

Scores gives A.C. casino sex appeal

Written by Administrator
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ATLANTIC CITY When patrons walk into Scores, the \$25 million adult-entertainment complex opening here Thursday, the big hope is that the scantily clad women, customized videos, pulsating music, and luxurious decor will provide a new lure for the struggling resort - sex appeal.

The venue - which features the "Electric Fantasy Club" as one of seven themed areas, VIP bottle service, and cabana-style private rooms that rent for \$100 per half-hour for lap dances - debuts at the Trump Taj Mahal as the first strip club inside a U.S. casino. It opens the same week that preliminary competitions are taking place at Boardwalk Hall for the very wholesome Miss America Pageant.

It's a showdown for the ages - naughty vs. nice, adults-only vs. family-friendly - and highlights the tension the resort feels as it tries to decide which way to go amid shrinking gaming revenue.

Two years ago, Gov. Christie announced a state takeover of Atlantic City to make the casino city more family-friendly, attract conventions, and retool its image of being less than clean and safe. Installing new lighting on the Boardwalk, bringing back Miss America, adding rides to the Steel Pier fit those goals.

But a high-end strip club?

"Listen, I don't think having one Scores in Atlantic City is going to kill the family-friendly nature of some of the other attractions," Christie said last month. "I assume that most people like me wouldn't bring their kids to Scores. I think that's probably a pretty good bet."

Other casinos here already feature dancers in revealing clothing, including Ivan Kane's Royal Jelly Burlesque Nightclub at Revel. Scores' pole dancers must wear a G-string and pasties. Full nudity is prohibited by state gambling regulations.

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But Scores isn't a nightclub and officially breaks the industry's church/state separation. Even in Las Vegas, strip clubs are forbidden by zoning from being inside casinos.

"If this doesn't work, then I don't know what will for Atlantic City, because the last thing it needs is more gaming," said Bob Gans, the man behind the Scores brand, who gave a tour Tuesday of the 36,000-square-foot venue on the Taj's second level, far from the gaming floor. It didn't scream "strip club." There was only a bouncer and a Scores sign at the curtain-draped entrance behind a velvet rope.

"This is not your father's strip club," Gans said. It took him four years to get the license to open here.

The silver-haired Gans cuts a grandfatherly figure. It would be hard to guess he is the managing partner of an adult-entertainment franchise.

Scores began in 1991 in New York as a 10,000-square-foot strip club. There are now six in the country. Scores Atlantic City will be the largest, 31/2 times bigger than the one in New York.

"You have 30 million visitors who come here a year, and plenty of them are adults," Gans said. "This offers them adult entertainment and an experience they'll never forget."

Gans said Scores was for anyone over 21, though he envisions attracting conventioners, club-goers who are somewhat "older than the Revel crowd," and bachelor and bachelorette parties. Scores' Blue Velvet Theater, which will have a male revue, is to open after Columbus Day.

Officials behind the rebranding of Atlantic City say Scores is just the city's latest entertainment offering.

Liza Cartmell, chief executive officer of the Atlantic City Alliance, which is running the five-year,

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\$130 million "Do AC" marketing campaign, said: "Atlantic City and our campaign is adult-focused. . . . None of the 'Do AC' campaign features families. Scores is another example of the increasing investment in non-gaming activities across the destination, including nightclubs, spas, restaurants, retail, and events."

John Palmieri, executive director of the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, which is partnered with the Atlantic City Alliance, added, "We are remaining true to who we are and what we are, when we can cater to opposite ends of the spectrum and everything in between successfully."

Gans describes Scores Atlantic City, with its touch-sensitive stage lighting and reflective ceiling, as "a high-tech social and sensory playground built entirely around the pursuit of escape and fantasy."

The Miss America contestants will pass the new adult complex Saturday during the "Show Us Your Shoes" parade on the Boardwalk.

Sam Haskell, chairman and CEO of the Miss America Organization, declined comment on whether the strip club was counter to the pageant's message of empowering women to be all they can be.

Mark Yackow, chief operating officer of Scores, doesn't think it contradicts the pageant's message. He said the club, like Miss A, offers more than just beautiful women.

"When these girls come out with their full makeup and hair, they look like they just stepped out of Glamour magazine," he said. "But it's all about personality. They are selling fantasy."

Pretty, vivacious women - fully clothed or not - may not be enough. Gaming revenue for the dozen casinos here was down nearly 5 percent in August from a year ago, a peak summer month, based on Tuesday's numbers. It marked the 12th straight monthly casino revenue decline for the resort.

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