

Morgantown casino looks like a winner

Written by Administrator
Thursday, 06 January 2022 00:00 -

For many years people have dreamed of turning the Morgantown area into a popular destination for visitors.

The community on the southern tip of Berks County is located at a Pennsylvania Turnpike interchange and is near Lancaster County attractions as well as the Philadelphia suburbs. That means there's a tremendous number of potential visitors.

But it hasn't been easy to come up with an idea that takes hold. An outlet mall was built decades ago when Berks County was a mecca for shoppers seeking discounts. That didn't last. The nearby borough of New Morgan was established with construction of a resort in mind. There was even talk about getting Disney to build an attraction there. Obviously that never happened, either.

The Hollywood Casino Morgantown, which opened in December, shows great promise in putting an end to that trend and encouraging further economic development in the area.

It hasn't been easy for Wyomissing-based Penn National Gaming to get the project off the ground, as the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant delays. But the casino's doors are now open.

The \$111 million casino has 750 slot machines and 28 table games plus room for 10 more table games. There will also be two hybrid games where players can wager with a live feed from table games. The casino will be open 24 hours on Fridays and Saturdays and from 9 a.m. to 4 a.m. on other days.

People do need to know that the main attraction here is gambling. The Morgantown site does not offer all the trappings of a larger casino. The dining options are casual — a Tony Luke's cheesesteak stand and a quick-service Asian restaurant. The only entertainment other than the casino games is TV sets showing sporting events, and people can bet on those, too. The facility's website directs customers looking for entertainment to Penn National's full-scale Hollywood Casino in Dauphin County.

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We'd love to see more offerings at the Morgantown site, but the gaming experience alone should be plenty to attract good crowds and bring money into the community.

The next step is for the area's government and business leaders to find ways to take advantage of this opportunity. And it isn't just the immediate area that can benefit. Interstate 176 makes it possible for casino visitors to be in the Reading area in a matter of minutes.

Given its local ties, Penn National should be encouraging casino visitors to see more of what Berks County has to offer. And the people who run and promote local businesses and attractions should work to capitalize on the situation, making casino guests aware of what's going on nearby.

It's unreasonable to expect a relatively small casino to make a huge difference by itself, but it's quite possible for it to provide the spark for something bigger.

While we are pleased that the casino is open and have high hopes for the benefits it can bring, we must acknowledge a few concerns.

We continue to have serious reservations about the state's continuing reliance on expansion of gaming to fund government services and operations. There's no denying the potential downsides of easy access to gambling, particularly for those prone to addiction. And casino opponents have warned that a casino could bring crime to surrounding areas.

It will be up to Penn National and community leaders to make sure this attraction is a boon rather than a burden to the area. Given the company's successful track record in managing such facilities across the country, we expect it to do a good job.

The Morgantown casino's opening offers some excitement and hope for growth during a troubled time for so many businesses, especially those built around having people gather in public. It's a welcome development, and we wish it well.

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