

The owners of Magic City Casino want to open operations in Edgewater



The Genting Group's desire to build a casino in Miami has been well known ever since the Malaysian company bought its first chunk of land and buildings in the Omni neighborhood from the *Miami Herald's* parent company six years ago.

But Genting isn't the only company that wants to bring gambling to the Biscayne Corridor. The Magic City Casino in West Little Havana is asking the state's Department of Business and Professional Regulations for a permit to operate a jai alai and poker facility in Edgewater, where the 54-year-old, five-story Chesterfield Smith Center for Social Justice building now stands, at 3000 Biscayne Blvd.

Unlike other gambling expansion initiatives, the state won't require a special election for the jai alai's opening. However, it may need approval from the Miami City Commission since the seven-year-old Miami 21 zoning code is silent on new gambling facilities.

Isadore "Izzy" Havenick, vice president of Magic City Casino, says his company is still in the early stages of exploring the possibility of building a gambling facility in Edgewater. There isn't even a rendering for the proposed building, he notes.

Poker Face

Written by Erik Bojnansky, BT Senior Writer
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“We were looking at areas in Miami where we thought that a card room and jai alai facility could do well,” says Havenick, whose company also owns a 25 percent stake in the Casino at Dania Beach, which includes live jai alai. “We think there’s already a huge entertainment district there, so we figured one more amenity to come to that area might be fun.”

Havenick adds that the proposed jai alai wouldn’t include slot machines. “Slot machines were assigned to seven specific sites [by the state] in Miami-Dade and Broward counties,” he explains.

Formerly known as Flagler Greyhound Track, Magic City Casino at 450 NW 37th Ave. -- along with Calder Race Course in Miami Gardens and Miami Jai-Alai (now Casino Miami Jai-Alai) near Miami International Airport -- was allowed to obtain slot machines after Miami-Dade voters blessed the move in January 2008. Magic City Casino has also hosted poker games since 1997.

“The legislature chose to add an eighth site in 2010 -- Hialeah Park has a slots license,” Havenick notes. “But we’re not asking for one [at Edgewater].”

Paul Seago, executive director of No Casinos in Orlando, is doubtful of Havenick’s claims. “When a pari-mutuel owner [racetracks and jai alai] says they don’t want slot machines,” Seago says, “I don’t believe it for a second.”

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letters@biscayntimes.com