

Casino applicant emphasizes Philly connection

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PHL LOCAL GAMING wants you to know something: They're local.

One of six bidders hoping to build Philly's second house of cards, the group has proposed Casino Revolution at Front Street and Packer Avenue, where 84-year-old Philly boy and "Tomato King" Joseph Procacci runs his national produce company.

Procacci would be majority owner of the casino-hotel. Another local business giant, Walter Lomax Jr., would be part-owner.

Procacci said at a news event yesterday that he wants to "transform" the desolate industrial corner of the city "from a warehouse district, and change it to an entertainment district" on a 25-acre plot.

The decision is up to the state Gaming Control Board, which is appointed by the governor and legislative leaders in Harrisburg. They are not expected to make a decision until next year.

When they do, PHL Local Gaming officials are hoping they look past the big names - Vegas Strip legend Steve Wynn has a proposal for a Fishtown casino - and pick a bidder with Philly connections.

"When you're playing slots every day, do you come to say, 'I'm here because of Steve Wynn,' or do you come here because the service is good, you know people, the product's great, you're involved in the neighborhood?" PHL president Joseph Canfora said. "The local market is repeat business."

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But Procacci isn't the only local vying for the casino permit.

Developer Bart Blatstein is proposing to convert the former home of the *Daily News and Inquirer*, at Callowhill and Broad streets, into the Provence casino-hotel. U.S. Rep. Bob Brady, D-Phila., is pushing a private-public partnership to run (and maximize city profits from) a separate proposed casino at 7th Street and Packer Avenue. And the Goldenberg Group, of Blue Bell, wants to build on the parking lot at 8th and Market streets.

Operators of the Xfinity Live! entertainment complex partnered with Greenwood Gaming, operator of Parx, for their proposal at 9th and Packer.

Many states have legalized gambling in recent years, diluting a revenue stream that once flowed directly to Las Vegas and Atlantic City.

Asked why there was so much interest in the casino permit at a moment when the industry appears to be slowing, Canfora said gambling in Philly is still ripe for some cha-ching.

"I can assure you that the Philadelphia market is not on the end of the life cycle," Canfora said.

Suitability hearings on each bid are expected to be held in early 2014, Canfora said.

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