

## Casino exec seeks expanded gambling in Indiana while making few friends

Written by Administrator  
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At least one Indiana casino owner wants to be able to move slot machines and gaming tables to population centers, such as Indianapolis, as out-of-state competition cuts into business. (Photo: IndyStar 2006 file photo)

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Full House Resorts CEO Dan Lee — whose plan to build a casino on former airport land was rejected last year — hasn't given up on Indianapolis.

The outspoken Las Vegas casino executive is gearing up to take his case for gaming in Indiana population centers to the legislature at a time when some lawmakers are showing sympathy for more flexible gaming rules. Some observers say his effort could help pave the way for someone to shuffle the gambling landscape in the state.

But so far, Lee's brash style isn't winning over many, if any, of the people who might be able to help him. And he has incited stiff opposition from competitors in the gambling business.

Full House is the owner of Rising Star Casino Resort in Rising Sun. Lee, who [took over as chief executive](#) in December 2014, argues that Rising Star is overshadowed by new competition in Cincinnati. He wants the state to let him move some of Rising Star's games to a more profitable area.

Lee last year chose a stunningly ambitious target: Indianapolis. He [proposed](#) moving 1,400 of

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Rising Star's approved slots and table games to a new casino as part of a redevelopment of a 130-acre site that includes a former Indianapolis International Airport terminal. The pitch gained no traction, but Lee said if it can't be Indianapolis, the state should still let Full House and other operators bring gaming to the state's more populous cities.



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Full House Resorts, the owner of Rising Star Casino Resort in Rising Sun, wants to move some of the casino's gaming capacity to another location in the state. (Photo: Charlie Nye/IndyStar 2013 file photo)

"The state has found itself in an unusual position where a lot of its gaming capacity is in the wrong places," Lee said in an interview. "When it was legalized some 25 years ago in Indiana, it was done at all the border communities, designed to bring in revenue from Ohio and Illinois and Michigan and Kentucky, to some extent. All of those places have their own casinos."

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Lee said he will ask the legislature for help. Although Gov. Mike Pence has said he won't sign any bill that expands gambling, the legislature has taken small steps toward offering more freedom to casino operators.

The General Assembly last year [passed a bill](#) allowing riverboat casinos — which for decades were the only types of casinos allowed in Indiana — to move onto land and let race

Rep. Todd Huston, R-Fishers, has [proposed legislation](#) that would remove restrictions on where casinos could be built and how many could be licensed. Huston thinks the state eventually could be open to allowing casinos to move their games — but not to Indianapolis, at least any time soon.

"That could be potentially open for discussion," Huston said. "But I think the difference is, everybody understands the economic impact and, frankly, the commodity that Indianapolis would be. If there's going to be gaming in Indianapolis, it would need to be thought of in a large-scale economic development plan. Where's the right spot to put it in? What are the right types of businesses to be around it? How do you attract the right interest?"

Lee's bid to build a casino as part of a larger development by the airport was never likely to win support, Huston said. The Indianapolis Airport Authority passed over Lee's proposal in favor of a plan from a group called Athlete's Business Network. The airport authority eventually [rejected that proposal](#), too, and is restarting its development process. Lee [hasn't given up on developing the site](#) and eventually adding a casino.

"It may work if it's in a different community," Huston said of moving gaming from one casino to a new site.

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