

Legends Bay Casino, first new casino in Reno-Sparks, opens doors

Written by Administrator

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Trays of wine and hors d'oeuvres moved across the gaming floor of Legends Bay Casino late Tuesday, the edibles quickly making their way into the hands of various guests eager to experience the first new casino to open in Reno-Sparks in more than two decades.

For Olympia Gaming CEO Gary Goett, it's a sight that he has literally waited years for.

"This has been somewhat long in coming," Goett said. "But we're very excited to be here and share this project with the community."

More: [Here's a first look inside the new Legends Bay Casino in Sparks](#)

A look at the initial guests prior to the 8 p.m. public opening revealed a slice of the Silver State.

The early attendees include people young and old, politicians, gaming executives, and guests from northern and southern Nevada — including the highest elected official in the state.

"This is a great night for all of Nevada," said Gov. Steve Sisolak.

"Our iconic gaming industry is not just in Las Vegas, it's statewide. Nobody does it like Nevada does."

Sparks Mayor Ed Lawson, who sat just a couple of chairs away from Sisolak, agreed.

Lawson, who served as a longtime city councilmember prior to becoming mayor, still remembers when Olympia gaming acquired the site for the Legends Bay Casino more than a decade ago. One Great Recession and a pandemic later, Lawson reveled in seeing the project

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finally reach the finish line.

The fact that Sparks — which usually doesn't get the same attention as Reno — ended up as the city to have the first casino in the area in more than two decades was especially satisfying for the longtime booster for Sparks.

"It's been 15 years from start to finish to get this off the ground," Lawson said.

Lawson then flashed a sly grin before looking at Goett.

"This whole thing wasn't done with STAR bonds so we're happy for you to be paying taxes."

Lawson was referring to the controversial measure known as Sales Tax Anticipation Revenue bonds, which allowed local governments to borrow against future anticipated sales tax to fund projects such as Cabela's, the Reno Aces ballpark and the Outlets at Legends.

In addition to the taxes, Legends Bay Casino will also be employing about 300 people. For a state that was hit hard by shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, such jobs are especially crucial for its citizens, according to Sisolak.

It's a view that holds true even in Northern Nevada, which has been diversifying away from gaming ever since tribal gaming gained federal approval at the turn of the millennium.

"For those 300 people, these are the most important 300 jobs in Nevada," Sisolak said.

Just because Northern Nevada isn't as gaming-heavy as the Las Vegas area doesn't mean the sector is no longer important for the region, said Charlene Bybee. Bybee serves as Sparks' mayor pro tempore, which is akin to being vice mayor.

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Like mining, gaming will always play a role in the Northern Nevada economy, according to Bybee.

“Gaming and mining is what formed the state,” Bybee said. “Gaming will never go away.”

Bybee also pointed to the popularity of sports betting — including with younger people — as a reason to be optimistic about the sector despite its challenges in recent years.

One amenity that Legends Bay Casino considers its ace in the hole against the competition is its sportsbook, the first in Northern Nevada to be operated by Las Vegas-based Circa Sports. Circa runs the biggest sportsbook in the world in Sin City.

Circa Sports CEO and founder Derek Stevens was on hand to celebrate the opening of [his company's latest Circa Sportsbook](#).

“We’re just excited about our first investment in Northern Nevada,” Stevens said while sitting with guests by the tables of the sportsbook.

“By giving Reno-Sparks customers one more sportsbook to play with, it gives them another option which I think is going to be great for locals and our business.”

Legends Bay Casino cost about \$130 million to build, according to Olympia Gaming Regional President Court Cardinal. Cardinal expects 700 guests to enjoy Tuesday’s early preview before Legends Bay Casino fully opens its doors to the public at 8 p.m.

Although Cardinal has helped open several casinos, including Olympia Gaming’s Casino Fandango about 19 years ago in Carson City, this is the first time he’s opening a new gaming facility after COVID-19.

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“It’s interesting because we’re opening in a different environment,” Cardinal said.

Although the cost for hiring and keeping employees has gone up given the strong competition for workers, it’s a challenge that isn’t unique to Olympia Gaming as it impacts the whole industry.

Not all changes also involve a challenge. Casino Fandango, for example, was the first casino in the state to implement ticket-in, ticket-out coinless slots, according to Cardinal. The technology has improved even beyond that today, he added.

“I think the biggest change is technology,” Cardinal said. “We can do a lot more things now.”

As for any potential challenges or surprises involving COVID-19 and its impact on the economy, Lawson believes the worst is already over. That includes any potential shutdowns just like Nevada experienced starting in March 2020.

“I’m not worried about COVID,” Lawson said.

“I know we had to do what we did. Hopefully, we’re not doing that again.”

Jason Hidalgo covers [business](#) and technology for the Reno Gazette Journal, and also reviews the latest video games.

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