

Casino expansion USD 39M over budget

The final price tag on the huge addition that transforms Casino Windsor into Caesars Windsor is CAD 439 million, says Kelly McDougald, the new CEO of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.

„That’s as of yesterday,“ McDougald said Thursday as she prepared to travel to Windsor to take part in the first public tours of the new building on Friday.

The new casino opens officially Thursday with a gala party for thousands of invited customers and other guests from all over North America. Construction of the casino’s second tower has been the largest project in the region, and the largest source of construction jobs.

The approved budget for the expansion of the former Casino Windsor was CAD 400 million when it was announced in February, 2005. „We think that’s pretty good,“ McDougald said of the completion total, which was all public funds. „A variance of 10 per cent on a three-year construction project is fairly consistent in the industry.“

Don’t believe the rumour that half the luxury floors in the 27-storey „Augustus“ tower of the rebranded casino were left unfinished to cut costs, McDougald said. All the rooms in the new luxury hotel tower are finished.

But like most Windsor rumours, there is a grain of truth behind the „not finished“ tale that has been circulating the town for the past few months. What has been left unfinished in Windsor’s tallest structure is the top floor, which will be filled with a new attraction as soon as the OLG and Caesars, the private company that runs the casino for the provincial agency, can figure out what to do with it.

„We will be looking at options for that space going forward,“ said McDougald, newly appointed to the OLG’s top post in December. „It’s a huge space, premier space – it’s got the best view in the region. But we wanted to wait until MGM was finished in Detroit (it opened its flashy new CAD 805-million casino in October) before we decided what to do with it.“

Everything Caesars Windsor does these days is done with at least one eye cocked in the direction of the Canadian casino’s competition in Detroit. Caesars considers MGM – its main rival in Las Vegas – as its closest competition in the Windsor-Detroit region.

McDougald toured the top floor space in the new tower several months ago, before the building was completed. The room has a soaring headspace of more than 15 feet, and can open onto a signature open-air space that looks like a cockpit at the prow of a very tall ship. „It wasn’t closed in yet,“ the CEO said, shuddering at the memory of her cold and windy tour of the open space 34 stories above street level.

A nightclub is a definite possibility for the space, McDougald hinted. The OLG’s other casinos have them and Caesars Windsor does not, yet. But whatever occupies the top floor will almost certainly be operated by a private-sector company which will not necessarily be Caesars.

„Whatever is put in there will be a terrific attraction.“