

There are plenty of entertaining opportunities associated with the official unveiling Dec. 22 of the new **Hollywood Casino** in Joliet.

What's now called the **Empress Casino and Hotel** will become **Hollywood Casino and Hotel**, a sister property to the neighboring **Hollywood**

Casino Aurora, which first opened in 1993 and has always retained the same name. Both the Joliet and Aurora properties are under the **Penn National Gaming Corp.** based in Wyomissing, Penn.

The renaming closes the final chapter for the Empress name and brand, launched by then Joliet-based **Empress Entertainment** which opened its first riverboat in 1992 in Joliet and added a Hammond boat in 1996 when Indiana began allowing riverboat gambling.

When casino mogul **Jack Binion** purchased both the Hammond and Joliet properties in 1999 for \$609 million, he soon found that Illinois gaming regulatory officials refused to allow him to operate both properties because of licensing restrictions. He was forced to sell the Joliet property to **Argosy Gaming**, while holding on to the Hammond property and rebranding it as **Jack Binion's Horseshoe**

. Today, the Hammond property is owned and managed by Harrah's.

As for all of the streets and signage leading visitors to the Joliet casino from I-80 and I-55, names like Empress Drive and others will all remain, despite the brand change, to save expense.

Jon Johnson, vice president and general manager for Empress/Hollywood Casino, is excited about the \$90 million in renovations and newly designed construction to replace the Egyptian-themed pyramid (complete with a faux Spinx) entertainment pavilion that was destroyed by March 2009 fire. (The gaming barge was unharmed.)

As guests enter the new \$65 million pavilion from the new, attached \$25 million parking garage, they will be greeted by a palatial lobby that includes an agreement with **Sony Pictures** to

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display three-story movie theater posters promoting movies soon-to-be released. For this month's ribbon-cutting, a large looming poster for

"The Green Hornet,"

starring

Seth Rogen

and

Cameron Diaz

and opening Jan. 11, is displayed.

The **Hollywood Stadium Sports Bar**, also off the lobby, won't be completed in time for this month's ribbon cutting, but should be open by February. It will boast 45 plasma screen televisions, in addition to the sprawling wall screen display.

Among the sports memorabilia to be displayed in the sports bar area, look for **Sean Astin's Not re Dame**

jersey from the 1993 film

"Rudy,"

when Astin portrayed

Daniel Eugene "Rudy" Ruettiger

, the movie's title character. Ruettiger was born and raised in Joliet.

But the real treasure trove of Hollywood memorabilia will be housed in large cases in the swanky **Final Cut Steakhouse**.

A cashmere sweater owned and worn by **Marilyn Monroe**, the gowns of **Elizabeth Taylor** and **Sophia Loren**

and the original "Joliet Jake" suits worn by

John Belushi

and

Dan Aykroyd

for their roles in the 1980 film

"The Blues Brothers"

are just a few of the priceless finds that will be on exhibit.

For more information and a sneak peek, go to HollywoodCasinoJoliet.com or (888) 436-7737.

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