

New parking fees at Tampa's Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino unpopular with some

Written by Administrator
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TAMPA — Every Saturday — and some Fridays — George Boyer and his wife, Beverly, make the 40-mile drive from their Lakeland home to play poker and the slot machines at Tampa's Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.

It was their tradition, one that continued even after Beverly suffered a stroke. Then the Boyers learned the casino had instituted a \$10 charge for parking after 30 minutes.

The tradition was over.

For the weekend, Boyer decided to play poker at Tampa Bay Downs near Oldsmar, where he can park for free. He said he's gambled in at least 20 countries, and never once paid to park at a casino.

"This is kind of the icing on the cake," he said.

The Boyers aren't the only people unhappy about the new charge, which went into effect Aug. 1. Many have taken to social media to express their frustration.

"Guess they weren't getting enough money from the machines," reads one Facebook post from Friday. Another says the casino is "taking the fun out of going."

Casino spokeswoman Nikki Yourison said the Hard Rock plans to improve security in its garages by adding officers and better lighting. But she declined to say whether the new parking fee was needed to pay for it. The Seminole Tribe of Florida, which operates seven casinos in the state including the Hard Rock, typically takes in more than \$2 billion in annual revenue from its gambling operations.

Yourison noted that most entertainment venues around Tampa Bay charge for parking, and

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other casinos across the nation do, as well. In June, MGM Resorts International began charging for parking at 12 properties in Las Vegas as part of a \$90 million plan to meet consumer demands and "significantly improve the parking experience," according to a company news release.

The Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood in South Florida, where Boyer, 61, has also gambled, does not charge a parking fee.

"We were treated better there," he said.

The parking fee at Tampa's Hard Rock can be waived for guests who spend at least \$50 at the casino's spa, restaurants or retail shops. Hotel guests, as well as Elite and X card members, can also have the charge waived. Other guests can cover the charge with "comp dollars" accrued from casino play.

The Hard Rock can get away with the changes, Boyer said, because they're the only casino in the area.

"When you run a total monopoly ... this is how the casino patrons are treated," Boyer said. "They need competition."

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