

# Yuma's Sunshine

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ranks Yuma as the sunniest place in the country. It's a distinction that early business leaders used to their advantage.

There was a time when “the whole country laughed at the joke about the Yuma soldier who died and went to the regions of Belzebub [sic] and sent back home for his blankets,” an *El Paso Herald* reporter wrote in 1920. “Yuma is cashing in on its climate ... which proves that even a joke may be useful and that if you keep at it long enough, you can win.”

The reference was to Yuma’s “Free Board” promotion. Frank Ming, owner of the Pilot Knob Hotel and Yuma’s mayor in the 1920s, first came up with the bright idea of offering free meals, or board, on cloudy days. Other businesses, including the Southern Pacific Hotel and a gas station that offered “free gasoline every day the sun doesn’t shine,” jumped in.

No one knows exactly when the promotion started — likely the early 1900s, based on the photo at right — but it ran for decades. A *Los Angeles Times* article made reference to it in 1939.

Yuma’s legendary sunshine has been documented by everyone from *Guinness World Records* to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which

ranks Yuma as the sunniest place in the United States.

The city’s early business leaders took that sunshine to the bank. The promotional campaign attracted media coverage from as far away as New York.

“The founding fathers of Yuma were enterprising men,” says Laurie Boone, special-collections librarian for the Yuma County Library District. “[Climate], of course, is one of the [five] C’s in Arizona

and has typically been in our pitch to get people to come to Yuma. That hotel and sign were within view of the train station. It was an advertisement for Yuma.”

During Arizona’s Centennial, Yuma’s visitors bureau resurrected the campaign for a full year, offering guests at participating hotels a free dinner any day the sun didn’t shine. The result? “We did not give away a single taco,” says the bureau’s Ann Walker.

— KATHY MONTGOMERY



Yuma's Pilot Knob Hotel, shown in the 1900s, famously offered free meals on rare cloudy days.

THE JOURNAL

## this month in history

- Southern Arizona's Coronado National Memorial is established on July 9, 1952.
- Bisbee officials and citizens round up and deport almost 1,200 strikers from the Industrial Workers of the World on July 12, 1917.
- On July 17, 1935, the city of Phoenix purchases Sky

Harbor Airport, which has one runway. The airport is so isolated that it garners the nickname “The Farm.”

- Lightning strikes a National Guard company tent in Naco on July 20, 1917. The lightning splinters a rifle stock and melts the cartridges in a cartridge belt, soldering them together.

- The city of Globe floods on July 24, 1896, destroying homes and the local Silver King Saloon and causing mine tunnels in the area to cave in.
- Governor Thomas Campbell, in hopes of saving taxpayers \$90,000, cancels the Arizona State Fair on July 30, 1921.

## ARIZONA HIGHWAYS 50 Years Ago



Isolation from the day-to-day buzz of humanity was the theme of *Arizona Highways'* July 1965 issue, which featured the intimate and remote Cibecue Creek and its relationship to the struggling but surviving culture of the Cibecue Apaches.