



Horseshoe Casino Cleveland owner Dan Gilbert asks for patience with inexperienced dealers

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By

CLEVELAND, Ohio — With the Horseshoe Casino Cleveland set to **open in three days**, owner Dan Gilbert worries that his gaming crew still needs a little time to sharpen their skills.

Gilbert and his joint venture, Rock Ohio Caesars, made sure that the vast majority of the casino's 1,600 employees came from Northeast Ohio, but the tradeoff is that dealers are rookies. He asks players to be patient and said the workers will get better with experience.

"You're going to have kinks, for sure," Gilbert said while meeting Thursday with Plain Dealer editors and reporters. "You're going to have things you're going to have to get through. It's not going to be a perfect operation on Day 1."

Caesars Entertainment trained and continues to coach the workers, but they will need a shakeout period that could last "a few weeks," added Matt Cullen, president and chief operating officer of Gilbert's Rock Gaming LLC.

Gilbert and Cullen touched on a range of subjects. Among their points:

- Gilbert assured skeptics that Rock Ohio will proceed with a proposed casino expansion. He did not give a timetable but said the site, overlooking the Cuyahoga River, has complications that will prolong development.

"We bought that land for \$85 million," Gilbert said. "We're absolutely building Phase 2."

- Advocates of Ohio's indoor-smoking ban need not fear that the casino will seek an exemption. Gilbert said he can't stand smoking and thinks the Horseshoe will be a huge draw for people who feel

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the same.

- Rock Ohio is seriously considering moving the Thistledown thoroughbred track from North Randall to the Akron-Canton area and equipping it with video slot machines. Caesars, which bought the track, will soon transfer ownership to Rock Ohio.

State legislators authorized installation of slot machines at Ohio's seven horseracing tracks. A Franklin County judge is expected to rule soon on whether the decision violated the state constitution.

- Cullen defended **charging for parking** in the casino garage, emphasizing that patrons who gamble for at least a half-hour and spend varying amounts -- for example, \$75 on slot machines -- will park free.

If parking were always free, Cullen said, downtown workers and others would take spaces that could go to customers. The casino has not announced rates, but Cullen indicated the amount will be "expensive for a transient."

Gilbert, majority owner of the Cavaliers, and Cullen repeated their pledge to integrate the casino with downtown Cleveland and help spur its revival. They believe the area from Public Square to Quicken Loans Arena will become a sort of Times Square once the casino expansion is completed.

They said Gilbert is contributing by adding 100 jobs at his Quicken Loans on-line mortgage center, which will bring the total to about 400. He also started Bizdom Cleveland, which mentors entrepreneurs and provides them with seed money.

Gilbert said entrepreneurs and young adults are ready to trade Cleveland's suburbs for downtown. He cited the high occupancy in downtown apartments.

"The generation of folks in their 20s and 30s, if you poll them, 90 percent want to live in an urban core," Gilbert said. "That's who they are. That's who they want to be."

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A look inside the Horseshoe Casino Cleveland

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