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Jumer's new casino now open

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ROCK ISLAND -- The wait is over. The Quad-Cities gets to open its big, shiny new Christmas present early.

Monday at 6 p.m., the new Jumer's Casino & Hotel opened to the public. While only about three miles from the former Casino Rock Island riverboat -- which opened in March 1992 -- the new \$150 million complex feels a world away.

"It's stunning," said Craig Hesser, Jumer's marketing manager since April. He came from the casino's ad agency, Henry Russell Bruce.

"I've been to enough casinos in the Midwest, in Vegas and New Jersey. I'm obviously prejudiced, but I've given so many tours of this facility," he said amidst the glittering, flashing lights of the 42,500-square-foot casino floor.

One travel magazine writer said Jumer's is "every bit as good as any one of the new off-Strip casinos in Vegas," Mr. Hesser said. "That's kind of the idea -- to bring that Vegas kind of hip, cool feeling to this market. I think they accomplished it.

"It's been a very long and arduous road to get to this point," said Bill Renk, Jumer's vice president of sales and marketing. More than seven years of planning and state review went into the complex at the intersection of Illinois 92 and Interstate 280.

"There's nothing like coming into the facility



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Photo: Patrick Traylor

People line up at the entrance of the new Jumer's Casino & Hotel near the intersection of I-280 and IL Rt. 92 in Rock Island on Monday evening, December 1. The doors opened at 6 p.m. as the crowd counted down, "3, 2, 1" before streaming onto the gambling floor.



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Photo: Gary Krambeck

Jumer's Casino and Hotel roulette dealers Becky Rangel of Silvis and Melanie Cookson of Rock Island work together cleaning the roulette wheel before the opening hour on Monday Dec. 1.

for the first time, seeing what we have to offer," Mr. Renk said. "To sum it up -- it's Vegas, baby."

Half the casino's 1,100 slot machines are new. There also are 24 table games, and -- for the first time -- six live poker tables. At one bank of slot machines, players have the chance to win a 2009 red Corvette (on display), for one coin, Mr. Renk said.

Compared to the old 17,200-square-foot casino, which was on five levels, Jumer's dealer Chuck Wendel said he and many employees were wowed at the new place.

◆ "When we first walked in here, everybody was blown away. The boat was nice, but it got kind of dingy after 16 years."

Mr. Wendel, who's been with Jumer's since the beginning, said he ate at the Player's Buffet (one of four restaurants), for a test run. "It was excellent."

The Player's Buffet is the only restaurant limited to casino patrons, who must be at least 21. The center island is dedicated to desserts, and there will be stations for carved meat, salads, Asian, international, and American foods. There is a back room that seats up to 48.

Lakeside Cafe is a bright, casual family-style '50s-type diner with a game motif, geared more for hotel guests.

The casino is "adult entertainment," Mr. Renk said. "We're not positioning ourselves as a destination for families." In fact, casino players can order alcohol at the Oculus sports bar -- in the center of the floor, with 24 flat-panel televisions -- at 9:30 a.m. daily. The casino is open from 7 a.m. to 5 a.m. every day.

The upscale DJ's Steakhouse is named after company chairman Donald James Jumer, who died Sept. 9 at age 82.

"This is our glamorous piece, our high-end restaurant," Mr. Renk said. It's more dimly lit, with white tablecloths, and distinctive red and yellow lighting.



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Photo: Gary Krambeck

Staff members for the Player's Buffet at the Jumer's Casino and Hotel prepare for the opening day in the restaurant on Monday Dec 1st.



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Jumer's Casino and Hotel housekeeping employee Nick Maess of Rock Island cleans around the table top games in the Oculus sports bar before the opening on Monday, Dec. 1. The bar is located at the center of the casino gaming floor.



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Photo: Gary Krambeck

A 2009 Chevy Corvette is displayed as a prize in the "any coin can win this car" game on the main gaming floor at the Jumer's Casino and Hotel.

The Art Deco design was based on Mr. Jumer's affection for the 1930s-era Cord car, he said. The metalwork along the back room is a reflection of the car's lines.

The fourth restaurant is the Top Hat Deli, with grab-and-go foods next to Lakeside Cafe.

The Edje nightclub will be open nightly from 7 p.m. to 3 a.m., with live entertainment from 7 to 11 p.m. Thursday to Saturday. Dueling pianos will be featured for the first six weeks, with live bands and comedians in the future.

For the five-story hotel (with indoor pool, whirlpool and fitness center), basic room rates are \$89 a night, Sunday-Thursday, \$99 on weekends. Starting April 1, rates increase to \$99 and \$109.

The suites are \$109 Sunday to Thursday and \$129 weekends, with the larger executive suites (including view of the lake and fountain) at \$300 any day. There also is a 7,400-square-foot events center.

"We wanted to create a one-stop destination," Mr. Renk said. "We put a great deal of effort on the hiring and the training of our personnel, to train them in what we want to give the public -- the Jumer experience. Service ultimately is really the thing that we're selling."

The 16-month construction employed 400 laborers, and Jumer's doubled its full-time employment to 700. It interviewed 3,000 people for the 350 new positions, Mr. Renk said.

Its designers specialize in casinos -- Minneapolis-based KKE Architects and Las Vegas-based Yates-Silverman, Inc. KKE also designed Riverside Casino & Resort south of Iowa City.

Compared to Riverside, Mr. Renk said: "I think we went in a different direction with respect to the level of luxury, the attention to detail, the feeling, the ambiance, the design and the color. Subjectively, personally, I feel this is a far superior experience."

The new Jumer's Web site is www.jumerscasinohotel.com.

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