

Going to Mexico?

By January 31st, 2008, you will need a valid Passport or a U.S. birth certificate plus valid government-issued identification, (Arizona driver's license). The requirement had been that on 1/31/2008, you'd need a Passport to get through. Due to the huge backups in Passport production (18 million Passports were ordered in 2007; up from 8 million in 2006), Homeland Security has backed the date back to 2009. [No date has been specified at this time & once a date is determined, it will not be moved].

So, the advice from the State Department was to get one now, a Passport costs around \$100 & is good for 10 years. It has been announced that Tucson will get a new passport production center that will employ 100 and will match its Arkansas location production levels. Current turn-times are estimated at 4-6 weeks, but a realistic timeframe is 8 weeks. So, if you are planning anything that needs a Passport, get started on the process now.

WHTI

Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative & US Dept of State sent speakers for the recent Border Trade Alliance regional meeting in Nogales yesterday. I attended on behalf of the Marana Chamber of Commerce.

There is a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Feds & the State of Arizona that will allow Arizona to offer "Enhanced Drivers Licenses" for \$20 more than a regular DL, it allows for Land & Sea travel between the USA, Canada & Mexico. [at this time, Air will not be allowed without a full Passport]. The legislation still must get through the Arizona Legislature before it can be acted upon. But, for families that may have relatives in Mexico the EDL (\$20) is much more affordable than the actual Passport (\$100). For Arizonans that visit Mexico occasionally by land or sea, it is a bargain.

Washington State Department of Licensing is ahead of the curve with their introduction of the new Enhanced Drivers License (that will be equipped with RFID & Biometric Identification) and will begin issuing the new EDL in January 2008.

WHTI is looking to partner with Chambers of Commerce and other organizations to help in grass roots efforts.

SECURITY, THE BORDER & ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

As we speak, the border checkpoints are antiquated. Last Memorial Day, Arizonans returning from Rocky Point sat through 8 hour waits on a 2 lane highway to get through the Lukeville checkpoint. Trade between Sonora & Arizona is very important to both nations. Approximately 35% of the retail sales at the Tucson Mall are from Sonaran residents.

The sales tax revenue is essential to Marana's growth as well. The housing slowdown has hit Marana hard and development plans of retail. So, border trade with Mexico must continue.

Homeland Security has put the ID requirements into effect as an important security measure. The US needs to know who is crossing the border and verify the documents that they have. The RFID and Biometric devices will shave major time off for border crossers. While driving into the border gate, the radio devices will activate and report the identification of the American. When they get to the border agent, the agent will then be able to swipe the card and verify the identities via Biometrics. This will allow faster travel for Americans returning from Canada and Mexico.

MEXICAN & CANADIAN CITIZENS CROSSING BY LAND OR SEA

I asked the Homeland Security representative and she stated that a Green Card or a Passport is sufficient for crossing into the US from Mexico or Canada for those nations' citizens. The Sonoran government sent a consulate and she stated that the Passport costs approximately \$100 for Mexican residents as well. The Green Cards are usually paid for by American businesses that want the workforce.