

Revenues and patrons up at Missouri casinos

Kansas City, Missouri (AP) – While both Las Vegas and Atlantic City are reporting double-digit declines in casino revenues, Missouri's gambling income is growing.

The state's casino industry continues to shrug off the nation's recession, posting both higher revenues and more patrons in February than during the same month a year ago, according to the Missouri Gaming Commission.

„It's the combination of a lot of things,“ said Troy Stremming, a vice president with Ameristar Casinos Inc., a leading Las Vegas-based gaming and entertainment company.

„We don't rely on travel the way Las Vegas and Atlantic City do. There's removal of the loss limits, and people staying closer to home and not traveling long distances.

„The combination of all of them certainly is making the casino operators in the Midwest part of the country more attractive,“ he said.

Nevada casinos had their 13th straight month of declines in January and Atlantic City's 11 casinos posted a 19.2 percent drop in revenue last month.

Missouri's casino revenues were buoyed by a sharp rise in both patrons and revenues at St. Louis' newest casino, Lumiere Place. Revenues there were 38 percent higher than in February 2008, and 54 percent more patrons walked through the doors, edging Lumiere past Harrah's North Kansas City as the state's fifth highest-grossing casino.

Statewide, casino revenues for the month were up USD 5.1 million over February 2008. For the fiscal year that started

July 1, revenues were USD 63.9 million higher than in the same span of the previous fiscal year.

While patrons and admissions rose in the Kansas City market in February, revenues fell by about USD 426,000, or less than 1 percent, from the previous year. In the St. Louis market, revenues were up USD 4.1 million over February 2008.

Ameristar's St. Charles casino continues to be Missouri's most lucrative, winning about USD 25.8 million in February. Harrah's Maryland Heights is second at USD 23.1 million, followed by Ameristar Kansas City at USD 20.1 million and Argosy in Riverside at USD 17.06 million.

The state's six smallest casinos all saw higher revenues in February than in January, and other than the President, all were up over the same month a year ago.

Overall, winnings at four of Missouri's five largest casinos dropped from January to February. Officials attributed the lower winnings to February being a shorter month with one less weekend than January.

As for the number of patrons, Stremming said Kansas City's new smoking ban likely played a part in the increases in that market.

In three of the city's four casinos, smoking is banned everywhere but on the casino floors, meaning people who come to the casinos solely for the restaurants and sports bars – for instance, to watch a basketball game – have to either go outside or into the casino to smoke.

Each time a person goes into the casino, even if it's just to smoke a cigarette, the state counts that as another patron and charges the casino USD 2.