Winslow Today: Commerce and Employment

After World War II, Winslow’s growth slowed as technology reduced the railroad industry’s manpower requirements. In 1979, downtown businesses were devastated when the Interstate 40 bypass opened. Today, the economy is more diversified, and Winslow’s population is stable at almost 10,000 people. The largest employers include the BNSF Railway, the Winslow Unified School District, Northland Pioneer College-Winslow Campus, the Little Colorado Medical Center, Winslow Indian Health Services, and an Arizona Department of Corrections facility south of town.

The Santa Fe and BNSF Railways

Town leaders resisted growth after World War II, so the Santa Fe expanded the diesel shops in Barstow, California, instead of Winslow. Technological advancements, along with the loss of passenger operations to Amtrak in 1971, continued to reduce jobs throughout the industry, though railroads remained critical to hauling freight around the nation. The Santa Fe merged with the Burlington Northern Railroad in 1995, and Winslow continued to serve as division headquarters until the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway moved them to Belen, New Mexico, in 2001. The company, renamed BNSF Railway in 2005, was purchased by Berkshire Hathaway in 2010 and remains one of the largest employers in town.

The Winslow-Lindbergh Regional Airport

The best preserved of the original TAT airfields, the Winslow Municipal Airport was renamed in 1998 as a lasting tribute to its role in aviation history. Wiseman Aviation has been contracted by the city to run daily operations since 2007 and restored the terminal to its original style. Said Orville Wiseman, “The Winslow Airport was probably the busiest airport in the Southwest back in the 1940s . . . all the airmail for Northern Arizona went through there . . . it’s probably the oldest continuous service passenger terminal in the world . . . that’s a pretty neat little piece of history.” Current airport users include the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. military, Columbia Scientific Balloon Facility, medical transport services, and the E&O Kitchen. Recreational flyers continue to stop here for the good weather and unobstructed landscape, as well as for the annual High Desert Fly-In (www.highdesertflyin.org).

Winslow as Border Town

Hopi and Navajo people have continually migrated between their tribal lands and Winslow for trade, employment, education, public services, and entertainment. Non-native Winslow residents have also migrated to Hopi and Navajo communities while working as traders, teachers, and medical workers.

In 1996, Patricia Egan posed with her second-grade students at Dillon School, 40 miles northeast of Winslow (left). She remembers leaving Chicago in 1989 at age 55 to start a new career. “I felt like everything in my life leading up to that time prepared me for that, and I felt a real kinship with the people, especially the grandparents, many of whom were taking care of the kids . . . and I felt very honored by that trust.”

In 1956, the Bureau of Indian Education opened a Native American dormitory in Winslow named Emmons Hall. Renovated and renamed Winslow Residential Hall in 1990, it houses Hopi, Navajo, and Apache students while they attend Winslow High School. Sophomore and varsity basketball player Karylin Bitonti (right, at left) describes why she was willing to leave her home in Leupp to attend school in Winslow. “It gives me more experience, more time to be social amongst my peers here at the residential hall, and to get to know the staff . . . (and) the high standards that they have with the accelerated classes . . . I like them. Actually, I love them!”

Helene Bitonte (right, at right), Winslow Residential Hall Executive Director, reflects on one of the advantages for the students: “I see the students as we’re all related . . . even though we’re miles apart, I still know a lot of the families. Some of the kids here I had when they were little, at a different school district . . . it’s like one big, regional community.”

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