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# Revel, Atlantic City's newest casino, opens

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — The sun rose on a new era in Atlantic City on Monday as the \$2.4 billion Revel casino resort opened its doors with a blueberry smoothie toast at sunrise and a rush of gamblers eager to try out the city's 12th casino.

The first customer through the door shortly wasted little time in winning big. Jerry Colonna of Mount Laurel arrived at 5 a.m. to play some roulette before heading for his job at a waste management company. He walked away from the table up \$1,500 after just 10 minutes of gambling.

"No one wants to be the first loser," he said. "I'm a degenerate gambler," he joked, "and like all degenerate gamblers, they want to see the new thing. This is going to turn Atlantic City around. That's obvious."

That's also what officials from the shore to Trenton are counting on. Revel is marketing itself as a lifestyle resort, a vacation and meeting mecca that just happens to offer casino gambling as well. It's in keeping with the new thinking in Atlantic City, the nation's second-largest gambling market that has taken a pounding over the last five years from the recession and a slew of new casinos popping up all around it in neighboring states.

Gambling revenue has fallen from \$5.2 billion in 2006 to \$3.3 billion last year. Given that, Atlantic City is trying to remake itself into a place where gourmet restaurants, top-name concerts, spas and luxurious hotel rooms are just as important as slot machines and cards.

Michael Garrity recalls sitting on a pile of dirt at the end of the Atlantic City Boardwalk in 2006 with Kevin DeSanctis, a former New Jersey state trooper and casino executive. Morgan Stanley, Garrity's Wall Street investment firm, had just lined up land for what would become Revel..

The economy was humming along and Atlantic City's casino revenues were at their height. Yet sitting on that dirt pile, DeSanctis, Revel's CEO, was already thinking several years ahead.

"He said, 'The last thing Atlantic City needs right now is a new casino,'" recalled Garrity, who is now Revel's chief investment officer.

So they set out to build something that was not just a casino but a true destination resort.

"The real issue is: Can you maintain the interest and the excitement?" DeSanctis said. "If we can do that, then I'm not worried. This is going to be a great resort."

Colonna certainly agreed.

"They need to knock down all the crap halls and build more places like this," he said.

Lorraine Capers may have been the first winner at the slot machines once Revel opened.

Immediately after entering the casino, she sat at the first slot machine on the casino floor, fed it some money, pushed a button and won seven free spins.

"It's beautiful," she said of the resort. "I've never seen anything this beautiful."

Capers said Revel felt lucky to her, although she gave some credit to the emerald green nail polish and green rings she was wearing.

"That's why I always wear green," she said, clapping her hands as she won another \$2.25 on the machine. "It's just lucky."

Gambling is only part of the \$2.4 billion resort; it also has a luxurious spa, 14 restaurants, 10 pools and a theater with 5,050 seats that will host Beyoncé on Memorial Day weekend.

It has 2,450 slot machines and 160 table games. Its hotel, when fully open later this year, will have 1,898 rooms. Revel will employ about 5,500 full and part-time employees.

It is Atlantic City's only non-smoking casino resort and the only one to fully embrace the ocean, with floor-to-ceiling views of the coast that are considered a no-no in other gambling halls.

Located at the extreme northern end of the Boardwalk, next to the Showboat Casino Hotel, Revel is the first Atlantic City casino to open since its main rival, the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, debuted in 2003. With its angular slanted roof and its giant white light-up ball atop the 47-story structure — the second-tallest in New Jersey at 710 feet — Revel is already an iconic presence here.

Revel had to overcome numerous obstacles in order to reach Monday's opening. Three key executives working on the project died in a Minnesota plane crash in July 2008; a worker pouring concrete was struck by lightning and killed last September.

The project ran out of money during the recession and had to stop construction halfway through. Morgan Stanley pulled out, taking a \$1.2 billion loss on the project. It only got completed with the help of state tax incentives that were approved in February 2011. That came amid bitter opposition from the city's main casino union, which is livid that Revel has not signed a contract with its hotel and service industry workers, and filed several lawsuits seeking to thwart government assistance to the project.

It also instituted a first-of-its kind policy in Atlantic City in which employees on the front lines of customer service, including dealers and cocktail servers will have to reapply for their jobs every four or five years. Critics said the policy amounts to age discrimination, but DeSanctis said it is necessary to fight creeping "indifference" among workers who can get worn down dealing with the public.

New Jersey's Lt. Governor, Kim Guadagno, toasted Revel employees with DeSanctis moments before the casino opened its doors, raising glasses of blueberry smoothies, and urging the public to patronize the resort.

"Go put some money in the slot machines," she urged. "Game on!"

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