

Dania Casino ready to open Thursday

Written by Administrator
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Dania Casino will open Thursday with 550 slot machines, 12 poker tables and seven years of catching up to do.

It's the first phase of a massive renovation at the 61-year-old jai-alai fronton, which is the last [Broward County](#) pari-mutuel to add slot machines. Three others did so in 2006 and 2007.

Only about a quarter of the Dania Casino property will open Thursday. The jai-alai auditorium will remain blocked off from the public as workers embark on the second phase, which will take at least a year to complete. Three rows of seats remain for people who still want to watch jai-alai.

A VIP party will take place at 7 p.m. Thursday, followed by an opening to the public at 9 p.m.

Thursday marks a major milestone in a long journey for what formerly was known as Dania Jai-Alai. Las Vegas-based [Boyd Gaming](#) bought the fronton for \$152 million in 2006, when [Broward County](#) voters approved slots. But Boyd officials chose not to renovate, citing a 50 percent tax on slots and nearby competition from the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino. (The state lowered that tax to 35 percent in 2010.)

Boyd eventually took a massive loss on the purchase, selling it for \$65.5 million in May 2013. Four Argentine casino operators now own 75 percent and a local group owns the rest.

Like owners of most horse tracks and dog tracks, jai-alai fronton owners have seen their pari-mutuel interests decline. There are now only six frontons in the United States, compared with 14 about a decade ago.

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"Dania's been pretty much out of sight for decades," says Baird Thompson, a casino consultant in Miami. "That part of the coastal Broward community, too, has languished, and all the [Fort Lauderdale](#) airport runway construction has not helped."

Thompson says the casino can bring some energy to the area. [Dania Beach](#) Mayor Walter [Duke](#) agrees.

"Given the current economic recovery and expansion of the nearby seaport and airport, their timing couldn't be better," Duke says.

Dania Casino officials say they employ about 300 people.

"Dania Beach is clearly a city on the rise, and their re-emergence is a big part of it," Duke says.

Roger Gros, editor of the magazine Global Gaming Business, notes that Dania will be the closest casino to downtown Fort Lauderdale, and will attract business from those residents.

"We think there was a gap in the market," Gros says. "And the market has matured in recent years, as the South Florida public has begun to look at gambling as a recreational activity."

With Dania being the third racino along the U.S. 1 corridor in southern Broward, slot and poker players can expect to be courted with special offers and promotions.

But [Mardi Gras](#) president Dan Adkins says the Seminole Hard Rock is still the real

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competition, because it can offer blackjack and pays what turns out to be only about a 12 percent slot tax. State legislators need to figure out a way to balance the playing field, he says.

"As always, we are not concerned with 'equal' competition," Adkins says. "That said, the voter-approved casinos in South Florida still do not have a statutory business plan that allows us to compete with the tribe, build the capital improvements that will make U.S. destinations, and grow employment and revenue, including tax dollars."

Dania Casino's long-term plans call for 1,400 slot machines, a hotel and even a marina and access to nearby waterways.

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