

Golden Nugget, others with Las Vegas ties damaged by Hurricane Laura

By Nicole Raz Las Vegas Review-Journal
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Several casinos in Louisiana with Las Vegas ties have been dealt another blow — this time from Hurricane Laura.

Casinos in the area — and all over the country — were already reeling from the economic toll of the pandemic, which caused hotel-casinos to shutter their doors for months and to reopen with dampened visitation.

“The hits just keep coming to the industry,” said Brendan Bussmann, director of government affairs for Las Vegas-based Global Market Advisors LLC.

The storm came ashore about [11 p.m. PDT Wednesday](#) just west of Lake Charles, causing heavy wind damage that impacted casinos operated by Caesars Entertainment Inc., Landry’s Inc., Penn National Gaming Inc. and Boyd Gaming Corp. Landry’s operates the Golden Nugget brand nationwide.

Isle of Capri river boat casino, operated by Caesars, broke loose from its moorings during the hurricane, floated down the Calcasieu River and ran into an interstate highway bridge.

"The safety of our team members and guests are our primary concern," a Caesars spokeswoman said late Thursday. "Currently, Isle of Capri Lake Charles, Eldorado Shreveport, Harrah's Louisiana Downs and Horseshoe Bossier City are closed due to Hurricane Laura. Harrah's Louisiana Downs and Horseshoe Bossier City plan to reopen tomorrow (Friday) morning."

An area news station, WKRG, posted a video showing the roof of the Golden Nugget Lake Charles being peeled back by the winds that were up to 150 mph.

Gerry Del Prete, senior vice president of gaming operations, said a reopening date is unclear.

"After further assessing the situation, intense recovery efforts and accommodating the needs of first responders, we are unsure of an exact reopening date," he said in a statement to the Review-Journal.

The nearby L'Auberge Lake Charles casino also sustained damage.

L'Auberge is operated by Penn National, which also runs the M Resort and Tropicana in Las Vegas.

"We are continuing to assess the damage. Most importantly, all of our team members that were on property are safe and accounted for and we're continuing to reach out to those who were evacuated to check their wellbeing," company spokesman Jeff Morris said.

Boyd reported minimal damage to its four area casinos.

Company spokesman David Strow said the company had closed Delta Downs, a racino about 25 miles west of Lake Charles in Vinton near the Texas border, and the Amelia Belle riverboat casino in Amelia on Tuesday.

The casino at Sam's Town Shreveport and the racino at Evangeline Downs, Opelousas, were closed Wednesday ahead of the storm.

Of the four properties, only Delta Downs sustained major damage, he said. The three other casinos are scheduled to reopen Friday morning.

"There was some roof damage and some water inside the building at Delta Downs," Strow said. "It was rainfall and not storm surge."

Strow said experts are assessing the damage at Delta Downs and haven't yet determined when the property, which has more than 1,600 slot machines and a 200-room hotel, would reopen.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards allowed casinos to reopen May 18, after a mandated shutdown that began March 17.

"These facilities were on pace for a strong return from The Great Shutdown," Bussmann said. "That comeback will be hampered by the hurricane."

Josh Swissman, founding partner of gaming and hospitality consulting agency The Strategy Organization, said Golden Nugget was doing "the best of the bunch" with a 1.2 percent revenue shortfall compared to last July.

Greg Chase, founder and CEO of Las Vegas-based Experience Strategy Associates, said the storm only creates more instability for workers.

"I feel deeply for the employees of these properties who have been through a roller coaster themselves of watching their jobs be at risk, and now likely for longer as the city and industry there works to repair," he said.

Stocks for Caesars, Penn and Boyd were largely unaffected Thursday.

Caesars shares closed up \$1.27, 2.8 percent to \$47.26 per share. Penn was down 4 cents, 0.1 percent at the close, but rebounded by 15 cents, 0.3 percent, to \$56.29. Boyd was up 61 cents, 2.3 percent, but fell after hours by 45 cents, 1.7 percent, to \$26.43 a share.

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