

The Capital

Slots cash in at Arundel Mills Temporary casino could be on the way, Jockey Club says horse racing industry will ‘dramatically change’

Excerpted

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The casino debate may have finally ended.

Voters endorsed the state's largest and most lucrative casino for the Arundel Mills mall yesterday, and the 4,750-slot machine gambling emporium could arrive as soon as The Cordish Cos. can erect a temporary tent to house it.

"I'm going to try like the devil to do it, but it's not a hundred percent sure that I can," company president David Cordish said. "I've got to figure how to build a world-class permanent structure at the same time I'm building the temporary one."

The casino and the estimated \$430 million the state expects it will pump into government coffers will help plug holes in county and state balance sheets, but may spell the end of horse racing industry in Maryland. The issue inflated voter turnout across the county.

More than 55 percent of ballots upheld zoning for the 200,000-square-foot entertainment and gaming complex and ended more than 18 months of debate and the most costly local campaign of the election season.

More than \$8 million was poured into the fight over Question A as two gambling giants fought over whether to approve the casino, and Cordish said last night during a celebration at Arundel Mills mall that he thought voters connected with the message not to let gambling revenue go to a Penn National Gaming-owned casino in Charles Town, W.Va.

"This is not Charles Town, this is our town," Cordish said. "I think that resonated: to bring the money home, to let the home town win."

The scene at the No Slots at the Mall party, a group financed by Penn National and the Maryland Jockey Club, was "somber" last night, group Chairman David Jones said.

"It was good for the voters of Anne Arundel County to choose their destiny, whether for better or for worse," Jones said.

"I think we got really good turnout at ground zero, where, of course, is where people are most affected," Jones said, referring to the Hanover area around the mall. "I think as we traveled

out, there was a lot of misinformation by Mr. Cordish pushed out there."

Jones said he and his wife will move away from the mall area, and several other members of the citizen group that launched opposition to the campaign.

"I'm putting my house up for sale and I'm going to move somewhere else," Jones said. "I talk the talk, I walk the walk. Mr. Cordish is free to do whatever he wants if he wins, but he'll do it with out me being around."

Cordish said a victory on the referendum means his company will launch an "massive" outreach campaign to neighbors like Jones.

"We are going to prove to them, like we have in other areas where we've built, that we are going to improve their neighborhoods," Cordish said. "I really firmly am positive that at the end of the day they will become some of our biggest supporters."

Tom Chuckas, president of the Maryland Jockey Club, said the vote meant the end of horse racing in Maryland.

"The model that exists is going to change dramatically," Chuckas said. "It's become a real possibility" that the club's training facility in Bowie will close live racing and simulcast racing at Laurel Park racetrack will end and a shortened racing season will take place at Pimlico track in Baltimore. Chuckas said MI Development, which owns the track, is likely to further explore redeveloping it.

"Unfortunately, when you look that, you're creating one industry and you're decimating another," Chuckas said.

Cordish has said his company remains willing to buy the tracks and restore the horse racing industry. But Chuckas said, "They are not for sale."

Cordish's plans for the casino include a 300-seat music venue operated by Rams Head and restaurants by celebrity chef Bobby Flay, the Cheesecake Factory, a Ruth's Chris Steak House and a branch of Obrycki's Crab House and Seafood Restaurant.