

Casino could be Suffolk downer Officials say Eastie eateries will be welcomed, but ...

By Dave Wedge | Friday, November 16, 2012 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Local Coverage

Suffolk Downs officials insist local eateries and businesses will have an inside track on lucrative locations inside their proposed casino, but owners of longtime East Boston landmarks fear the gaming palace will be a bust for business — and wonder just who might get plum locations inside the billion-dollar resort.

“I think it’ll hurt more than it’s going to help us,” said John Mastrangelo, owner of Kelley Square Pub, a favorite Eastie watering hole for 20 years. “We’d consider (a casino location) but could probably never afford it. The rents and overhead, for our prices, we could never make it work.”

Suffolk Downs brass say a “taste of Boston” food court is in their plans, which could include six to eight eateries from Eastie, the North End, Back Bay and Revere. The casino will include another handful of “stand-alone” restaurants inside the proposed casino, some of which could also wind up going to locals.

Suffolk CEO Chip Tuttle said there would be an open bidding process for the coveted casino spots.

Tony DiCenso, owner of Rino’s Place, an Eastie staple that’s been serving home-cooked Italian fare since 1985, said he would “consider” a satellite location inside Suffolk Downs.

“I’d be interested,” DiCenso said. “But I don’t know what they’ll want. They usually want all the celebrity chefs, like Todd English, and that stuff.”

DiCenso, whose restaurant was recently featured on the Food Network show “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives,” said he takes reservations a month in advance and has a three-hour wait on Saturday nights. He fears all that could change once the slots are ringing just up Route 1A.

“We’re not going to get any business from the casino, that’s for sure,” he said.

But Tuttle said in addition to serving captive crowds inside the casino, local eateries, hotels and other businesses could see a boost from spinoff business. Caesar’s Entertainment — which is Suffolk’s partner in the casino deal — regularly incorporates area businesses into its rewards program and would wine and dine high rollers at Hub eateries off the casino property. In New Orleans, where Caesar’s operates a Harrah’s, local restaurants see \$4 million annually in casino business, Tuttle said.

“I know there’s concern, but we’re willing to work with East Boston businesses,” he said.

Suffolk Downs has paid an initial \$400,000 fee to the state to land the sole Boston casino license. Eastie City Councilor Sal LaMattina said he’ll be looking for local preference for restaurants and vendors as part of any Suffolk deal. “Hopefully they’ll have a food court there with a local flair,” LaMattina said.

Suffolk and Caesar’s officials met Monday with about 40 residents in Jeffries Point, many of whom expressed concerns over the impact on businesses.

“If they’re only going to give (Eastie businesses) six restaurants, how does that help the hundreds of other businesses on



Photo by Stuart Cahill

Main Street?" said Celeste Myers of No Eastie Casino. "I feel like it's going to have a reverse impact."

Bottom line: Expect a mad scramble among Hub restaurateurs for those six casino eatery slots.

Said Tuttle: "It's going to be a competitive process, and it will be a transparent process."

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