

## O'Malley, gamblers praise Md.'s first slots casino at its grand opening - Washington Post

Written by Administrator

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"Why should we give all our money away to other states?" Meadows said Thursday morning, sitting on his motorized scooter while he played "Invaders of the Planet Moohlah." "We should have done this 10 years ago. Yesterday, I won \$300."

In the casino's Epic Buffet dining room Thursday, Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) celebrated the opening of the 1,500-machine emporium just off

Interstate 95, reveling in Maryland's ability, at long last, to compete with gambling operations in West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

"Dollars that used to fly across the border . . . instead, they are staying here," O'Malley said. "For four long years, we were locked in gridlock about slots . . . [while] other states had resolved the issue."

In 2008, voters approved a plan to build five slots parlors around the state. State officials promised a windfall of \$660 million a year for public schools and \$100 million for [the state's flagging horse industry](#)

Hollywood Casino opened quietly Monday and lured 21,000 visitors in its first three days, according to its owner, Penn National Gaming, the nation's third-largest publicly traded gaming company. The casino has a clear field as plans for opening four other facilities remain unsettled. A parlor at Ocean Downs Racetrack on the Eastern Shore is expected to open in late December, but state officials say bad weather could delay opening until 2011. Proposed casinos in Anne Arundel County and at Baltimore's Inner Harbor are mired in legal and political uncertainties. A proposed location at Rocky Gap Lodge & Golf Resort in Western Maryland has yet to draw qualified bidders.

[Hollywood Casino](#) occupies a large sand-colored building that looks like a movie theater from the outside. Visitors step into a dark, cavernous room where neon red, green and blue flashes pulsate from video slots. The collective clang of the machines' bells sounds like a church organ playing without interruption.

Many of the games feature ethnic themes: "Jumpin' Jalapeno" features a picture of a man

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wearing a sombrero, and "Moon Rising" depicts an Asian-looking woman dressed in kimono and beads. Other games try to seduce, literally: Video three-card poker or blackjack games feature women dressed in tight lingerie, prominently displaying their cleavage. The women on the screens ask roaming bettors: "Don't you want to play with me?"

Gambling veterans, who can be fussy about which games bring them the most luck, couldn't help but compare the Perryville casino with established parlors in Delaware, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

"It's nice here," said Michael Waller, 55, a retired Navy operations specialist. "They don't smoke here like in other places. But the machines are new, and I miss a couple of them, like 'The Village People.' I almost won up to \$3,000 on that."

Waller, who also works as a disc jockey at a nightclub near the Laurel racetrack, worries that slots might be arriving too late to rejuvenate Maryland's horse industry. "If these slot machines got here faster," he said, "it would have saved Laurel."

In Perryville, an old railroad town of 4,500, politicians and business owners have been eager for the casino, which employs about 350 people, mostly locals. James L. Eberhardt, Perryville's mayor, said plans for the 140-acre property include hotels and restaurants. Other residents hope the casino will help the nearby outlet mall.

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