

BERLIN -- After a test run of the Casino at Ocean Downs under the scrutiny of the State Lottery Agency, attendees praised the casino as an impressive entertainment venue and a state lottery official cleared the way for the slots parlor to open.

Late Thursday, Maryland Lottery

director Stephen Martino signed a slots license for Ocean Enterprise 589, the company that controls Ocean Downs. A ribbon-cutting and grand opening is scheduled for Jan. 4, the first day the general public is expected to be invited inside. "I thought it was a first-class facility," said County Commissioner Judy Boggs after attending the controlled demonstration. "Everything was beautiful, without the noise and sensory overload of a Las Vegas casino."

The Casino at Ocean Downs will be the state's second modern slots parlor. A 2008 voter referendum approving slot machine gambling opened the door for five parlors to be built; the Hollywood Casino, in Cecil County, was the first venture to get off the ground.

The test demonstration was not only a chance for the casino to leap over its final hurdle on the way to being fully operational, but a chance to contribute money to local chapters of the American Legion. In a news release, the casino said its management matched the \$10,505 it earned in gambling proceeds during the test run with an additional charitable donation. When food and beverage revenues were factored in, the Legion was given \$23,446.

Hundreds of American Legion members were also invited to test out the service, slot machines and facilities.

Sarge Garlitz, commander of Post 166 in Ocean City, says the event was a success.

"It was totally off the charts," said Garlitz. "I had no idea what to expect. I had never been in a casino before."

Several representatives of local and state government are expected to attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the \$45 million facility, containing 750 slot machines, which is scheduled to begin at noon followed by the official opening at 1 p.m.

"Be among the first to experience the action-packed excitement of over 700 slots at the East Coast's newest casino," read the casino's opening-day advertisements. In a nod to opponents' worries that Maryland will develop social problems because of gambling, the ads include a toll-free number, 800-522-4700, that offers help for people with problem gambling habits.

Once the casino is open, it will begin to pay taxes on gaming revenues, 5.5 percent of which will be set aside for local impact grants. Of that, 60 percent will go to Worcester County, 20 percent to Ocean City, 10 percent to Berlin and 10 percent to Ocean Pines.

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