

Circa could change downtown visitation landscape when it opens

By [Richard N. Velotta](#) Las Vegas Review-Journal
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If all goes as planned Thursday, Derek Stevens will be licensed by the Nevada Gaming Commission for his [downtown Las Vegas Circa resort](#).

There's no reason to believe that won't happen.

On Sept. 9, after a 90-minute hearing, the [Nevada Gaming Control Board](#) unanimously recommended the commission approve licensing.

Regulators know Stevens well — he's been licensed nine times in the last 12 years and in the past year, he's been interviewed numerous times about each step leading up to the scheduled Oct. 28 opening.

For some prospective licensees, the regulatory process is a time of stress, when skeletons can come tumbling out of the closet and observant competitors can learn more about what their rivals are up to.

Not for Stevens. For him, the questioning from board members was an opportunity to talk more about the first from-the-ground-up resort being built downtown in 40 years and to get people excited about seeing it.

From some of those earlier interviews, we know:

■ Circa will have the world's largest sportsbook, a three-story operation with seating for 1,000. Stevens told the Control Board that earlier in his life, visits to sportsbooks at the Las Vegas Hilton (now the Westgate) and Caesars Palace influenced his desire to build the biggest and the best book. It'll even have a television studio and radio booths to host visiting media, which will likely make the Circa sportsbook even more renown.

■ Circa Sports, the company's branded sports wagering system, is growing. One of the approvals the commission will consider will be for Circa to [operate the sportsbook at the Tuscany](#). Stevens was successful in developing a new football contest through Circa, has a foothold in the [crowded Colorado sports-betting market](#) and is now on the verge of expanding in Nevada.

■ It'll have the first-of-its-kind [Stadium Swim](#), a tiered "aquatheater" in front of a monster video screen where people can watch sports in a leisurely environment. Stevens figured out how valuable watch parties can be after buying the old Clark County Courthouse site and converting it into the Downtown Las Vegas Events Center, a gathering place during Raiders and Golden Knights games. Stadium Swim got another publicity boost this past week [when auditioning talent to staff it](#).

■ The Legacy Club Rooftop Cocktails on the 35th floor of what will be downtown's tallest building will provide views of the sunset and the Strip as the lights come up. Stevens says it's one of his favorite places, and with its unobstructed views, it should be a magical draw.

■ The [Garage Mahal across the street](#) from Circa sounds like it's going to be the nicest parking garage in the city because it's going to become a first-ever transit hub for ride-hailing companies. Stevens indicated it'll not only have a

climate-controlled bridge over Main Street connecting to the casino but some artwork inside.

■ In June, Stevens announced [Circa will be for adults only](#). That's music to the ears of patrons who don't want to have to navigate around strollers and see children on the casino floor. Others have tried the adults-only concept. Will Stevens succeed in keeping the property that way?

With all these features coming to Circa, the big question will be whether the downtown property will be able to affect the visitation center of gravity.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority has reported that the proportion of visitors who said they visited downtown Las Vegas decreased from the past three years. Among the visitors who went downtown, they were less likely to say that the main reason was to see the Fremont Street Experience (45 percent) and more likely to say they were visiting primarily to gamble (14 percent). Yet the Gaming Control Board has reported that gross gaming revenue has increased at a faster pace downtown than any other market in the state over the past two years.

That would seem to indicate that Circa, with gambling in its wheelhouse, would provide a new draw to downtown. Some industry analysts are expecting that to happen.

“With so many signature elements, from the distinctive design to the adults-only status to the first tiered pool open all year, this really could be the first must-visit hotel casino downtown,” said Nehme Abouzeid, founder and president of LaunchVegas LLC. “Having a destination resort with bragworthy

amenities could be the anchor downtown needs to grab some market share from the Strip.”

Brendan Bussmann, director of government affairs for Las Vegas-based Global Market Advisors LLC, said Stevens’ personality is part of the equation and Circa’s features will draw some away from the Strip the same way other off-Strip properties do.

“Derek is very sold on Vegas, probably one of the best showmen of Vegas in the current era of people out there, and definitely wants to make a difference in downtown,” Bussmann said.

“The Strip will always be the Strip and will be the center of gaming as it relates to Las Vegas,” he said. “But that said, there are great products, not just with what you’re seeing with Circa downtown, but what you’re seeing at Red Rock and Green Valley and other places along the way that draw that customer off the Strip because they want a different experience.”

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