

Save our malls

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A mall in September should be home to the familiar rituals of back-to-school shopping. Children and parents, teenagers in social coteries all searching for the perfect clothes, accessories and supplies to fulfill that innate desire to conform. But a recent trip to the Meadows Mall revealed a different sense of conformity, one that had nothing to do with style. This is conformity to a business model that exists almost exclusively in Clark County: the existence of gambling within almost any restaurant — no matter the location.

Yes, location, location, location. Recently, that became not only a common real estate mantra but a confused chant, as the Tomfoolery Pub & Eatery inside the Meadows Mall gained a special use permit to increase the number of slots on the premises from five to 15.

Some may ask, "What difference do 10 more slots make in the grand scheme of gaming in Southern Nevada?" But it isn't solely the existence of these video poker machines; it is what they represent in the broader context of American iconography.

The architectural concept of the enclosed shopping mall was originally meant to encase a utopian atmosphere for material consumption. As the mall developed simultaneously with the sociological image of the teenager in the 1950s, shopping malls have also represented safety to parents and freedom to their children. With rent-a-cops, clean shelter, inexpensive entertainment and the opportunity to fulfill retail desire, in communities across America, the shopping mall is an acceptable playground for adolescents. From slides and swings, they graduate to video arcades and Hot Topic.

Here in Las Vegas, the Meadows Mall continues that tradition of ostensibly secure and publicly supervised leisure time for teens. There are no less than 15 schools within a two-mile radius of the mall. It is a common destination for families and youth of all ages. Therefore, the presence of a pub within the mall diminishes what is one of the last remaining bastions of atmospheric safety for youth. After all, we already live in a place where children attending G- and PG-rated films still have to walk through legions of chain-smoking gamblers just to get their latest PIXAR fix.

The City Council members who voted in favor of the additional slots at Tomfoolery's were responding to a common request from a Las Vegas business owner. Who among us have never sat at a bar with their pint of beer glowing from the light of the video poker encased in the mahogany underneath? And this transference of adult entertainment to normalcy throughout our community is what appears threatening to those who wish to maintain some semblance of suburban security.

There was one concession made by Tomfoolery's owner in response to the neighborhood protests: During the week it will close from 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. to address the threat potential drunk drivers pose to the children walking to school in the area at those hours. Because while this may have initially seemed like an issue of a few more slots, it was really about the safety of local children and teenagers. **CL**