

Revel gives smokers the green light in Atlantic City

Posted: Wednesday, May 29, 2013 1:00 am

By DONALD WITTKOWSKI, Staff Writer

Francis Gozum stood in the middle of Revel's casino floor Tuesday, puffing away on a Newport next to a sign that depicted a smouldering cigarette and said, "Smoking permitted beyond this point."

For the first time since it opened in April 2012, the \$2.4 billion megaresort is allowing gamblers to smoke in designated sections of the casino floor. Revel had been the only one of Atlantic City's 12 casinos to ban smoking, but it reversed course over the Memorial Day weekend in hopes of attracting more gamblers.

"Gambling goes hand in hand with drinking and smoking," insisted Gozum, a 25-year-old table games player from Valley Stream, N.Y. "For me, it's cool to smoke because I'm stressed out from losing some money."

Revel's decision to scrap its no-smoking policy is part of its marketing overhaul after it emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection last week under the new ownership of its lenders.

"I heard they were going bankrupt because they didn't allow smoking," Gozum said.

The resort's new management team believes smoking is one way of attracting more traditional gamblers who, like Gozum, contend that smoking and gambling are inextricably tied.

Randall Fine, whose Las Vegas-based Fine Point Group consulting firm has been hired to lead Revel's marketing turnaround, said even his mother has complained about the non-smoking policy. "It doesn't feel like a casino unless you smell smoke in the air," Fine said of his mother's remarks.

Revel's previous executive team thought a smoke-free casino was emblematic of the property's upscale resort image. Revel, however, has languished near the bottom of the pack in gambling revenue in the Atlantic City market, prompting questions whether the smoking ban had contributed to its financial struggles.

Anti-tobacco advocates argued Revel has been trying to use the smoke-free policy as an excuse for other problems at the casino. "I wonder how Revel notified guests who made reservations for this weekend that wanted a 100 percent smoke-free venue, and then showed up to a smoky gaming floor?" said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of the New Jersey-based Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy.

Revel began allowing guests to smoke after receiving regulatory approval from the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement on Friday, just in time for the start of the Memorial

Day weekend.

Some guests may be confused by leftover signs that continue to tout Revel as a smoke-free casino. A small sign on the door leading from the parking garage to the casino level says, "This is a smoke-free property. Thank you for not smoking."

Yefim Grebelsky, 63, and his wife, Galina Slutsky, 58, two nonsmokers from New York City, mistakenly found themselves sitting in the middle of Revel's new smoking section while playing the slot machines Tuesday. They urged Revel to try to keep smoking to a minimum now that it has begun.

"We prefer it when a casino has a smoke-free policy. One hundred percent nonsmoking is preferable," Grebelsky said.

"We hate secondhand smoke," Slutsky added.

Revel spokeswoman Kristen Weisz said smoking is currently allowed on 23 percent of the casino floor. Smoking will not be allowed in other parts of the property, she noted. Atlantic City law allows casinos to have smoking on no more than 25 percent of the gambling floor.

Contact Donald Wittkowski:

609-272-7258

DWittkowski@pressofac.com

http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/press/atlantic_city/revel-gives-smokers-the-green-light-in-atlantic-city/article_04496d30-c7b4-11e2-b15c-001a4bcf887a.html