Written by Administrator
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It won't be quite like playing cards under normal casino conditions, but it will have to do on Monday, Oct. 5, when casino cardrooms are allowed to reopen outdoors.

Seven cardroom casinos in Los Angeles County were busy over the weekend erecting tents, moving equipment outdoors and creating the type of conditions that are safe and legal for gaming.

Only a fraction of the roughly 8,000 employees who depend on the seven casinos in L.A. County for a livelihood will return to work, but it's a start, say city and casino officials.

Los Angeles County on Thursday gave the go-ahead for cardrooms to reopen outdoors only and without food and beverage service as early as Monday, Oct. 5. Operating outdoors has been permitted for weeks under current state guidelines, but the county did not allow it until now.

Aaron Dennis, general manager at the Lucky Lady Larry Flynt Casino, said the whole team of roughly 200 employees coming back to work at 5 p.m. Monday have come together to make the outdoor setting a reality. That's a little less than half of its full time staff.

The casino has prepared a tent roughly 80 feet by 100 feet accommodating about 40 tables.

"We expect to be quite busy based on real simple supply and demand principles," Dennis said. "We still expect the same amount of active gamblers in our communities to enjoy some fun."

Players will be separated by plexiglass between each other as well as the dealer. No food or beverage service will be allowed. Face masks must be worn at all times. And players will only be allowed indoors for vital services or to use the bathroom.

"We've been able to effectively recreate an entire casino operation in a matter of weeks outdoors and in tents," Dennis said. "It really speaks to what we're able to accomplish because our team is so dynamic."

The reopening of casinos, even just for outdoor operations, represented a sigh of relief for several cities that rely heavily on casino cardroom gambling and the taxes they create to run vital city services.

Officials from Hawaiian Gardens, Bell Gardens, Gardena and Commerce came together in September to urge the county to allow the outdoor operations of cardrooms as every other county where gambling occurs has already allowed.

In Bell Gardens, where roughly half of the general fund revenues come from The Bicycle Hotel & Casino, getting back to gaming means a great deal not only for the city but the roughly 100 local families directly employed there, according to Mayor Alejandra Cortez.

"For us it's a glimmer of hope," Cortez said. "It's a starting point to move forward. The pandemic has been much longer than we all expected. We've been suffering for the past several months, engaging in tough conversations with employees and residents about needing to cut services."

In response to the revenue losses, Cortez said the city gave its police officers a 7.5% pay reduction and furloughed city staff members.

"How do we thank our employees for sticking with the community and working through the pandemic, when instead of saying thank you, we are reducing their salaries?" Cortez said.

The casino has been prepared with tents for the past couple of weeks and will be prepared to open on Monday, according to Bells Garden City Manager Mike O'Kelly.

"Having the casino open in some capacity, as limited as it is, is still better than not having it open at all," O'Kelly said. "It gives us some hope that the casino will come back in full capacity at some point in the near future."

At the city of Commerce, where about 45% of its revenue comes from the Commerce Casino, City Manager Edgar Cisneros said the city has been making every effort it can to diversify but for now relies heavily on the casino. The city was short $15 million on a roughly $68 million annual budget this year due to the casino's closure for roughly six months, Cisneros said.

"The city of Commerce is thrilled and also optimistic that outdoor gaming will be done responsibly and it will be enjoyed by those who see it as a hobby and a form of entertainment," Cisneros said.

While Cisneros said he didn't want to criticize officials he felt that cardrooms should have been given an opportunity to prove themselves. When cardrooms first reopened June 19 after being closed since March, the state ordered them closed less than two weeks later on July 1. It was supposed to be a three-week closure but ended up being three months.

"They might as well not provide a time frame," Cisneros said. "And they never could trace a case back to a casino. Those were some of the concerns we expressed to the health department."

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