

NWI casinos rake in \$105.7M

Hard Rock again leads state in March revenue

By Karen Caffarini
For Post-Tribune

March is typically the busiest month of the year for Northwest Indiana casinos, according to a casino executive, and last month didn't disappoint.

The four casinos together — Ameristar in East Chicago, Blue Chip in Michigan City, Hard Rock Northern Indiana in Gary and

Horseshoe Hammond — raked in \$105.7 million in revenues, according to the Indiana Gaming Commission's monthly revenue report issued April 11.

This was almost 22% better than the \$86.78 million total in March 2021, when the two Majestic Star Casinos were in operation and the Hard Rock had not yet opened. It's also an 18.7% hike over February's \$89.04 million total take and an

almost 26% increase over January's \$84.05 million.

"January tends to be slower due to weather and the reset after the holidays. Business then starts to build again in February with March historically the busiest month of the year," said Joe Branchik, vice president, marketing, Hard Rock Casino Northern Indiana.

Shannon McKellar, vice president, marketing, for Horseshoe Hammond, said that casino also typically sees a bump in March. "March Indiana gaming reve-

nues were strong and seem to indicate that entertainment seekers were excited to get out and visit casinos," McKellar said.

"March is typically a month for Horseshoe when we see a bit stronger visitation relative to the winter months. I suspect that everyone starts to get excited about the notion that the cold weather may be in the past, and they are ready to venture out for spring and have some fun," she said.

However, the year-over-year increase was fueled primarily by

the switch from the two Majestic Star Casinos in Gary, which took in a total of \$12.57 million in March 2021, to Hard Rock, which raked in \$38.53 million last month, a more than 200% increase.

The other casinos showed a slight decrease in year-over-year revenues.

Ameristar took in \$19.98 million in revenues, 20.4% less than the \$25.11 million it took in during the previous March. Blue Chip's haul

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A closed southbound lane of Hohman Avenue runs in front of the Bank Calumet Tower in Hammond as construction is done near the intersection of Martha Street and Kennedy Avenue on April 7. KYLE TELECHAN/POST-TRIBUNE PHOTOS

'Back to being a business district'

Construction projects are building blocks for new look in downtown Hammond, Hessville

By Karen Caffarini
For Post-Tribune

Step one of the downtown Hammond revitalization project has begun, transforming the "drag strip" Hohman Avenue has become into a walkable community that will include market rate apartments along with some retail and commercial enterprises, and maybe even an Artists Alley in the future.

Work also began April 4 on improvements to Kennedy Avenue in the Hessville area, creating a more downtown atmosphere there as well.

Both projects, which have a combined cost of \$12.5 million, are being funded mostly with federal American Rescue Plan dollars. They're expected to be substantially completed this year.

Mayor Thomas McDermott



Construction crews work on the closed Hohman Avenue near the intersection with Sibley Street in Hammond on April 7.

said the Hohman project includes squeezing a portion of the heavily traveled road from four lanes to two and creating more parking on the street.

"I want to get downtown Hammond back to being a business district," McDermott said. "People want to go too fast down Hohman from Hammond to Munster. They'll need to take another route."

The city hired Jeff Speck of Jeff Speck and Associates, a world-renowned urban planner, to create a vision for Hammond's downtown to make it more walkable.

"He said traffic was way too high and the amount of parking way too small," McDermott said.

The city hired American Structurepoint of Merrillville to design the project and construction work

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Grant provides boost for Ivy Tech students

By Carole Carlson
For Post-Tribune

College students struggle for more reasons than just academic challenges.

"There's a lot of external factors that come into play when it comes to students not completing their studies," said Louie Gonzalez, chancellor of Ivy Tech Lake County. "Many times, people think it's all internal and it's not."

Ivy Tech officials and supporters celebrated the news April 12 of a \$1.2 million federal grant giving students a whole menu of wraparound services to aid them in gaining their degree.

U.S. Rep. Frank J. Mrvan, D-Highland, secured the federal appropriation recently along with nine other Community Project requests totaling about \$45 million.

"What we delivered today was hope, support and a public-private partnership to help students reach that vision," Mrvan said.

Ivy Tech's welding program is also receiving funding to expand instruction and improve equipment.

"To the Finish Line" brings together Ivy Tech Lake County, the North Township trustee's office, Urban League of Northwest Indiana, the Salvation Army of Northwest Indiana and Goodwill Industries.

Gonzalez said the alliance will bridge the gap, providing a safety net of services for students to finish school and prepare for life after graduation.

Urban League president and CEO Vanessa McCloud-Allen said she was one of those struggling students as she returned to college as a single mom with two young children.

"I took the scenic route," she

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Celebrating National Columnists Day

Holiday honors writers, especially Ernie Pyle, who died in World War II



Jerry Davich

"I start arguments with invisible people."

Aaron Sorkin, the playwright and TV screenwriter, told this to TV news legend Dan Rather during an interview. Sorkin's description of his writing career immediately resonated with me. I've been doing this since I started writing newspaper columns in the late 1990s, though I never perceived it that way.

I've likely been starting arguments with invisible people long before I stumbled into professional journalism. Before personal computers became the norm. Before texting and email became commonplace. And certainly before social media existed.

In the digital age, it seems most of us are starting arguments with invisible people. In a way, this is what columnists do on a regular, possibly daily, basis. First we sit alone with our thoughts and pick fights with ourselves, then we share these inner-dialogue arguments with our readers. If we share it with enough reasoning or convincing, our argument will provoke readers to share their

thoughts with us.

This has always been my goal as a columnist. Otherwise I feel as if I'm screaming in a wind tunnel or in an empty forest. My favorite reader response begins this way: "I've never before written or called a newspaper columnist or reporter, but..."

Provoking thoughts isn't only my job. It's my nature. I just happen to get paid for doing it through a traditional media outlet platform. My preferred bonuses come in the form of reader responses to my columns. It doesn't matter if it's positive and praising or negative

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Ernie Pyle's home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, has been turned into a library where a memorial honors the legendary reporter and his work. Pyle won the Pulitzer for an article about how soldiers deserve combat pay. AP



Tom Skilling's forecast High 44 Low 35

Chicago Weather Center: Forecast on back page

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