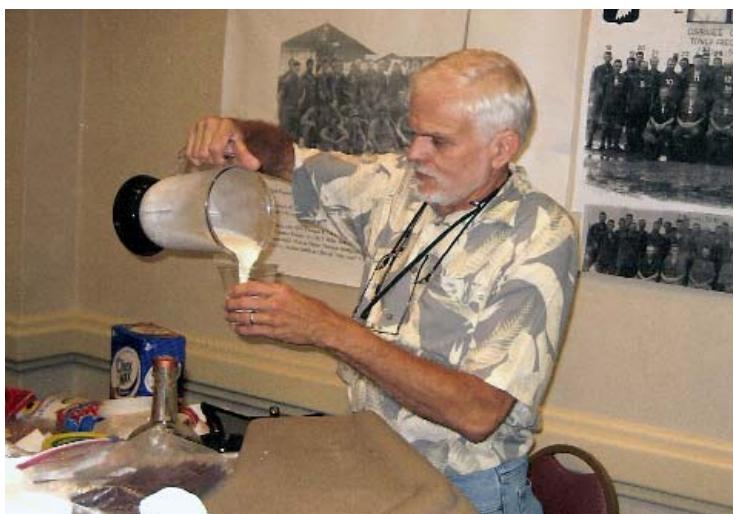
If possible we will rotate among Laughlin, Springfield and Myrtle Beach after 2010. The venues are good and the locations spread so all should be able to make one or

the other. Our finances are presently stable to increasing. Our biggest expense other than the reunion is setting up the possible locations. Once we settle on the three sites that cost will be drastically reduced. A full financial report will be presented in the next newsletter.

When all the raffles and donations for the event were totaled we brought in \$3,313. This was only possible through the generosity of the attendees and the members of the Ripcord Association. At the present time our Association has \$17,993.78 in the account with no outstanding bills due in.

Lastly, we had the brother -in -law of Capt. Hewitt of C 2/506 who was killed on 2 July, 1970, come to the reunion and perform a touching song he wrote about when they heard of Tom's death. There was not a dry eye in the house when he finished. The song is available as a download or a CD. Frank should have more info in the newsletter. All the proceeds for the song goes towards a group that aids the survivors of service men killed in the line of duty.

Most importantly I would like to thank all that helped during the reunion. Bob and Red Judd take care of the store and transport and store all the Ripcord paraphernalia all year long. They arrive early with us so we can stock up the hospitality room with adequate beer and snacks each year. Their help makes life for Kathy and me much easier. Fred Spaulding does a lot of traveling in order to set up the sites. If you think all goes well, it is in part because Fred has checked on the details before we all arrive and made certain the hotel stands by their word. This year we had the assistance of Jackie and Bob Wallace



***"Doc" Kellogg mixes another potent milk shake.***

who helped with registration for a time. And of course for the last two years Doc Kellogg with his blender, has seen fit to create a variety of concoctions that taste great and sneak up on you. Thanks also goes to all for being there and helping the new guys feel like part of the gang once more!! Have a great Fall!!!

# INCOMING MAIL

High School Letter  
Mr. Widjeskog,

Thank you for sending our school Ripcord. \* We will be placing it in our library for all the students.

Our students are learning much about the Vietnam War and that era through the Storyboard.

Paula Shields  
Hollister High School

\* This book was purchased and sent by Pops Hedrick E 2/506.

## First Reunion

I did not know what to expect from reunion, so I was a little scared when I drove down to Springfield. That feeling went away very quickly when I checked in. Everyone was so helpful and kind. All the old pics on the wall of hospitality room brought back a lot of memories. Mike and Liz Womack helped me a great deal and I want to thank them so much.

What I would say to other Ripcord survivors that have not been to a reunion, Go, it was one of the best experiences of my life. I plan on going every year from here on out as long as God is willing.

I want to thank Mike & Liz Womack, John Mihalko and Poje for kind of taking me under their wing and treating me great at my very first reunion.

I really enjoyed myself. I have made it my mission to attend every reunion from now on.

Bill Boles  
[bboles6166@yahoo.com]



General Harrison presents a Ripcord coin to another first timer.

Hello,

Roger West is looking for information on the chinook helicopter that went down on Ripcord. He was wondering when it was shot down, what unit went in to retrieve the down Chinook on Ripcord. He thinks he was attached to C Trp 2-17 Air Cav (Condors). Roger needs help remembering. He remembers going in and retrieving a chinook helicopter on LZ Ripcord. Any information would be greatly appreciated.

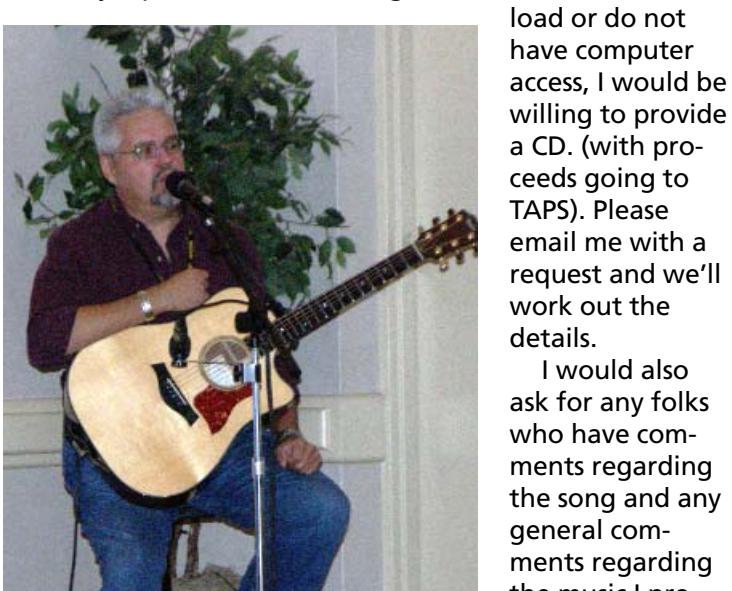
Sincerely,  
Ann West  
westess@hotmail.com writes:

*This letter was provided to us from Ray (Blackie) Blackman, one of the first writer's to our Ripcord Report*

Dear Frank & Lee:

Just a note of thanks to everyone from Ripcord. I was honored to participate and share some music with you all. I wanted to let you know that my web site is updated and ready for those interested in downloading A Letter From In Country.

If any Ripcord folk are having trouble with the download or do not have computer access, I would be willing to provide a CD. (with proceeds going to TAPS). Please email me with a request and we'll work out the details.



*Eric Deffenbaugh explains the origin of the touching, "A Letter from In Country".*

my marketing materials. Also any pictures of me performing/engaging with anyone, would most appreciated (jpeg format if possible). My email again is [Hopechords@aol.com](mailto:Hopechords@aol.com).

Thanks again for being such gracious hosts and making my connection to Ripcord a very warm and wonderful event.

Peace

Eric

My web site for downloading my song is [www.hope-chords.com](http://www.hope-chords.com). The web site for the charity organization that will benefit from song proceeds is [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org).

Hi, Frank,

The website looks great. We had a great time in Missouri. Going to the Wilson Creek Battlefield and walking the trails, as well as attending the Battlefield Museum, was not only educational, but very moving. We enjoyed seeing the Fantastic Caverns and attending the Dick Clark

*(Continued on next page)*

# INCOMING MAIL

American Bandstand Theater and Museum. The '57 car museum downstairs in the theater was really outstanding and should not be missed by anyone going to Branson.

More than anything, we again enjoyed being with our Ripcord brothers and sisters and having the opportunity to visit and get to know each other better. Each reunion just gets better in this regard as we get to know more and more people each time.

The food at the ladies' night raffle and the banquet was wonderful, as were the hotel service and accommodations.

We would like to say thanks to Lee and Kathy, as well as Red, and everyone else who worked so hard and helped to make this reunion such a success. We appreciate all you've done and all you continue to do. Thank you. We're looking forward to seeing everyone in '08 in Laughlin, Nevada!

Sincerely,  
George D. and Mary C. Murphy  
racenpace@sbcglobal.net

MADE IT HOME  
SAFE AND SOUND. I'M  
ALREADY LOOKING  
FORWARD TO NEXT  
YEAR.  
TEX

*Tex Campbell is the first to send me an e-mail that he arrived home safely and sent the first photo in to us and proudly shows the prize he won in our auction the Ripcordettes held on Friday evening.  
Not the car, the Horns!*



I graduated from artillery OCS in May 1970, about half of my class got orders for Vietnam, and the rest of us were promised that we would be there within a few months but I was sent to Korea instead. Steve Olson was a friend of mine and I pay tribute to his death with a rubbing from the wall which I display at my office. I have carried a little guilt through all these years; it was just an unlucky draw for Steve. I sent him a letter from Ft. Riley and it came back KIA.

I'm looking for any additional information about his FO ability and anybody that might have known him in such a short time in country. Is there any other source of information about the battle where he was killed.

Thanks for the help.  
David Johnson  
djohnson@sbpc.com

Joe and I recently attended our first Ripcord Reunion in Springfield, MO. What a truly special group of people we met. What a wonderful experience we had. Joe had been in contact with a few Ripcord guys over the years. We

received the Ripcord Reports and read about the reunion and post reunion news. He never expressed an interest in going to one before this year.

I wanted to be supportive and got behind his

decision and made all the arrangements. I secretly worried about the trip, thinking it would be a depressing and sad experience that he would regret. Turned out, I couldn't have been more wrong.

It became clear to me that Joe was having second thoughts about the trip the closer we got to leaving—but leave we did. As we got closer to Springfield Joe looked at me and said, "Look, I don't know how this going to go if it doesn't go well, we'll just get in the car and go home."

We were met by a warm, welcoming, friendly, smiling, sweet, helpful and wonderful group of people who made our visit a very nice experience. I urge all of you out there who have thought about attending a reunion, but have had reservations, to just give it a try. I'm pretty sure you won't be disappointed. These guys are really special! You'll be so glad that you made the effort. These gatherings are truly unique experience that you have to attend to understand.

Joe and another Ripcorder were talking and agreed that these reunions are great therapy and much better than any "shrink." Viet Nam vets have always had a special place in my heart long before I met and married mine. After this reunion I'm convinced that I've met some of the best!

Since we returned from the reunion I've begun reading Keith Nolans "Ripcord" book that I have purchased for Joe years ago. Now I have a new and renewed respect and admiration for all of you guys. I do hope that someone got a photo of General Harrison dancing on the table before he left. Better yet, I hope someone got a shot of the shock and amazement on our faces when he did it, what a moment! Did I mention that he's 80?

Joseph and Helen Connelly

# 2007 Ripcord Reunion Attendees

Dorian & Marsha Alexander	A/2-506	Sandra Hammons	C/2-506 (Layne)	Jim Neff	E/2-506
Floyd & Diane Alexander	A/2-506	William & Lynn Hand	B & E /2-506	Bruce & Ramona Nelson	2/319
William Baldwin	A/2-506	Evan Harr	Guest	Ben & Lilian Peters	B/2-506
John Beadle	2/11 Arty	Jim Harris & Andrew	HHC 2/506	Joe Pojedinec	Navy
Fred Behrens	Eagle Dust off	Ben & Carolyn Harrison	HHC 3rd Bde	Troy & Barbara Porter	C/2-506 Air Cav
Mary Jean Terrill	Guest	Chuck Hawkins	C & A 2/506	Robert & Gloria Pressley	B/2-506
Bill Boles	D/2-506 HHC	John & Barbara Hedrick	E/2-506	Buddy & Lisa Ralley	Mini Cav
Frank Bort	C/2-506	Chuck & Jean Holmen	A/159th	Mike & Laura Renner	2/11 Arty
Paul Buhr	A/2-506	Ronald Hoskins	E/2-506	Brian & Susan Reppe	B/2-506
Tex Campbell	D/2-506	Bob & Red Judd	B & E /2-506	John & Debbie Sherba	Recon 2/506
John Carr	A/2-506 HHC	Rick & Betty Kellogg	B/2-506	Fred Shuttleworth	E/2-506
Mike & Cathy Chiarelli	B/2-506	James & Marilyn Kilgore	E/2-506	Fred Spaulding	S-3 Air
Joseph & Helen Connally	D/1-506	David & Aubrey Kreckel	Guest	Wayne Spruill	D & E 2/506
Tommy & Judy & Lisa Counts	D/2-506	Walter & Kathie Lyssy	HHC 2/506	Lee Trembly	3rd Bde Air Cav
Harold Day	2/17 Cav	Frank Marshall	A/2-506	Gary & Roxy Turner	Guest
Eric Defenbaugh	Guest	Ron & Linda McCrory	E/2-506	Craig & Sandy Van Hout	B/2-506
Randy & Carol Ebrite		Richard & Joanne Meier	A/2-11 FA	Bob & Jackie Wallace	C/2-506
Sister of Burke Miller KIA 7/18/07		Joseph Melton	Iraq	Tom & Susan & Hope & Kinley Webster	A/2-506
Dan Esposito	2/11 Arty	Uwe & Diane Meyer	B/2-506	Lee & Kathy Widjeskog	A/2-506
Dale Falconer	B/2-506	John Mihalko	E/2-506	Mike & Liz Womack	C/2-506
Fred & Carol Gilbert	D/2-506	Kenneth & Connie	3rd Bde Air Cav	Audrey Wrightsell	Guest
Edie Habib	Guest	Leonard & Carol Moore	Mini Cav		
Robin Graham	HHC 2/506	Jerry & Mariella	C/2-506		
Ronald & Barbara Gunyan	B/2-506	George & Mary Murphy	B/2-320		



*Below and right:  
The General  
gets his  
funk on!*



*The Saturday Night Banquet.*



*Ripcord Vets telling the Iraq Vet how it was.*

*Gary & Roxy Turner and Randy & Carol Ebrite,  
sister of Burke Miller - KIA 7/18/70*

## Mike Labbee, B 2/506

While Mike's name is French in origin, he has a number of Irish ancestors in his background. Like many of the Irish, they have a hard time settling down. Mike was born in DeSoto, Missouri, but grew up in Bellville, Illinois. Since then he has been on the move.

Graduating high school in June of 1968, he joined the Army a month later. His Selective Service Board was moving fast and he got his draft notice a week after he arrived at Basic Training.

His Basic was at Fort Polk followed by Advanced Infantry Training at Fort Gordon, Georgia. After a try at flight school in Fort Rucker, Texas, he went to El Paso for Red-eye gunner training and then to Germany.

Mike re-enlisted for Vietnam and headed over with orders for the 9th Infantry Division. By the time he arrived orders for him and many others had been changed to help fill the depleted ranks of the 101st Division.

April 1970 found Labbee at Camp Evans teamed up with B 2/506 in the second platoon under Lt. Floyd. He

went on to serve under Captains Williams, Peters and Jenson before leaving country. He managed to get through Ripcord without injury but was later knocked unconscious when a blast killed one of the other guys in Bravo in February 1971. This blast messed up his eardrums, which got him stationed in the rear once his hearing returned. Constant bunker duty and the hassles of the rear soon had him volunteering to finish out his tour in the jungle.

After returning to the states he was shipped to Germany with a re-up and later Fort Hood. Just short of 10 years he found himself outside the Army and working in a variety of jobs such as steel mill worker, mechanic, tow truck driver, parts delivery etc.

Along the way he got married, but after 17 years they split and both were probably better for it.

Mike is now retired from the work force with a VA disability and spends time touring on his Kawasaki 750cc motorcycle and checking up on other Ripcord survivors.



### IMPORTANT!

Please send me your Vietnam photos from Ripcord and film footage, I want to put them on the website again.

You can e-mail them to me at:  
[frank@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frank@ripcordassociation.com)  
Or send them to me at  
224 Derry Hill Ct, Mt Laurel, NJ 08054

### Future Reunions

Laughlin, Nevada October 9 -12, 2008

Myrtle Beach, SC October 7-10, 2009

Des Moines, Iowa October 6-11, 2010

Springfield, MO in October, 2011

Laughlin, Nevada in 2012

Myrtle Beach, SC in 2013

# Next Ripcord Reunion – October 9 -12, 2008



**River Palms Resort & Casino**  
**2700 Casino Drive - Laughlin, NV 89029**  
**1(800)835-7904**

## Accommodations

The River Palms sets the new standard in superior service, exceptional quality and unparalleled value. With over 1,000 guest rooms and suites, the River Palms is the obvious choice for events of any size. The 25-story tower boasts the finest accommodations in Laughlin. Our spacious rooms are available with mountain or river views.



## Dining

Whether you are in the mood for an elegant meal or a quick bite, the River Palms has something for even the most discriminating palate. With four distinct restaurants and a top-notch catering and banquet staff, River Palms dining is a cut above. We also offer a variety of bars & lounges for an evening cocktail or gathering of friends.

## Gaming

With 72,000 square feet of the hottest Vegas style gaming action (the biggest in Laughlin), the River Palms is the only place to be.

### Table Games

The River Palms has all your favorite table games including Blackjack, Roulette, Craps, Three Card Poker, and Let It Ride.

### Slots

Slot Players have a reel good time at over 1,000 slot machines. The River Palms has all the latest and greatest slots around.



## Video Poker

If Video Poker is your game, look no further than the River Palms. With over 200 machines of every variety, so there's always a Royal waiting.

## Poker Room

For all you card players out there, get on you poker place and get ready to play. The Poker Room is one of the premiere poker rooms in Laughlin. With 60 seats and up to 300 seats for tournament play, there is no finer place for a game of Hold 'Em, Stud or Omaha.

## Beach Club Bingo

Beach Club Bingo is a premium bingo facility that seats 300. 6 sessions daily, at 9 a.m., 11 a.m., 1 p.m., 5 p.m., 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. The 1 p.m. and 9 p.m. sessions are Jumbo Sessions. Voted best Bingo in Laughlin!

## Attractions

The River Palms is a full service resort with premier amenities and river attractions right outside our door.

Whether you're into water sports, sight-seeing, or just want to relax the day away at our pool or Spa & Salon, the River Palms boasts something for every visitor.

Those seeking live entertainment or attending special events will find that River Palms aims to please. With a variety of talent the River Palms is your 24-hour hot spot in Laughlin!



**Outdoor Recreation** - Fishing, water skiing, and sailing are also available on the Colorado River or nearby Lake Mohave. You can even catch a water taxi right off the River Palms pier. If you would rather spend time on the links, the River Palms can also coordinate a tee time at one of three nearby championship level golf courses.

**Comedy Shop** features a nightly array of fun and laughter. Come see stand-up comedians who have been featured on HBO specials, Comedy Central, Premium Blend, The Tonight Show, Late Night, and more!

## Meetings

For meetings and conventions, the River Palms is simply the best. With 10,450 square feet of convention space, the River Palms can accommodate groups large and small. Our friendly and experienced staff is committed to giving our guests the superior service they deserve.