



Ameristar ups ante with hotel renovation

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EAST CHICAGO | Ameristar Casino Hotel has completed \$7 million in room and suite renovations, keeping the four-star hotel overlooking Lake Michigan in the top tier of Chicagoland lodging.

"We completely transformed the hotel," said Ameristar Vice President of Hospitality Marc Levin. "It's the 'wow' factor. Guests walk in and they are very impressed."

The first major renovation in the 288-room hotel's 11-year history was launched in September, despite the continued headwinds presented by the Cline Avenue Bridge closure and the lingering effects of the recession.

A tour given to a Times reporter and photographer on Monday revealed a hotel that has gone from traditional to contemporary in one big leap, with expansive 504-square-foot standard rooms replete with artwork and the latest digital amenities and hookups.

The top two floors of the 15-floor tower feature junior and presidential suites with more square footage than a small home. Those are reserved for Ameristar's premier Star Awards gaming patrons, who get the suite as a complimentary perk for the big bucks they lay down at the gaming tables.

"It positions us in a great way with our guests, so they can have a good overall gaming experience when they come here," said Ameristar spokesman Reginald Dotson.

The room renovations were designed by Robyn MacAdams, director of interior design at Carpenter Sellers Del Gatto Architects, Las Vegas.

Because top tier hotels are sparse outside Chicago proper, Ameristar's hotel is popular not only with gaming patrons, but also with business travelers, Levin said. Room rates range from \$109 to \$199.

The renovated standard rooms at the Ameristar Casino Hotel now feature oversize soaking tubs as well as separate glass-enclosed shower stalls. The presidential suites feature Jacuzzi tubs with separate oversize shower stalls in the main bathroom, as well as a separate half-bathroom.

Gone are the televisions housed in large armoires, replaced by 42-inch high-definition LCD screens featuring premier cable channels.

The renovation is in keeping with the gaming company's core values of quality services and continuous improvement, while also demonstrating Ameristar's continuing commitment to East Chicago, Dotson said.

Ameristar revenues began to flag badly after the condemnation of the Cline Avenue Bridge at the end of 2009. But in 2011 revenues began to recover, with the East Chicago boat the only one of five in Northwest Indiana to notch a year-to-year revenue increase.

The Cline Avenue Bridge serves as the main gateway to the casino from Chicago, so gaming patrons needed to accustom themselves to taking other routes. The bridge remains closed as state officials continue to negotiate with a private investment group that says it wants to build a toll bridge in place of the closed bridge.

Two-and-a-half years after its closure, Ameristar remains hopeful a new bridge will be built within the footprint of the old, Dotson said. The old bridge is scheduled for demolition this summer.