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REGIONAL EDITION

Dennis Gomes says he can bring Atlantic City's first casino back in all its glory. Here's the plan.

Resurrecting RESORTS



THE BUSINESS:

Property will adopt Roaring '20s theme

By DONALD WITTKOWSKI
Staff Writer

Dennis Gomes gazed at the dingy Boardwalk entryway at Resorts Atlantic City and bluntly declared, "It's horrible. We're going to change it." Not one for half-baked solutions, the gaming industry's version of Mr. Fix-It plans an overhaul of the entire casino when he becomes its new owner.

To revive the slumping Resorts, Gomes is going to retheme Atlantic City's oldest casino into a Roaring '20s motif. The rebranding is inspired by the new HBO series "Boardwalk Empire," set in Prohibition-era Atlantic City. The venerable Resorts name, though, will stay.

"In the Roaring '20s, it was a time when the world was changing," Gomes said. "It was a time of economic prosperity. It was before the Depression. There was a lot of partying going on. It was kind of like nonstop partying."

The New Jersey Casino Control Commission is expected to approve the sale Dec. 1, starting a new era for Gomes and the industry. Gomes, who lives in Margate, would become the city's only locally based casino owner-operator.

□ See Gomes, A8

THE FUN:

Entertainment, food to get major makeover

By SCOTT CRONICK
Staff Writer

More clubs. More restaurants. More entertainment.

The new Resorts Atlantic City is coming together in Dennis Gomes' mind. Now, he just has to figure out how to make it happen.

Transforming an 82-year-old building and a 32-year-old casino into a modern mecca for dining and entertainment presents challenges.

Money may be Gomes' biggest obstacle. But he is confident that he can make cosmetic changes and some capital investment to existing Resorts offerings to entice people to come there.

Gomes was presented with the same chal-

□ See Makeover, A9



Dennis Gomes, right, talks with his new vice president of marketing, Sherry Amos, about changes to Resorts Atlantic City as they walk around the casino floor. Atlantic City's first casino will try to re-create the 'nonstop party' atmosphere of the 1920s.

GOMES ON...

HIS APPROACH: 'I think it really is about energy, and I want to show the people in this industry what some passion and love of Atlantic City can do.'

■ **PHILADELPHIA CASINOS:** 'The players that are playing in Philadelphia right now, they're convenience players. ... So why would another (Philadelphia) casino add more mass to that and pull more people from Atlantic City?'

■ **'The biggest percentage of table games revenue comes from big players, and they're not coming from Philadelphia.'**

■ **FAMILY ATTRACTIONS:** 'I don't believe that family-oriented things and gaming mix well. ... I don't think we need to be bringing children around gambling necessarily.'

More on Resorts

Gomes' dream team

Read bios on the management team at Resorts. A8

The odds on saving jobs

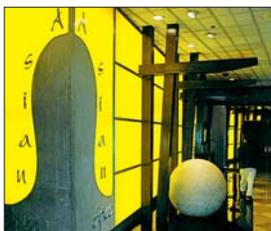
What will happen to existing employees in the transition? A9

Reviving attractions

Atlantic City favorites such as a singing bartender and a fiddler will make a comeback. A9

Audio clips, timeline

Listen to Dennis Gomes talk about the future of Resorts, and check out an interactive timeline on its history at PressofAtlanticCity.com



Asian Spice, like the other six restaurants at Resorts Atlantic City, will remain open, but it will get a new name and a new chef.

Almost all local teachers rate OK

■ Online data show most teachers get a satisfactory review in a nonstandardized evaluation process.

By DIANE D'AMICO
Education Writer

Almost every teacher in the area with evaluation results posted on his or her district website received a satisfactory appraisal in 2009-10, according to a review by The Press of Atlantic City.

But school and state officials

said the postings are just one small piece of data and do not reflect the entire evaluation process.

"Just because it says the teachers were satisfactory, that doesn't mean there weren't areas for improvement and recommendations on the evaluation," said Richard Starodub, superintendent in Lacey Township, Ocean County.

Without standardized statewide evaluation criteria, school districts and charter schools are

□ See Teachers, A6

Numbers by district

See how many teachers in your district were deemed satisfactory. A6

Tea party shakes up race in 3rd

■ The effect of a tea party candidate may be magnified in a close race.

By JULIET FLETCHER
and ROB SPAHR
Staff Writers

Ocean County has been a longtime bastion of traditional Republican politics. But the county finds itself becoming more politically volatile this year. The growing influence of so-called tea party supporters have created a new uncertainty in the county's political landscape.

As more independent-minded voters without party affiliation move into the county, leaving more swing voters for candidates to convince, so attendance at tea party events — each one a melting-pot of grass-roots conservative political philosophy —

□ See Tea party, A5

Campaign 2010

Voter Guide

Review the congressional and county races in Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and southern Ocean counties with our Voter Guide 2010. A4

Sunny

High: 70
Low: 50

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The management 'Dream Team'

Dennis Gomes

Title: President and chief executive officer

Bio: Gomes, 66, spent more than 30 years in the Atlantic City and Las Vegas casino markets as a top executive. He has managed 14 separate casino hotels during his career, including Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort and Tropicana Casino and Resort in Atlantic City. He is credited with the planning and development of Tropicana's highly acclaimed Havana-themed retail, dining and nightclub complex, called The Quarter.



'We have a group of people second to none. We refer to it as a "Dream Team."

The primary aspect of their character is they care about people.'

Dennis Gomes



Sherry Amos

Title: Vice president of marketing

Bio: Amos, 48, was vice president of marketing under Gomes at the Tropicana and will perform the same duties at Resorts. She took on the job of signing up tenants for The Quarter leading up to its grand opening in 2004. The Quarter was a \$285 million project that did not include any slot machines or gaming tables, a novel concept then when Atlantic City was just beginning to experiment with major nongaming attractions.



Title: Vice president of entertainment

Bio: Nielson, 64, has a background in both the gaming and movie industries. While working in Las Vegas at the former Silverbird Casino in 1982, Nielson was the first one to book singer Tina Turner as a headliner in a major casino showroom. She brought Celine Dion to Trump Taj Mahal in the 1990s before the songstress became a pop sensation. Nielson got to know Gomes when they formerly worked at the old Aladdin casino in Vegas. "He lets me be creative," she said. "Dennis lets me go completely out of the box and do something usual."



Title: Vice president of food and beverage

Bio: Zitto, 50, who will oversee Resorts' bars and restaurants, served as Las Vegas casino mogul Steve Wynn's personal chef. He worked in Wynn's house for about a year in the 1980s, preparing special foods when the celebrity CEO was on a "longevity diet." Gomes appointed Zitto as vice president of food and beverage at the Golden Nugget casino hotel in Las Vegas when Zitto was still in his early 20s. "There's going to be a noticeable change in all of the food and beverage outlets," Zitto said of plans to upgrade the restaurants at Resorts.



Title: Vice president of casino marketing

Bio: Elkis, 51, most recently served as director of national marketing for Harrah's Atlantic City. She started her gaming career in 1982, working as a pool league at the former Golden Nugget casino in Atlantic City. She worked her way up the executive ranks. For Elkis, this is a return trip to Resorts. She previously worked there from 1993 to 1999. "My phone has blown up over the weekend because people want to work for a great leader," Elkis said of interest in joining Gomes at Resorts.



Title: Vice president of player development

Bio: Howard, 52, has been in the gaming industry since 1990, including stops at Trump, Harrah's and Tropicana. He is known for his ability to cultivate high rollers, producing millions of dollars in business while he was at Tropicana. Howard was heading for a new job at a Pennsylvania casino, but chose Resorts instead when Gomes emerged as the buyer. Gomes said Howard has already lined up three or four top gamblers to come to Resorts. "In the next three or four months, there's going to be a ton of excitement there," Howard predicted of Resorts.



Title: Vice president and chief administrative officer

Bio: Arnesen, 62, will focus primarily on hotel operations at Resorts. He has worked for casinos and hotels throughout the country, including Atlantic City. He helped to open Trump Taj Mahal in 1990 and before that was at Resorts. Arnesen was among seven senior executives lured away from Resorts by Trump in 1988. He also formerly worked for Carnival Cruise Lines and the Mohegan Sun casino in Connecticut.



Title: Executive vice president of operations

Bio: Gomes' 28-year-old son will be second-in-command at Resorts. He has a degree in economic history from the University of Pennsylvania. His casino career began in Las Vegas in the MGM Mirage management training program. He joined his father in 2007 at Gomes Gaming Inc., a casino management firm. He helped Gomes Gaming to develop and manage a slots casino in Indianapolis called Indiana Live.

Compiled by Donald Wittkowski

Gomes

(Continued from A1)

Resorts opened with an incredible buzz on May 26, 1978, to begin Atlantic City's casino era. However, there's been little to celebrate since its dramatic fall in more recent years, under various owners and with losses mounting. Gomes and his financial partner, Morris Bailey, are buying Resorts for just \$35 million from a group of lenders that took control of the property last December after it defaulted on its \$360 million mortgage and was threatened with foreclosure.

The tough-talking Gomes, a black belt in martial arts, is not known as someone who backs down from a fight. He has built a reputation as a shrewd competitor during his more than 30 years in the Atlantic City and Las Vegas casino markets. He has been labeled a turnaround artist, someone who rescues distressed casinos and makes them showplaces.

"His reputation is that he's very creative in the industry. There's no question about that. That is his legacy," said Robert McDevitt, president of Local 54 of UNITE-HERE, Atlantic City's largest casino union.

Gaming analysts describe Gomes as an innovator, a motivator and a marketing expert acclaimed for his wacky publicity stunts, including one promotion that pitted chickens playing tic-tac-toe against human gamblers at Tropicana Casino and Resort. They say Resorts will be in good hands when he takes charge.

"Success in gaming, in market after market and time after time, has been achieved by people who see opportunity where others see despair. Dennis Gomes has the ability to be that type of leader," Michael Pollock, managing director of the casino consulting firm Spectrum Gaming Group, said Friday.

In his former days as an Atlantic City CEO, Gomes was credited with reviving Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort and the Tropicana. The Taj Mahal's operating profits jumped from \$84 million to \$148 million annually during his 3½ years there in the early 1990s, Gomes said. He boosted Tropicana's operating profits from about \$68 million to close to \$130 million annually before he left the casino in 2005 following a management shake-up at its former parent company.

Now, the 66-year-old Gomes is on the verge of getting the title he has coveted for years —

casino owner. Bailey, 72, a New York real estate mogul who was born in Atlantic City, is Gomes' financial backer.

Resorts' \$35 million sale price reflects Atlantic City's depressed real estate values. The price is only \$5 million more than Resorts' original development cost in 1978. Gomes and Bailey are also getting 10.5 acres of vacant oceanfront property, which they will hold in reserve for possible future redevelopment plans.

"This is a great, great real estate investment," Gomes said.

Something for everyone

The rebranding plan capitalizes on the national publicity generated by "Boardwalk Empire," a TV series based in part on a book by local author and judge Nelson Johnson. Gomes thinks the '20s theme will help attract younger customers to a casino now often crowded with gray-haired gamblers.

"I don't think if something comes from the past it's necessarily going to appeal only to an older generation," Gomes said. "It's sort of retro, and retro is popular with younger people. You can be something-for-everybody, and I think this theme does that."

Cocktail servers, bartenders, bellhops and other employees will dress in 1920s-period costumes. Flappers, a term that applied to a new breed of brash and flashy young women in the 1920s, will dance in Resorts' ornate hotel lobby. Guests will be serenaded by music from the 1920s, '30s and '40s. Drinks will also feature a Roaring '20s theme.

Although longtime customers at Resorts expressed excitement about the rebranding, they also had their own ideas for rejuvenating the property. Mainly, they suggested making the casino more affordable in the sluggish economy.

"They used to give us really good perks," Rudy Wiegand, 69, of Fair Lawn, Bergen County, said while playing a penny slot machine. "Then they upped the requirements for comps. Times got tough, so I guess they had to cut back, but they should start giving us more comps again."

Harold Burgmayer, 85, of Atlantic City, urged Resorts to create an entire area of \$5 blackjack tables to appeal to budget-conscious gamblers.

"I've been playing table games for years," Burgmayer said. "The \$10, \$15 and \$20 tables are just too much for the average person. Resorts

isn't going to make it without average people. They just can't depend on wealthy people."

Time to remodel

Gomes wants to give Resorts a more upscale feel through a mix of new restaurants, nightclubs and cosmetic improvements to the casino hotel. He declined to disclose the estimated cost of the makeover.

Resorts was created out of the old Haddon Hall hotel building that dates to the 1920s and is now called the Ocean Tower. All 480 guest rooms in the old tower will be refurbished to give them a fresh look, Gomes said.

Complementing the original casino is the Rendezvous Tower, a nearly 400-room hotel expansion built in 2004. Gomes is thinking of using the Rendezvous Tower's Art Deco-style facade as a model for a new Boardwalk entrance to the casino.

"We're perfect because of that Art Deco tower and the original tower," Gomes said. "This is the most beautiful '20s decor ever. It was the perfect theme for us."

Gomes dismissed criticism that Resorts is simply too old and too decrepit to compete against the Boardwalk's younger casinos.

"It was in far better condition than we ever expected," he said.

To help finance the new entryway, Gomes is counting on \$2.5 million in funding from a Boardwalk facade-improvement program controlled by the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, a state agency that uses Atlantic City gaming revenue for housing projects and economic development.

Gomes pointed to peeling paint and rust streaks that mar Resorts' bland Boardwalk facade. The entire entryway is expected to be replaced. Also likely to go are Hollywood Walk of Fame-style plaques adorned with the handprints and autographs of Engelbert Humperdinck, Wayne Newton, Tom Jones, Cher and other stars who performed at Resorts over the years. Those aging stars once defined Resorts' entertainment scene, but they hardly resonate with the younger generation of gamblers coveted by Gomes.

One plaque signed in 1983 by singer Tony Orlando also bears the inscription, "Hope I left a good impression." Gomes and his management team think otherwise — not of Orlando, but of the outdated entryway.

"We've got to clean this up," said Matt Howard, who will be



Staff photo by Danny Drake

New Resorts owner Dennis Gomes hopes to transform space on the second floor of the Rendezvous Tower, now used for storage, into a posh nightclub or upscale restaurants.

Resorts' new vice president of player development under Gomes.

Another key improvement project planned by Gomes is the transformation of 30,000 square feet of prime space on the second floor of the Rendezvous Tower. Gomes hopes to convert the now-blocked off, stand ready to whisk guests to the second floor once it is given a facelift. For now, the unoccupied space serves as a storage area for old furniture, cardboard boxes and other odds and ends.

The vacant space overlooks the casino floor, but is currently hidden from view by temporary walls. Two escalators, now blocked off, stand ready to whisk guests to the second floor once it is given a facelift. For now, the unoccupied space serves as a storage area for old furniture, cardboard boxes and other odds and ends.

A.C. the gaming mecca

Nongaming attractions such as trendy restaurants, retail shops and nightclubs are viewed as crucial for distinguishing Resorts and the other Atlantic City casinos from their less-lavish competitors in Pennsylvania. Atlantic City gaming revenue has plunged since casino gambling began in Pennsylvania in 2006, although part of the decline can also be attributed to the fragile economy.

Atlantic City revenue peaked at \$5.2 billion in 2006, but dropped to \$3.9 billion in 2009 and is down an additional 8.7 percent through the first nine months this year. Resorts has been particularly vulnerable to the competition. It is Atlantic City's worst performer this year, suffering an 18.2 percent revenue decline. Gomes is inheriting a casino that lost \$18 million last year and has posted a \$10.8 million gross operating loss through the first two quarters of 2010.

Pollock, the gaming analyst, predicted Gomes will be at the forefront of Atlantic City's hoped-for recovery after a four-year downturn in the nation's second-largest casino market.

"These are challenging times for Atlantic City, and nobody understands that better than Dennis Gomes," Pollock said. "He clearly entered this market at this time with a very specific plan he wants to implement. At some point, Atlantic City is going to be heading in the right direction. Once the industry, the city and the state figure out the correct path, I think Dennis Gomes wants to get there first."

Pennsylvania's casinos became even tougher competitors this year by adding Atlantic City-style table games to their slot parlors. In September, the \$355 million SugarHouse Casino opened in Philadelphia, in the heart of one of Atlantic City's major feeder markets. However, Gomes dismissed the extra competition, arguing that Atlantic City's mix of gambling and nongaming attractions will continue to be a tourist magnet.

"I feel the more gambling they create there, the more they will want to come to mecca. We are the mecca," Gomes said of the possibility of Pennsylvania customers spurring their home market to instead gamble in Atlantic City.

"I'm not worried about casino in Philadelphia, either," he added.

Gomes asserted that Pennsylvania will remain a "convenience market" for local gamblers, while Atlantic City will attract larger-spending customers, particularly the lucrative table games players.

"The biggest percentage of table games revenue comes from big players, and they're

not coming from Philadelphia," Gomes said.

Fixing Resorts — again

At nearly every turn, Gomes seems ready to defend Atlantic City's honor and knock the competition. Over the years, he has talked about his "love" for the town, also pointing to Resorts as the object of his affections.

"I want to show the people in this industry what some passion and love of Atlantic City can do," he said.

Resorts is where Gomes began his Atlantic City gaming career. In the 1970s, he briefly headed the special investigations section of the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement. He also spent time as a gaming investigator in Nevada, where he exposed a money-skimming scam in Las Vegas that inspired the 1995 movie "Casino" starring Robert DeNiro.

While at the DGE, he was in the middle of a politically charged investigation for Resorts' New Jersey gaming license. Gomes recalled that he and his investigators uncovered evidence about bribes paid then by Resorts' casino in the Bahamas to government officials on the island nation. New Jersey politicians turned a blind eye and still wanted the license approved for Resorts for Atlantic City's first casino, Gomes said.

Resorts later purged its problems under new leadership, Gomes said. Since the 1970s, Resorts has changed ownership a handful of times. Gomes drew parallels between Resorts' struggles in the past and its present-day financial difficulties.

"Now, we're coming back to fix it again," he said.

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Makeover

(Continued from A1)

lenges when he was president of the Tropicana Casino and Resort. He recalled one example when he converted a French restaurant to Chinese. To make it different, Gomes wanted to remove the mirrors and glass lantern sculptures and install Chinese décor. After getting a bid of \$1.5 million, Gomes decided to do it his way, buying a big \$1,000 Buddha statue and putting it in the middle of the room.

"Everybody that came in after that looked around and said, 'This is the most beautiful Chinese restaurant we have ever seen, and we really love those glass lanterns on the mirrors,'" Gomes said with a laugh at a meeting last week with The Press of Atlantic City's editorial board.

Entertainment

Some of Resorts' entertainment will be tied to the Roaring '20s theme of the casino floor. Flappers will dance around the lobby, wearing short skirts and 'showing a little cheek,' Gomes said.

Resorts' Superstar Theater will be home to long-running revue shows offered daily, year-round, bucking the trend of other Atlantic City casinos, which have dramatically reduced off-season revues.

Stephanie Nielson, vice president of entertainment, said the 1,350-seat Superstar Theater will kick off its revue shows with a Roaring '20s-themed production and gradually move into other genres.

Other long-running shows will also be found in The Screening Room, Resorts' 300-seat theater on the 13th floor. Nielson would not specify what shows would be presented there, simply stating they would be "very unique."

"Dennis always had entertainment to fit every different demographic," Nielson said. "We are also going after young people."

Bianche "The Singing Bartender" Morro is set to reunite with Morro. But unlike her days at the Trop, Morro will sing songs from the '20s to '40s along with more contemporary music in 25 Hours, Resorts' casino-floor bar that will also feature a small stage to offer lounge performers when Morro isn't working.

"She can sing, make drinks and make change without missing a beat," Gomes said. "She has a beautiful, angelic voice."

Gomes hopes to reunite Morro with two of his other favorites, stillwalker John McNair and Colin G. Matthews, a violinist from Trinidad. If all goes as Gomes' hopes, McNair would roam the casino for entertainment and special events, while Matthews would perform free solo concerts at an undetermined location, offering music ranging from Glenn Miller to Bob Marley.

Gomes said he expects Resorts to feature at least one headliner a quarter and sometimes more frequently.

Nielson said she doesn't plan to compete with Live Nation and C3, national agencies that book major headliners around the city.

"Many times, you have to find an act ... getting ready to break (into stardom)," Nielson said. "Or tie into someone getting national exposure on PBS.

You have to just be aware of what's happening in television and all areas of entertainment and sometimes bring in a package that's never been thought of before."

Gomes added he may reach out to some friends, including former "Saturday Night Live" cast member Joe Piscopo, to play engagements.

Sports will also play a major role in Resorts' entertainment strategy. Gomes remembers watching boxing with his father when he was a child, and he wants to help bring back the excitement of fight night in Atlantic City while also boosting midweek income.

"I want to see if we can possibly get something started every single Wednesday night ... that we have fights going on," said Gomes, noting that he will continue to offer mixed martial arts events at the casino as well.

Vice President of Player Development Matt Howard will play a big role in making those fights a reality. The Absecon resident, who trained 13 world champions including Donovan "Razor" Ruddock, Ray Mercer, Shannon Briggs and Arturo Gatti, is already working with promoters to plan future boxing and MMA events.

"I have talked to three of the top promoters in the business about doing a monthly or bi-monthly, televised boxing event," Howard said. "Promoters are so responsive because casinos and boxing are forever intertwined. Dennis wants to bring back the old days of boxing. It's going to happen," he asserted.

A new club

Boogie Nights, the popular '70s and '80s dance club created by Dave Pena and Resorts spokesperson Brian Cahill, will remain at the casino, but Gomes said he would like to add a new dance club that would be best suited for 30,000 square feet of currently unoccupied space on the second floor of the Rendezvous Tower. Gomes is quick to note, however, that he may not want to make a large capital investment in that space.

"We are primarily looking for people who want to come in and build it out ... we provide that space," Gomes said. "We're looking at a lot of different things ... from strip-tease places with famous names to restaurant-nightclub concepts. It could be one big one. It could be several small ones."

Restaurants

Gomes' plan is to keep all of the current restaurants open, add at least one new concept soon and improve the food quality in all of them.

Resorts currently features six restaurants: Capriccio, a gourmet Italian eatery; Asian Spice, which has a noodle bar and dining room; Gallagher's, the New York steakhouse with a burger bar across the hall; The Buffet, Breadsticks, a 24-hour coffee shop on the Boardwalk; and the Beach Ball Seafood House, a summer-only restaurant that is also on the Boardwalk.

Gomes Gaming is already in discussions with a Rhode Island restaurant to bring an Italian concept to Resorts, he said. The eatery will be a completely new restaurant built in the Horizon Room, which features an ocean view and has been used as a small meeting

The entertainment 'dream team'

Dennis Gomes said he will bring unique entertainment back to Resorts. He gave three examples of the kinds of local entertainment icons he intends to have at his casino.



Blanche Morro

Blanche Morro, aka the "Singing Bartender," got her start in an Atlantic City pub, was spotted by one of Dennis Gomes' marketing executives and hired on the spot when Gomes checked out her act. Starting at the Tropicana in 1996, the Egg Harbor Township resident worked there until 2005 and had a bar named after her in the Tiffany Lounge, which had to be expanded 30 feet to accommodate the demand. "I am very excited to have my comeback," Morro said. "I think it will be fun to offer a mix of music."



Colin G. Matthews

Trinidad fiddler Colin G. Matthews was discovered by Gomes when the future Resorts owner was in Boston and went to Faneuil Hall Marketplace, where Matthews was a street entertainer. Gomes bought one of Matthews' CDs and asked if Matthews wanted to work in A.C. "I said hook me up, brother," Matthews recalled. Gomes did just that, hiring Matthews to perform in the Tropicana's Quarter from 2004 to 2006, and later at Indiana Live Casino near Indianapolis. "I jumped at the opportunity when Dennis called me to work at Resorts, but my wife is fed up with moving," Matthews said. "Dennis told me to beg her to change my mind. And I did. This is a tremendous opportunity. I love working for Dennis."



John McNair

John McNair has worked as a stillwalker entertainer for more than 30 years, including the past 20 at the Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort and the Tropicana Casino and Resort, where he currently still works. Known as Mackie and Johnmbi, the Galloway Township resident considers himself a "walking billboard" for all of his clients, including the city of Cape May. "I am like the mascot for the places I work for," McNair said. "Whether I am running tournaments, hosting parties and special events, people have really come to know me. Dennis always has a vision of what he wants to do and where the city and the industry should be going. He makes things happen."

room and for art exhibits. It once housed Catch a Rising Star and The Improv comedy clubs.

"We want to re-create that type of restaurant ... and possibly have some gaming tables there associated with the restaurant," said Gomes, who would not specify the name of the eatery.

Capriccio won't be affected by the new concept, even though it also offers Italian in a space steps away from the Horizon Room.

"Capriccio is still one of the top restaurants around," Gomes said. "I'm not going to close any restaurants. If anything, we might have more restaurants and longer hours for restaurants, too. One of the things we are going to be doing here is going after mid-week business significantly. Those restaurants are going to have to be open longer hours and more often."

Gomes said he "loves the room The Buffet is in," but he realizes the product can't compare with many other casino buffets. The plan is to upgrade the buffet line with minimal capital expense but to improve food quality dramatically. And he plans to bring back lavish Sunday brunches.

"The room has potential, but the line itself looks like a cafeteria," said Robert Zitto, vice president of food and beverage. "I know we can completely change the feel and look and make it much, much better than it is today."

Asian Spice will be re-branded with a different name, and Gomes will bring chef Wai Ping Tong to run the new Asian restaurant. Gomes worked with the chef at Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort and the Tropicana, naming Ping's Golden Dynasty after him in 2004.

Resorts' future may also

mean partnerships with chain restaurants and celebrity chefs. That space may include the unoccupied level in the Rendezvous Tower.

"Bob's got lots of contacts," Gomes said of Zitto, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America who was Steve Wynn's personal chef early in Zitto's career. "Borgata did a great job. To build out from scratch, that would be very costly. We have access to the money to do that, but whether I want to spend it on that, I am not so sure."

Gomes said he would like to bring restaurants with name recognition to the spaces currently occupied by Breadsticks and Beach Ball.

"You have to have a coffee shop, but I would like to have a major sports bar restaurant on the ground level," Gomes said.

Beach bar

Gomes said he would love to build a beach bar in front of Resorts. However, the minimal beach may be a concern.

"The beach replenishment ... stops right before us," Gomes said. "And we really need that beach in order to do a beach bar."

Gomes said he is working with the city and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to propose extending the beach replenishment to include Resorts' beachfront.

If that happens, Gomes wouldn't rule out inviting Nikki Beach back to the property. The popular, upscale club has successful beach clubs around the world, including Miami, Las Vegas and Panama. Its partnership with Resorts was short-lived, lasting just one season in 2005.

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Most Resorts workers will lose, regain jobs

■ The casino's new owner, Dennis Gomes, says he will rehire most of the existing workers.

By DONALD WITTKOWSKI
Staff Writer

ATLANTIC CITY — Resorts Atlantic City is preparing to fire all of its 2,022 employees Dec. 15. The next day, most of them will be back on the job again. But some of them will have to take a pay cut.

This odd turn of events is part of the transition to new ownership in the \$35 million sale of Atlantic City's oldest casino to former gaming executive Dennis Gomes and his financial partner, Morris Bailey. Gomes says he has no plans to close the casino. The New Jersey Casino Control Commission also says a shutdown will not happen as it prepares to approve the sale on Dec. 1.

Many details still must be worked out, but one union official noted that employees fear they will lose their jobs or that Resorts may go out of business.

"I think the more they read about it in the newspaper, the more concerned they get," said Robert McDevitt, president of Local 54 of UNITE-HERE, which represents about 750 employees at Resorts.

Resorts International Hotel Inc. operates the casino for the current owner, RAC Atlantic City Holdings LLC, a group of lenders that took over Resorts last December after it defaulted on its \$360 million mortgage. RAC, which is selling Resorts to Gomes, plans to end the management agreement with Resorts International on Dec. 15. Resorts International will then "terminate" all of the employees, according to a memo from the casino's general manager, John Pasqualoni.

The Casino Control Commission expects to approve the ownership switch at its Dec. 1 board meeting. The commission also has a regularly scheduled meeting Dec. 15 in case it needs more time.

"The commission will act on this before the termination of that management agreement," spokesman Daniel Heneghan said. Heneghan added that the commission has not even considered the possibility of Resorts shutting down because "that's not going to happen."

Stepping in as the new owner, Gomes will control the hiring process. All employees must re-apply for their jobs online through a website run by HRLogix/First Advantage, which is serving as a hiring consultant to Resorts.

"We're not firing anybody. We are hiring," Gomes said. "In previous casino sales, the new owners inherited the work force when they bought the company. Gomes, however, is

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not buying the company that owns Resorts — he is acquiring the buildings and the land.

Gomes maintains that legal distinction gives him hiring power. He said he intends to hire back most of the existing workers, promising they will be given preference when their qualifications "are equal" to other applicants.

The hiring process is part of Gomes' plan to lower the labor costs at Resorts. He said the financially troubled casino may not be able to survive unless it gets its costs under control, meaning some employees will have to take pay cuts or work fewer hours.

"I don't want to shut anything down, but people are going to have to realize (there are) going to be sacrifices from everyone working," Gomes said. "You can't have these legacy costs that have accumulated for 20 to 30 years or whatever it's been."

Gomes insisted he is not using the hiring process to try to abolish union contracts.

McDevitt argued that Gomes does not have the power to void the Local 54 labor agreement because of its successorship language. He said that language requires Gomes to inherit the contract and all of its terms.

Under the contract, Local 54 workers who have been on the job for more than eight years receive top wages on the union pay scale, McDevitt said. That could complicate Gomes' plan to reduce labor costs.

Local 54 also has been in discussions with Gomes and Resorts officials about plans for terminating employees.

"We don't concede that Resorts has the right to fire our members," McDevitt said. "We don't think it's an open-and-shut case."

Pasqualoni, Resorts' general manager, told nonunion employees in a memo last week that the transition to new ownership will affect their medical benefits and possibly their sick and vacation time. He also noted that Gomes' company will ultimately decide who stays and who goes.

"While we expect that Gomes' Gaming Inc. may hire a number of the existing employees, only representatives of Gomes Gaming Inc. may make any commitments or answer any questions regarding future employment," Pasqualoni wrote.

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Technical group leader Ed Hannan, of Tuckerton, Ocean County, and Resorts spokesman Brian Cahill, of Washington Township, Gloucester County, walk through Boogie Nights, Resorts Atlantic City's '70s and '80s dance club.

Staff photo by Danny Drake