

As Hempfield casino marks a year in business, local leaders say it provides more than a place to gamble

Written by Administrator

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Westmoreland County leaders are touting Live! Casino Pittsburgh as an “incredible economic engine” after the facility pumped millions of dollars into the economy during its first year of operation.

Located in Hempfield’s Westmoreland Mall, the casino has seen economic impact investments totaling almost \$135 million since opening last November, officials said. That’s in addition to the initial \$150 million investment in construction costs for the 100,000-square-foot facility that features dining and entertainment.

“Its impact throughout this community has been extremely important for Westmoreland County,” said Dan DeBone, executive director of the Westmoreland County Chamber of Commerce. “Not just the jobs but the economic impact. ... It’s just been a great partnership throughout this county.”

So far, those dollars have gone toward state and local taxes, employee salaries, purchasing goods and services from local businesses and player winnings. Casino officials also have raised money for local nonprofits such as the Westmoreland County Food Bank and Sage’s Army, an organization combating the opioid epidemic.

Between last November, when Live! [opened in the former Bon-Ton store](#) , and October, the casino generated more than \$87.9 million in revenue from slot machines, table games and sports betting, according to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board. Since opening, the casino has seen continued growth in revenues, reaching [\\$9.4 million last month](#)

Of total revenues, \$1.4 million were paid in local taxes to Hempfield, along with \$49.5 million to the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue in gaming taxes.

Hempfield Supervisor Doug Weimer said the township’s local share has been used to maintain roads and bridges while providing resources to the volunteer fire department. He noted the dollar amount was on track with predictions issued before the casino’s opening.

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“I’m not looking to rely on that as a steady stream of income; it’s an additional possible revenue,” Weimer said.

For Hempfield, the casino has not only filtered tax dollars into the community, but it also has contributed to growth along the commercial corridor and at Westmoreland Mall.

According to Weimer, the facility is maintaining property values and spurring developments across the region, including a proposed Menards. The Wisconsin-based home improvement store is planned for the former Ramada by Wyndham Greensburg Hotel and Conference Center, across Route 30 from the mall.

Store vacancy rates at the mall have decreased, with new businesses taking a more entertainment-based approach.

“It’s kind of an entertainment destination for all ages, where they do have bowling and air hockey out there for young adults and young children, and then they do have the entertainment bars and restaurants,” Weimer said.

In addition, the casino compensated its 521 employees \$21 million in salaries, wages and benefits. Total player winnings have totaled \$44 million. More than \$18 million was invested in goods and services, \$9 million of which went to local businesses while \$5.5 million was invested in women and minority-owned businesses.

The facility also offers several opportunities for community members to donate to local nonprofits. In March, officials placed two donation boxes, known as [The Giveback Box](#), in the casino where guests can contribute slot tickets, cash or table game chips. Benefiting charities change monthly.

Donations also can be made when cashing out slot tickets at casino kiosks.

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In all, about \$100,000 has been donated to local charities over the past year, officials said.

Sean Sullivan, Live! Casino's general manager, said the economic impact from the casino was better than expected.

"Not only did we do this, exceed our expectations, but we did it in a world of covid where we were shut down for a month," he said, referencing a December closure issued by the state to help curb the spread of the virus. "I think everybody involved has been fantastic."

Sullivan said several changes at the casino point to increased economic growth in coming years, including the addition of a [poker room](#), electronic gaming terminals and an event center that can be used for weddings, concerts and other events.

In order to maintain that growth, DeBone said he is hopeful the chamber and casino will continue their strong relationship.

Weimer said he's excited to see how the casino operates outside of covid-related restrictions.

"I've been really happy to see what's happened in the past year with their commitment to the community and the excitement that's been maintained with visiting there," Weimer said.

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