

Valley Forge Casino fined \$200K

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Ira Lubert's Valley Forge Casino Resort was fined \$200,000 Wednesday by the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board for violating rules on special offers to attract customers.

The fine was the biggest single one yet levied by the board.

The hearing in Harrisburg included a testy statement by board chairman William H. Ryan, who accused Valley Forge of intentionally violating regulations to get around the rules governing the type of casino operated by Lubert, a venture capitalist and real-estate investor.

"I believe this was an intentional attempt to avoid admittedly difficult, cumbersome access restrictions," Ryan said. "The intent here was to get people into the casino without having to deal with those cumbersome access restrictions."

That allegation prompted Lubert, who had been sitting quietly beside his attorney, to speak.

Lubert, who is in the group of investors who want to build a casino at Eighth and Market Streets in Center City, said Valley Forge had started the Lucky Day promotion because it passed muster with its lawyer.

"This is reputational for me," Lubert said. "It's very important for me to just let you know that it was not intentional."

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The board decided that Valley Forge should pay the entire \$200,000 within 30 days, rather than in four payments, as first negotiated by the office of enforcement counsel.

The fine was levied for a promotional program that offered seasonal and annual dining club memberships free or at a discount. Those memberships allowed access to the casino. The law requires visitors to the Valley Forge casino to spend at least \$10 in the resort to access the gambling area.

David La Torre, a spokesman for Valley Forge, said the casino had worked hard to comply with the law. "The law's requirement that a patron must pay \$10 before entering the casino continues to be perceived as overwhelmingly negative by our customers. In fact, upon learning of the access requirement, many have left our casino in protest," he said.

That has hurt revenues, including funds for property-tax relief statewide, he said.

Though Commissioner Keith R. McCall said the type of license held by Valley Forge "doesn't work," the board insisted on the elimination of passages in the consent order saying Valley Forge's violations were unintentional.

In another matter, the gaming board approved a consent agreement for SugarHouse Casino to pay a \$20,000 fine for allowing a patron on its "self-exclusion" list to gamble.

SugarHouse pledged to improve its procedures for detecting compulsive gamblers. A lawyer for SugarHouse, Michael Sklar, told the board that if a patron is seen in the casino for 24 hours, dealers are told to notify the surveillance office, which would then see if the person is on the voluntary self-exclusion list.

The SugarHouse action was prompted by the ability of a Philadelphia man, Kylee Bryant, to engage in marathon gambling sessions on three occasions despite being on the list.

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