

## This Day in History... April 20, 1987

# Reopening of Sunshine Skyway Bridge

On April 20, 1987, the second Sunshine Skyway Bridge opened. It was rebuilt following a 1980 accident. Considered a symbol of Florida, it's also the longest cable-stayed concrete bridge in the world.

Construction on the original Sunshine Skyway Bridge began in 1950. It opened as a two-lane bridge on September 6, 1954. It reduced travel time across the bay and opened a route to southern Florida. The two lanes of the span became crowded, so another bridge was built next to it between 1967 and 1971 to relieve the traffic.



*The bridge is a popular symbol of Florida and was painted yellow to represent the sun's rays and Florida's nickname, the Sunshine State.*

to two towers support the center section of the bridge. Construction began in June 1982 and was completed by early 1987. Before the bridge officially opened, it hosted a 10K race. On January 11, 1987, some 10,000 runners, joggers, and walkers participated in four races across the bridge. Since 2018, the bridge has hosted the Skyway 10K, which benefits the Armed Forces Families Foundation (the 2021 event was held virtually due to COVID).

The new four-mile-long Sunshine Skyway Bridge officially opened to traffic on April 20, 1987.



*Since 2018, the bridge has hosted a 10K to benefit the Armed Forces Families Foundation.*

has won several design and engineering awards.

The old bridges have brought new life to the area. The remnants of the center portion were sunk in the bay as artificial reefs. The entrance ramps of the bridges became the Skyway State Fishing Piers, complete with picnic tables and a bait shop. As each day ends, tourists and residents gather on the piers to witness one of the colorful sunsets that light up the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. The Sunshine Skyway Bridge forms a stunning silhouette across Tampa Bay, making it a popular photo subject and setting for automobile commercials.



*The 2012 Priority Mail stamp pictures the Sunshine Skyway Bridge.*

On May 9, 1980, a sudden storm struck, bringing torrential rains and 70-mile-per-hour winds. With low visibility and radar rendered useless, the freighter *Summit Venture* struck the newer span. Over 1,200 feet of the bridge tumbled into the bay, and 35 lives were lost. While plans began for a replacement bridge, the southbound span became a fishing pier and the northbound span once again had to carry traffic going in both directions.

Florida Governor Bob Graham had seen a bridge in France with a unique design. When the new bridge was built over Tampa Bay, the same cable-stayed construction was used. Steel cables anchored



*The remains of the old bridge were made into fishing piers.*

It was later named the Bob Graham

Sunshine Skyway Bridge, after the governor who proposed its design. Most refer to it as the Sunshine Skyway or simply the Skyway. The new bridge was modernized to meet interstate standards. On the main span, two towers are supported by 42 continuous stay cables, encased in nine-inch diameter steel pipes. These cables were painted yellow, to represent the sun's rays. The shipping channel was also expanded, and 36 "dolphins" were installed. These dolphins protect the bridge's piers and pylons in the event of another possible ship collision. Over the years, the bridge



*The bridge has served as the backdrop for several car commercials.*

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