

Written by Administrator

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The Hollywood Casino Perryville

— the first casino in Maryland in decades — has drawn more than 21,000 visitors since opening to the public Monday, officials said this morning.

The casino's 1,500 slot machines have been a regional draw, they said, while noting that cars in the parking lot have carried license plates from Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, New Jersey and other areas.

[Gov. Martin O'Malley](#) toured the casino today for its scheduled grand opening — even though doors had opened to the public several days earlier than planned. He said the casinos already are attracting tourists and "preventing dollars that used to fly across the border from leaving."

Officials expect the industry to eventually generate thousands of jobs for Marylanders and contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to the state. They hope the 34,000-square-foot casino in Perryville — just west of Interstate 95, off Route 222 — will lure back Marylanders who have been gambling out of state, and will attract travelers along the highway.

Jerry Shetzler of Bear, Del., said he was likely to return to the Perryville casino. "We make the rounds everywhere. It's a nice place with a lot of new machines," said the 58-year-old semi-retired contractor, who had recently spent a week in Las Vegas.

Lauri Oyinlade, 49, of Baltimore was less sure about a return visit. She expected to continue her periodic trips to Delaware casinos — some are only 30 miles further than Perryville. "Distance is not a problem," she said.

The Perryville casino got a test run Saturday with a group of about 1,400 invited guests. That event went so well that the public opening was moved up to Monday, several days ahead of today's scheduled grand opening.

Slot machine gambling was banned in the 1960s in Maryland. But since then, casinos have been built in neighboring Pennsylvania, Delaware and West Virginia, luring many Marylanders.

Thousands drawn to casino opening - Baltimore Sun

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Some of those casinos also offer table games such as blackjack and roulette, which are not allowed in Maryland.

After years of debate, Maryland slots supporters won a 2008 referendum to approve slots at five locations in the state, but the only other casino close to opening is at the Ocean Downs racetrack on the Eastern Shore. Plans for slots parlors in Baltimore and at Arundel Mills have become entangled in legal challenges; the state has been unable to identify an acceptable bidder to operate one at Rocky Gap in Western Maryland.

"I don't blame anybody for being against slots at the mall," O'Malley said. "I prefer to see them at race tracks. I think it's important to do this right. I don't think we should be bullied into accepting slots at the mall."

For now, the most obvious economic impact of the casino is the 350 jobs it has provided. Eighty percent of the workers are from Cecil or Harford counties, which will benefit from their income and payroll taxes.

Perryville Mayor Jim Eberhardt said he hoped the casino would spur development of hotels and retail in the area. "It is not too often we get to welcome a new industry to an area — especially an industry that hires 350 people right off the bat."

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