

## **Opinion: Visitors better served by the closing of A.C. Welcome Center**

In the business world, companies are rewarded for recognizing their mistakes and quickly ending their drag on performance by liquidating the offending unit and taking a loss.

That's how to think about the closing — finally! — of the Atlantic City Welcome Center. Until this month, for 20 years it failed miserably to deliver value anywhere near the resources it took to build and run it.

Nearly everything about the center was a mistake, including its conception, location and design.

At a cost of \$3.7 million to build and only 3,000 square feet — the size of an ordinary home — a durable, almost luxurious facility was expected to greet visitors on arrival to the glitzy gaming resort.

Instead, the design was topped and dominated by a white canvas tent that many thought looked cheesy. And when people found out that it included no public bathrooms, there was widespread anger and disbelief. Apparently it occurred to no one involved in creating the center that visitors who had just driven hours to get to Atlantic City might want to use a restroom at their first stop. Then-Mayor Jim Whelan was furious.

The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority realized this fatal flaw during construction and spent another half million to add to the bathrooms at the gas station next door. As our editorial in 1999 said, “not very welcoming” to ask people who've gotta go to go next door.

The outcry prompted the CRDA to provide some luxury portable restrooms when the welcome center opened, but this crucial design omission alone would have been enough to ensure the failure of the center.

Restrooms or no, the welcome center was doomed the moment the CRDA and city decided to put it a few miles out of town in the no-man's land between eastbound and westbound lanes of the Atlantic City Expressway. The visitors streaming by on that highway are gamblers who know their real welcome is waiting for them at the casino of their choice. Nearly all have already decided which casino they're visiting first and can't help but find it with the overabundant signage all the way into the resort and to each casino parking garage. There's no good reason to waste time with a stop outside town.

Those who do want general information have been more likely to get it at the CRDA's Boardwalk Information Center.

So the end of the expressway center fiasco is good news. The CRDA will put more staff at the Boardwalk Information Center and extend its hours, and put more effort into social and digital marketing. Both are much more productive uses of its resources.

Shutting the center is a good sign for the city's recovery. As anyone in business knows, success is not only figuring out how to do things better — it's also having the courage and insight to quit doing them worse.