

Cedar Bay buys Casino Queen riverboat

After 15 years along the Mississippi River as an icon of the East St. Louis waterfront and home to one of the earliest gambling establishments in the region, the Casino Queen riverboat departed Monday under new ownership.

Branson-based Cedar Bay Entertainment, which specializes in family entertainment, bought the 19th-century, four-story side-wheeler for an undisclosed amount. Cedar Bay operates a Titanic museum in Branson and plans to break ground November 13 on a second one in Tennessee.

But John Joslyn, president and CEO of the privately owned Cedar Bay, wouldn't say what type of family entertainment complex the riverboat would become or where it will eventually be docked. But he did emphasize that his company specializes in family entertainment, signaling a departure from the boat's gambling past.

"There's a lot of great space that captured my imagination," he said. "We haven't quite determined how we will use it. We have to consider city landscapes, look at all our options and talk with cities. But we are keeping the restaurant because it's a great facility."

As TV news cameras rolled and photographers snapped pictures, the riverboat left its berth across the river from the Gateway Arch on Monday morning to make its way 17 miles north to Mike's Dock in Hartford, Ill., where it will be docked for winter before undergoing renovations.

When it first opened in 1993, the riverboat casino was one of the largest employers in East St. Louis, second only to the school district, said Tom Monaghan, general manager of the Casino Queen. "When the boat first opened, people said this

boat would never work,” said East St. Louis Mayor Alvin Parks Jr. “As you crossed Eads Bridge and Martin Luther King Bridge, it was part of the landscape. We will miss it.”

During its lifetime, the riverboat generated USD 700 million in state and local tax dollars. Last year, the Casino Queen moved its operations to a USD 92 million complex on-land. “It’s sad to see it go,” Monaghan said. “But due to the state of the economy, she decided to get a part-time job in her retirement.”