

Rivers Casino counters racism charges

Written by Administrator
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The Rivers Casino denied charges of racism Wednesday, saying its staff works hard to host events that appeal to people of all colors.

In a letter to Allegheny County Council member Amanda Green Hawkins, the casino says it hasn't turned away black fundraisers or treated black events differently, and it promised to meet with the councilwoman to set her mind at ease.

"As we have repeatedly stated, Rivers Casino has zero tolerance for racism of any kind," Rivers general manager Craig Clark wrote in the letter. "We are proud of our diversity track records regarding employment, selection of service providers and community outreach."

Ms. Green Hawkins sent a letter to casino management Aug. 6 saying she had received numerous complaints of racism from her constituents.

In July, she wrote, the casino shut down a party by the Pittsburgh Ruff Ryders, a black motorcycle club, telling visitors too many people had showed up to the bar, she wrote. Earlier in the year, according to her sources, it also refused to sponsor an anti-violence rally organized by Stop the Violence Pittsburgh, saying it can't donate to an organization serving children.

She also relayed complaints that the Rivers discontinued a popular "Casino Royale" night that attracted black patrons, and that it refused to play host or play boxing matches popular in the black community.

Mr. Clark addressed her arguments point by point. The Ruff Ryders overbooked the Drum Bar, he said, inviting 400 people to a venue that can only seat 115. Although the casino had to close the bar early to prevent overcrowding, it gave the motorcycle club a full refund, he wrote.

On the anti-violence rally, the casino does not sponsor programs serving people under 21, Mr. Clark said, since the casino itself serves only those 21-and-over. As the event was specifically geared to young blacks, a casino representative contacted organizers and politely declined.

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As for boxing, Rivers has stopped showing matches at the Drum Bar and the Wheelhouse because of large crowds and repeated vandalism, Mr. Clark wrote. But while they still show and host matches in their banquet hall or amphitheater, those venues are frequently booked up.

Lastly, the "Casino Royale" event series wasn't canceled because too many of its participants were black, Mr. Clark wrote -- it was canceled because no one showed up.

William Marshall begs to differ. The organizer of the Stop the Violence Pittsburgh event and the "Casino Royale" nights, he's one of the residents who brought his complaints to Ms. Green Hawkins. "I went to these events, and they were good, peaceful events," he said. "They were well-attended."

Ms. Green Hawkins hasn't yet read the letter. She'll meet with casino officials next Thursday.

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