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Revel to begin eight-week preview with opening on April 2

By DONALD WITTKOWSKI Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, February 10, 2012 1:00 am



The first new Atlantic City casino in nine years will make its much-anticipated debut sooner than expected.

Revel will begin welcoming guests April 2, beginning an eight-week preview that will culminate in a formal grand opening celebration during Memorial Day weekend, the casino announced Thursday.

Developer Revel Entertainment Group LLC said previously that the \$2.4 billion megaresort would open for business May 15 but decided to push up the date after construction proceeded weeks ahead of schedule.

Kevin DeSanctis, the casino's chief executive officer, said slot machines and table games will be ready April 2, but Revel plans to bring hotel rooms, restaurants, pools, nightclubs, retail shops and other nongaming attractions online in stages. Revel will be Atlantic City's first smoke-free casino, he noted.

The entire gaming resort will stage its premiere May 25, the kickoff to Memorial Day weekend and the informal start of Atlantic City's peak summer tourist season. The hotel will begin accepting reservations March 5.

"By Memorial Day, we should be in pretty good shape, but frankly, I would expect us to hit our stride around the Fourth of July weekend," DeSanctis said during a conference call Thursday.

DeSanctis promised there will be a spectacular grand opening highlighted by big-name entertainment in Revel's 5,500-seat concert hall. Names will be announced later, he said.

"We are clearly going to have entertainment that is very impressive," DeSanctis said. "Our view is, entertainment will be important not only to us, but to Atlantic City."

Revel is billing itself more as a "lifestyle resort" than a typical casino hotel. The beach-themed property features a glass-covered, curvy facade that appears as though it were sculpted by waves. DeSanctis

explained that Revel hopes to distinguish itself from other casinos in town by integrating its modern architecture and attractions with the beach and ocean.

“I think as people walk through, everybody comes up with their own ‘wow factor,’” he said. “Clearly, when you think of the design of the building, it’s architecturally pleasing.”

Revel also will break from the pack by offering Atlantic City’s first smoke-free casino. DeSanctis acknowledged trepidation about going smoke-free in an industry long known for customers puffing away on cigarettes and cigars while playing at the slot machines and gaming tables.

“Whenever you try something new, you’re always a little concerned about it,” he said.

Anti-smoking groups immediately hailed Revel’s decision, saying it would not only save customers from having to breathe smoky air but also would benefit the employees.

“The air quality in Revel will be superior to every other smoke-infested casino in Atlantic City. We applaud Revel for their vision and their business sense for ensuring their customers and employees don’t breathe cancer-causing air,” said Stephanie Steinberg, chairwoman of Smoke-Free Gaming of America.

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, or GASP, said Revel is simply catering to the wishes of the general population.

“From a financial perspective, it makes sense to be smoke-free, especially when you have the overwhelming majority of people who don’t smoke and not only prefer but demand a smoke-free environment. Revel is delivering on that,” Blumenfeld said.

Revel overlooks the Boardwalk next to the Showboat Casino Hotel. It will have 1,800 hotel rooms and employ about 5,500 workers. Revel is the first casino to open in Atlantic City since Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in 2003.

“Revel’s announcement of its April 2 opening is great news, and it will mark the start of an exciting new era for Atlantic City,” said Linda M. Kassekert, chair of the New Jersey Casino Control Commission. “This new property will expand the market as it draws in new visitors to experience its shops, restaurants, spa, clubs and other amenities.”

Kassekert noted that the commission is working closely with Revel and the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement to complete the licensing process in time for the opening.

DGE Director David Rebeck said his agency expects to complete its licensing report on Revel for the commission’s regularly scheduled March 14 board meeting. Barring last-minute glitches, the commission is expected to give Revel regulatory approval to open.

“We are pushing hard to give him everything he needs to get open,” Rebeck said of the regulatory approvals sought by DeSanctis.

Although Revel will open for business in April, the casino will host a dress rehearsal for about 5,000 invited guests from the local community March 29 and 30. DeSanctis said the dry run will allow Revel to test its systems and work out any potential operating problems, under the scrutiny of state gaming regulators, before the real gambling starts April 2.

During Revel’s preview, customers will experience seven of 14 restaurants created by celebrity chefs Alain Allegretti, Marc Forgione, Jose Garces and Robert Wiedmaier. Additional restaurants and bars will open each week as the property heads toward Memorial Day.

About 500 hotel rooms will be brought online each week. Revel's array of retail shops will not open April 2 but should be ready for a mass opening sometime in May, DeSanctis said.

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