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RIVIERA IMPLOSION GOES OFF WITHOUT A HITCH

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Las Vegas bid a bittersweet goodbye to the Riviera early Tuesday, as the historic hotel's Monaco tower came crashing down to pave the way for expanded convention facilities.

The 24-story tower was imploded around 2:35 a.m., preceded by a fireworks show and a countdown. A rumbling began, and the easternmost part of the tower began to fall first. The entire building ceased to exist in under a minute, and in the minutes that followed, the dust cleared, leaving a void on the northern end of the Strip.

"As we say goodbye to the Riviera, we look forward to our future," Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority President and CEO Rossi Ralenkotter said at a lively viewing party in an adjacent convention center parking lot.

The Riviera on Tuesday joined other resorts such as the Stardust, the Aladdin and the Dunes when it was reduced to rubble by 18 delayed detonations. But those hotels "are the foundation of where we are today," Ralenkotter said.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority acquired the property for \$190 million in February 2015 and plans to expand convention facilities there.

Former Nevada Gov. Bob Miller's memories go back to the Riviera's beginning. He spent part of his childhood as a lifeguard at the hotel.

"It's a bittersweet moment for me to watch my past being blown up," Miller said before proclaiming, in line with Las Vegas tradition, "In with the new."

Live music and a refreshments tent contributed to a lively scene at the parking lot implosion viewing party. The crowd erupted in cheers as the Riviera fell.

The implosion went "absolutely to plan," said Terry Miller, principal at Cordell Corp., the firm hired as the LVCVA's project manager.

As the viewing party crowd began to disperse shortly after the implosion, the work of cleanup crews was just beginning. For about two hours following the implosion, crews were cleaning streets, sidewalks and neighboring buildings. But the dust left behind wasn't expected to be an issue, Terry Miller said, because a lot of advance work was done to seal off neighboring properties and remove any hazardous materials.

Concrete left behind on the Riviera site will be crushed there and used for fill where a hole now remains. Steel will be taken off-site to be salvaged.

The parking lot revelers weren't the only ones watching the Riviera come down.

Behind a flame-lit barrier wall of the patio at the Barrymore, inside the nearby Royal

Resort, about 15 people sat with an otherwise unobstructed view of the once-shimmering Riviera.

Tonight those lights were dimmed, with the exception of the 24-story Monaco tower, which glowed a light orange.

Local woman Michelle Draucker is a self-described implosion pro, having seen both the Frontier casino and the Clarion hotel come down.

The two men sitting with Draucker, Jeff Willis of Dallas, Texas, and Kimani Williams of Las Vegas, said they did not have any special memories of the “Riv” but were at the watch party solely to see the building implode.

“I want to feel it,” Willis said. “Watching on TV is nothing like seeing it in person.”

Outside the Casino Center Boulevard property, viewers started trickling into the parking lot about an hour before boomday.

After a minutes-long fireworks show, the conclusion of the Monaco tower commenced. A plume of smoke rivaled the Stratosphere in height and stretched from Sahara Avenue to the striped tent at Circus Circus to the Peppermill Restaurant and Fireside Lounge. It could be seen from as far south as Mandalay Bay, and the implosion was heard around the valley.

Clark County Commissioner Lawrence Weekly referenced Las Vegas’ knack for reinvention, and said taking down the Riviera will provide an opportunity to “expand our footprint” and bring in more shows, more visitors and larger conventions.

The Riviera property is adjacent to the Convention Center’s Gold Lot. Taking the Riviera down will create space for an extra 3,100 parking spaces that could be used for additional vehicle parking or for outdoor exhibits.

W.A. Richardson Builders LLC, the demolition contractor, won the \$42 million demolition bid. Tuesday morning’s implosion was the first of two at the Riviera site.

Hazardous materials were removed before the Monaco tower could be brought down. The Monte Carlo tower is scheduled to be taken down in August, but workers first will need to wrap the building in plastic and chisel away its exterior finish that contains asbestos.

The Monaco tower was built in 1987, while the older Monte Carlo tower was finished in 1975.

Some nearby streets, including Las Vegas Boulevard, were closed for several hours for the implosion.

Rafael Villanueva of the LVCVA acted as the emcee at the parking lot viewing party and called the festivities a “fond farewell to a historic part of Las Vegas” that will help make way for future prosperity.