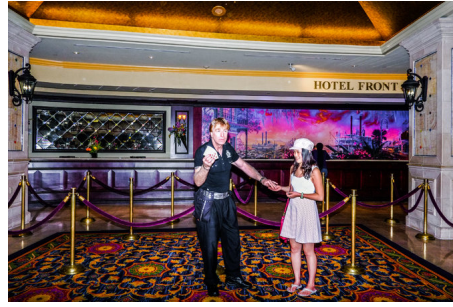


Showboat Casino Closes Amid Tears and Questions About Atlantic City's Direction

Written by Administrator

Monday, 01 September 2014 03:10 -

Photo



Arnaldo Leggi performed card tricks on Saturday during his last shift at the Showboat. Mr. Leggi had worked at the casino since its opening in 1987. Credit
Devin Yalkin for The New York Times

ATLANTIC CITY — One casino here closed on Sunday and another will be shuttered this week, the latest signs of the reckoning underway for New Jersey's faded gambling mecca.

At Showboat, state gambling officials began chaining the doors locked just before 4 p.m., the end of the line for the 27-year-old New Orleans-themed casino owned by Caesars Entertainment. "Go home, we're closed," a security worker shouted at a taxi driver who had pulled up to the building in the midst of the shutdown.

It was a cutting departure from the warm embrace that has long greeted gamblers arriving in what used to be the premier gambling destination east of Las Vegas.

With the closing of Showboat, the giant Revel is next in line, slated to close at 5 a.m. Tuesday, little more than two years after its opening was heralded as the sort of eye-popping boost Atlantic City needed.

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But a proliferation of new gambling resorts in surrounding states has ravaged Atlantic City's casino-dependent economy. The Atlantic Club closed in January. Showboat's turn came on Sunday. Revel will be dark by sunrise Tuesday. And on Sept. 16, Trump Plaza will close.

[Several thousand workers will have lost their jobs](#) by the time the four casinos are closed and

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the city will have lost much of the identity it has cultivated since gambling was legalized here in 1978.

Local and state leaders, their rescue attempts in tatters, are now wondering whether the city's future lies in a return to its roots as a traditional seaside resort.

"My mother and father used to bring my sister and I on the boardwalk back in the '40s," said Sue Dell, a bartender who lost her job at Showboat's House of Blues restaurant after 12 years. "We would get dressed up, and it was different. It isn't like it is today."

Ms. Dell, 66, cried as she recalled selling her house in nearby Egg Harbor Township after receiving a layoff notice in June.

"I thought, well, if I don't have a job I won't be able to afford my mortgage, so I hired a real estate agent and I put my house up for sale and it sold in one day," she said. "I lived there for 11 years."

Since then, Ms. Dell has been living with her 91-year-old mother in Ocean City, N.J. But on Wednesday she is flying to Florida for a week to look for a job as a bartender. She loves her work and does not want to retire, she said.

Despite the pain of uprooting, she is glad she sold her house when she did. These days, her neighborhood is full of "For Sale" signs at properties owned by other laid-off casino workers, she said.

Ms. Dell said she had been coping with her job loss. Then she arrived for her final shift on Saturday and found "everybody crying."

In the hours before the shutdown of Showboat, a notice posted in the lobby stated that the casino would "cease operations" at 4 p.m. Sunday. A jeweler advertised 80 percent off earrings,

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bracelets and other merchandise.

One longtime employee, Arnaldo Leggi, tried to keep spirits up as he worked his final shift, cheerfully doing card tricks for passers-by.

Mr. Leggi, 56, said he had been working at the Showboat on and off since it opened in 1987, and hoped to begin a new career in comedy clubs. But he had no specific plans for what to do next.

"I opened this place, and now I'm going to close it," he said. "I'm not feeling too good about it."

Despite the bad economic news, some see the reduction in casino capacity as an opportunity to strengthen the city's remaining businesses.

"This I call a shakeout. It's not a disaster," said Art Pote, 84, who has lived in a rented apartment at the Taj Mahal casino for the last nine years, and before that came to Atlantic City every weekend from his former home in Brick, N.J. "We just cannot support 12 casinos. It could be the beginning of a better day. It's going to hurt, but the ones that remain will do better."

Mr. Pote, sitting outside the bankrupt Revel, said he had been excited to watch construction of the \$2.4 billion blue-glass tower with its wavelike lower stories stretching toward the beach, and was so fond of the new casino that he took a room there for three of its final days.

"I couldn't wait for it to get finished," he said, wearing a windbreaker with a Revel logo. "They had a great idea, but the economy was just terrible."

He said Atlantic City leaders are doing the right thing by trying to make it less dependent on casinos and more reliant on its beaches, restaurants and entertainment venues.

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"They need to run this place like a resort town, not what it turned into," he said.

Nora Valijan, 57, who played a Freak Show slot machine in Revel's sparsely populated casino on Saturday afternoon, said she would continue to come to Atlantic City from her home in Westchester County, N.Y., mainly to visit friends who live at the Taj Mahal.

But this weekend she wanted to bid farewell to Revel. "I put \$40 in just to say goodbye," she said.

Whatever Atlantic City's future holds, it got a musical boost on Saturday night from [the Hooters](#), a Philadelphia rock band that came to play Revel's final show, and offered a Bruce Springsteen-inspired nod to the city's long history as a place of escapist fun.

"Put your makeup on and fix your hair real pretty," the band sang in its opening number. "And meet me tonight in Atlantic City."

Correction: August 31, 2014

An earlier version of a picture caption with this article misspelled the name of a Showboat worker. As the article correctly notes, it is Arnaldo Leggi, not Arnold.

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