

# Job disagreement sparks probe of Columbia Sussex

The Indiana Gaming Commission is conducting an investigation of Columbia Sussex Corp. regarding statements it allegedly made about staffing levels at its newly acquired Casino Aztar riverboat.

Columbia Sussex became the owner of the boat, based on the Ohio River at Evansville, Ind., when it acquired casino operator Aztar Corp. in January.

Ernie Yelton, executive director of the Indiana Gaming Commission, confirmed that a probe has been launched at the request of the mayor of Evansville. He declined to be specific about the reasons, saying only that they referred to „affirmative statements“ the Fort Mitchell-based company made about staffing levels at the time it assumed ownership of the Casino Aztar riverboat and hotel complex.

The Evansville Courier Press, in an March 26 story, cited a letter that Mayor Jonathan Weinzapfel had released to local media, in which he said that Columbia Sussex told him in a private meeting that it was planning to lay off about 70 Casino Aztar employees. The company already had cut about 20 jobs when it took over the casino.

Columbia Sussex said that it might have to cut the jobs because of competition from a new casino in French Lick, Ind., according to the newspaper.

Weinzapfel subsequently requested that the gaming commission investigate. An attorney for Weinzapfel told the Courier Press that the mayor had been led to believe that the company was not planning any layoffs beyond the initial 20. The casino employs about 1,200, according to the newspaper.

Yelton said he didn't know how long the investigation might take.

Privately held Columbia Sussex owns 83 hotels and seven casinos and is the largest licensee of Marriott hotels in the nation. With the Aztar purchase, it also acquired Tropicana Casino and Resort in Atlantic City, N.J., Tropicana Resort and Casino in Las Vegas and Ramada Express Hotel and Casino in Laughlin, Nevada.