

Detroit casino workers ratify new contract

Written by Administrator

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MGM Grand Hotel and Casino in Detroit on Monday, November 9, 2015. (Photo: Jessica J. Trevino, Detroit Free Press)

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Workers at Detroit's three casinos ratified a new 5-year contract Sunday -- ending months of contentious and complicated negotiations and providing relief to thousands of workers.

Joe Daugherty, president of Unite Here Local 24 and head of the bargaining committee for a group of unions, said in an email that a majority of workers at all three casinos approved the contract. The vote was 95% in favor at Greektown, 85% in favor at Motor City and 76% in favor at MGM Grand.

Sandra Poinsetta, vice president of Unite Here Local 24 and an MGM Grand employee, said in a statement that Detroit's Casino jobs "continue to be the best in the gaming industry and the impact of Detroit Casinos continue to be extremely significant to the city of Detroit's future and will be for years to come."

Poinsetta also said, "The new five year agreement will continue to provide a secure future for our members, address challenges with inflationary health care costs and over the term of the agreement will raise wages."

The new contract provides full-time workers with \$4,250 signing bonuses, modest wage

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increases in the fourth and fifth years of the contract and holds the line on health care costs for about 6,000 workers represented by the Detroit Casino Council. The Council includes members of UAW Local 7777, Unite Here Local 24, Teamsters Local 372 and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 324 that work at the casinos.

Community leaders watched the contract talks closely because of the high volume of tourism and tax revenue generated by the casinos.

The council reached a tentative agreement with the casino's last Sunday after a final round of negotiations that lasted six days.

The new contract will replace a four-year agreement that expired on Oct. 16.

This year, health care was by far the most difficult issue on the table.

Negotiators for the casinos warned the labor unions from the outset that little money would be available for raises and bonuses unless workers contributed more money towards health care. They told labor leaders that health care costs for the three casinos will increase by \$46 million, to almost \$262 million, over the next four years.

In the end, the labor unions successfully negotiated an agreement that maintains the existing HAP/Blue Cross health plans with no additional premium costs, according to an update posted on Unite Here Local 24's Web site.

The contract also provides workers with a 2% wage increase in the fourth year of the contract and a 3% raise in the fifth year of the contract.

Other gains for workers include:

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- One additional sick/personal day for part-timers workers after five years of employment.
- Improvements to part-timers scheduling and seniority issues
- Continued protections on sub-contracting
- Improvements to worker classifications

Both Greektown Casino and MGM Grand issued statements praising the final outcome.

"We are pleased to be aligned with our union partners on a labor contract that makes sense for all involved," Greektown Casino said in a statement. "We can now collectively move forward continuing to build a successful business for the benefit of our team members, our company and our Detroit community."

Steve Zanella, president and chief operating officer of MGM Grand Detroit, said "Together, we crafted an agreement that reflects the priorities identified by Union members: maintaining current health-care plans while providing both wage increases and bonuses."

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