

BERLIN -- Dozens of rows of gleaming slot machines offered "Sex in the City" and "I Love Lucy" themes. Voluptuous, computer-generated women on TV screens offered passers-by a round of video blackjack. Outside, cars filled the parking lot at the Casino at Ocean Downs. For expectant gamblers and elected officials alike, the

wait is over. Slots have arrived. An official grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony brought together Gov. Martin O'Malley, the lottery commission chairman, state, county and local delegates. Once the speeches were done, customers began feeding coins and bills into the video gaming machines.

"It was a controversial issue, but the people of Maryland decided they wanted it and it was overwhelmingly voted in," said House Delegate Norm Conway. "It has been a lot of effort, and a lot of work, and now this becomes the second casino in Maryland."

The \$45 million facility currently contains 750 slot machines. Since Maryland voters legalized slots in 2008, only one other casino, The Hollywood Casino in Perryville, has opened. Ocean Downs would have run a tight race for the first casino if they were able to open when the company hoped, on Memorial Day 2010. But the disposal of asbestos found in part of the track's renovated building slowed the process down.

During the opening, O'Malley said the creation of over 236 casino jobs as well as the 300 jobs supported during the construction phase is extremely important given the current state of the economy. The revenue generated by the slots parlor, he said, has the possibility to help Maryland's economy.

"We are all in this fight together," said O'Malley. "We can sit back and complain and be frustrated or we can take action to create jobs and that's what we are doing today."

Once the first month of revenue is tallied, local municipalities and Worcester County government can expect to see an increase in their coffers as local impact grants are handed out. Diane McGraw, lottery commissioner, says local governments will not need to apply for the grants. Instead they will receive their portion automatically each month.

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