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Goodbye Caesars, hello Horseshoe

Harrah's rebrands Caesars as Horseshoe

By Grace Schneider

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Exit Caesar. Enter Horseshoe.

Amid much fanfare, executives at the Harrison County casino formerly known as Caesars Indiana formally unveiled their \$53 million renovation and rebranding of the riverboat yesterday.

The conversion to Horseshoe Casino Hotel scrubbed the Roman heads on playing cards, poker chips, carpeting and wall murals -- and ushered in golden horseshoes throughout the four-deck gaming vessel now called Legend.

The changes were launched 18 months ago by parent Harrah's Entertainment Inc. and had closed portions of the casino while the business remained open.

"It's pretty. It's nice," said Ingrid Wordlow of Louisville, who was playing at a 25-cent slot machine.

The chemical worker joked that she'd like it even better if the machines were set to pay out a bit more.

Harrah's had said three years ago it would rename the boat, a move that industry experts said would limit its Caesars brand to the high-end Las Vegas and Atlantic City markets. The Horseshoe name was one that people could identify with, Harrah's officials said.

Yesterday, gamblers had to wade through a crowd of 100 or so invited guests, elected leaders and casino executives who gathered near the boarding area to cut a black-and-gold ribbon to mark the opening.

Many of the guests returned last night for a VIP party for 3,000 people, an outdoor concert with country singer Reba McEntire, and a free celebration with live music, dance troupes and contortionists.

The boat has been renovated and brightened with new carpet, paint, mahogany wood, beige marble and crystal chandeliers tipped with gold.

The fourth deck still features the boat's high-limit gambling area with a secluded place for high-rollers to play at private tables.

The casino's 2,050 employees won't change because of the conversion. The boat will still offer about 2,000 slot machines and 104 table games, said Rick Mazer, Horseshoe's regional president and general manager for the Southern Indiana property and Harrah's Lake Michigan gambling facility in Hammond.

Lois Lasher, a retired butcher store worker from Boston, Ky., who traveled by tour bus from Bardstown, said she was impressed with the makeover.

But she said she noticed skimpy payouts on the slot machines.

"Everything looks good," Lasher said. "If they'd boost the machines up, it would help a whole lot. They're tight."

Mazer said Horseshoe, along with most casinos across the country, are replacing many high-dollar slots with penny, nickel and dime machines that feature a higher percentage "hold" on the money that's inserted in them.

Gamblers may notice the devices don't pay out as frequently on the lower denomination games.

"Every property in the country has changed," Mazer said. "We've changed our mix of games because the customer has demanded it. They're fun to play."

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