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By [JAY MILLER](#)

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If all goes as planned, Cleveland will have the first casino in Ohio in early 2012 when the Cleveland Horseshoe Casino opens its temporary, \$350

million first phase in the Higbee Building at Tower City Center.

That money is in addition to the \$600 million investment planned for the permanent casino south of Tower City.

Cleveland Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert and Gary Loveman, president and CEO of Caesar's Entertainment Corp. — the leaders of a joint venture called Rock Ohio Caesars LLC — unveiled the four-floor, 300,000-square-foot gambling hall at a news conference this morning.

“You're going to see something very spectacular,” Mr. Gilbert said as the rendering of the dramatically lit refurbished department exterior was unveiled.

The temporary casino will create 2,000 temporary construction jobs and 1,600 full-time jobs, Mr. Gilbert said.

Several of the nearly 200 business and civic leaders at the unveiling were surprised at the high

price tag for a temporary casino that will be replaced two years or less after it opens. Early estimates had placed the cost of the building the temporary casino at \$100 million.

Mr. Gilbert would not confirm to *Crain's* speculation that he and his partners will seek to change the constitutional language that is bringing casino gambling to Ohio so that they can operate gambling halls at two disconnected sites, which would allow the Higbee complex to stay open after the permanent casino opens. Mr. Gilbert said the money would be worth it if the Cleveland operation had first mover advantage in the state.

As Mr. Gilbert spoke, he then pointed to Albert Ratner, co-chairman of Forest City Enterprises Inc., and said, "He's part of the reason."

Forest City, which owns both the Higbee Building and the permanent casino site, is known for its tough negotiations. Earlier this week, the Rock Ohio Caesar's partnership closed its purchase of the permanent site for \$88 million, a gambling company released said.

Casino to include World Series of Poker room

The Horseshoe brand is one of three used by the Caesar's company, which also operates casinos under the Harrah's and Caesar's name. The Caesar's brand is reserved for resort casinos, while the Horseshoe brand is considered the high-end pure gambler's casino.

The Cleveland temporary casino will include a World Series of Poker room with 25 to 30 poker tables. The World Series is a Caesar's-owned brand name that operates a high-stakes series of poker tournaments.

The temporary casino also is expected to have more than 2,000 slot machines, 65 table games and several other specialized gambling areas, including a high-limits area and a 96,000-square-foot VIP player's lounge. The casino also will have several restaurant options and a main-floor bar that will offer entertainment.

Mr. Gilbert said the complexities of the site for the permanent casino, 16 acres behind Tower City Center that slopes to the Cuyahoga River, would have pushed back the opening of the

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Cleveland casino, probably into 2013. Mr. Gilbert would not be specific about a target completion date for the permanent casino.

That uncertainty led to the decision to open a temporary casino so the Cleveland casino will open before casinos in Cincinnati, Columbus and Toledo. Those are expected to open later in 2012.

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