

Written by Administrator
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HAMMOND, Ind. - The first thing you notice about the Horseshoe Casino Hammond is not the rich, paneled interiors, the expanse of blackjack tables or the 22-foot-high, barrel-vaulted ceiling.

You notice the crowds.

Even on a Wednesday night, thousands of customers are rolling the dice, playing cards and working the slots that ring nearly every second with each

bet made. Raking in \$558.5 million in gambling revenue last year and less than 25 miles from downtown Chicago, the Horseshoe is this region's richest and most popular casino.

It's also the best example of what Cincinnati's future casino might be like. Developers last week announced that Caesars Entertainment Corp. will bring its Horseshoe concept to Broadway Commons when the downtown casino opens in 2012.

□ [Photos: Horseshoe Casino Hammond: What Cincinnati's might look like](#)

Known for its higher betting limits and better odds, Horseshoe is marketed to appeal to serious gamblers. It's the only one of 11 casinos in Indiana where gamblers can wager \$1,000 on a single pull of a slot machine handle. It's also one of just two in the state - both Horseshoes - where players can bet \$100,000 on a game of baccarat.

More liberal house rules offer players slightly better odds of winning various games. Here at the high-limits blackjack tables, for instance, house dealers are required to stand on a "soft 17" - typically an ace and a six. Because an ace can have a value of either 1 or 11, the house forfeits a slight advantage by not drawing an additional card.

Developers say Horseshoe Casino Cincinnati will offer plenty of penny slots and welcome gamblers willing to play for all stakes. But an ability to handle big bets also may appeal to gamblers who cannot find those draws at the three nearest riverboat casinos in southeast

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Indiana.

"We're tops in betting limits and odds offered in games," says Kevin Kline, whose appointment as new general manager of Cincinnati's casino was announced on Friday. Formerly the assistant general manager at the Hammond Horseshoe, Kline plans to move to Cincinnati in the next few months.

He says Cincinnati's casino will offer more of a true gambling experience with generous freebies for best players. Its elegant, conservative feel will be in contrast to the more casual, raucous vibe of some other casinos.

"It's a place that feels more like a club," says Gary Loveman, chief executive of Caesars Entertainment.

The choice of brand for Cincinnati was influenced by the heavy competition already here, Loveman says. He notes that Horseshoe casinos are No. 1 in every market where they're located.

"We wanted to be positioned as best in market."

High rollers

Even the layout of Hammond's Horseshoe focuses on the allure of the big wager. Table games are situated in the middle of the gambling floor - not in the back, behind the slots, as is typical in many casinos.

"The energy you feel walking in with eight or 10 craps games going on creates a real sense of arrival," Kline says.

▣ [Photos: Groundbreaking for Cincinnati casino](#)

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Karen Jablonski, a 51-year-old surgical coordinator for a Chicago hospital, says she loves the look and feel of the Horseshoe. Her favorite game is roulette, which she plays when she visits the casino about every other month.

"It's beautiful - it's my favorite casino," she says. "It reminds me of Vegas. It's the closest thing we've got to that, and I go every year."

The Horseshoe isn't the luxury brand of Caesars Entertainment, the world's largest gambling company that's partnering with Rock Gaming developers to build Cincinnati's casino. The luxury cache belongs to casinos with the name Caesars - only four in the world.

But the Horseshoe name is more upscale than the entertainment company's other major concept, Harrah's. Caesars operates five Horseshoes in Indiana, Iowa, Kansas and Mississippi, while it runs 16 Harrah's in Arizona, California, Nevada, New Jersey, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina and Pennsylvania.

Caesars also is bringing the Horseshoe brand to a new casino in Cleveland, with the first of two phases scheduled to open early next year. Two other casinos approved by Ohio voters in 2009 will be Hollywood brands when they open in 2012 in Columbus and Toledo. Those casinos will be owned and operated by Penn National Gaming Inc., the parent company of Hollywood Casino Lawrenceburg.

The Horseshoe brand was created in 1951 by legendary gambler and World Series of Poker founder Benny Binion. The downtown Las Vegas casino that carried his name attracted the attention of serious gamblers with its high table limits, including \$500 craps wagers, then 10 times the norm.

"A brand is a promise to customers," says Joseph Weinert, a gambling analyst with Atlantic City-based Spectrum Gaming Group. He says the Horseshoe is known for emphasizing table games like craps and blackjack rather than slot machines.

While ultimately casinos succeed or fail based on their amenities and customer service, Weinert

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says the Cincinnati casino will need every advantage as the region grows crowded with new casinos. Besides the two new Hollywood casinos in Columbus and Toledo, the region's current dominant casino is southeast Indiana's Hollywood Casino Lawrenceburg.

"Hollywood's a strong brand, and it's getting stronger," Weinert says.

Caesars acquired the Horseshoe brand in 2004 from Binion's son, Jack, who had expanded the concept outside Nevada and took its image more upscale from its utilitarian roots.

"Jack Binion made it a little fancier, but kept its core customer service and high limits," says Lyle Berman, chief executive of Minneapolis-based casino operator Lakes Entertainment, which has an option to buy a 10 percent interest in the Cincinnati casino. "He never made it too elegant - it still felt like a gambling house."

Amenities, attractions

Lit up with 79 chandeliers, the Horseshoe Casino Hammond sports a 108,000-square-foot casino floor - nearly one and half times the size of a typical Kroger. Open 24/7, it has four restaurants, a wine bar and a 2,500-seat theater that also functions as meeting and banquet space.

Kline cautions the building plans for Cincinnati aren't to copy everything in Hammond. For instance, a wine bar is not the list. And while the Cincinnati casino will have meeting and event space, plans don't include a theater. Developers are negotiating with the city to acquire a nearby parking lot for conversion into an area for outdoor events.

Most important, the Cincinnati casino will be land-based, so it will look nothing like Hammond's riverboat exterior with its massive barge affixed to the back of the entry building.

"We want to make something unique in Cincinnati. We're not just going to take this and replicate it," Kline says.

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He says the Horseshoe concept is "flexible" and both Rock Gaming and Caesars Entertainment will develop the property to fit the personality of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

To cater the Horseshoe concept to Chicago's sizable Asian population - Chinatown is 25 minutes away - a casino high-limit room has a feng shui-influenced design, called "Le Cheng." The room features an elaborate wood ceiling and walls that were hand-carved in China. "This shows the versatility of Horseshoe," Kline says.

He says developers are still talking with Cincinnati restaurateurs about potentially locating eateries within the casino at Broadway Commons. A steakhouse will "definitely" be among three or four restaurants, Kline says. It could be Horseshoe's own Jack Binion Steakhouse or a local concept.

Another restaurant most likely will be a buffet, Kline says. The buffet in Hammond is called Village Square and serves fare including sandwiches and Mexican food.

Customer service

Cincinnati's casino is expected to employ 1,700 workers once it is up and running in the final months of 2012. Jobs will range from servers and security officials to financial analysts and food and beverage managers.

While casino staff are trained to always be courteous, they dress more formally at a Horseshoe than at a Harrah's, Kline says. Typically, employees wear jackets and ties.

Behind the scenes, Hammond casino workers partake in "buzz sessions" - miniature pep rallies intended to fire them up before they take to the floor and interact with customers. During breaks, employees can unplug in a meditation room, a game room with pinball machines and Wii, a computer room or a TV room.

Break schedules also vary by a worker's position. Service employees get a standard 30-minute lunch plus two 15-minute breaks.

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Due to the intensity of presiding over table games, most dealers work 80 minutes on, then 20 minutes off. Craps dealers - who referee the fastest-paced table game and often for the most demanding customers - work 60 minutes on and 30 minutes off.

"It's a very intense game - both physically and mentally," Kline explains, noting that dealers spend their shifts on their feet and constantly reach across the table. "But some dealers when they start doing craps, they only want to do that."

Loveman says highly trained dealers are key to the operation, just as serious golfers appreciate an attentive staff at a golf course.

"Gamblers, like golfers, take their gaming seriously," he says.

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