

# LT Hard Rock making inroads to be viable



Lake Tahoe Hard Rock introduced outdoor music on New Year's Eve. Photo/LTN

**By Kathryn Reed**

A year ago this time the hype surrounding the opening of Lake Tahoe Hard Rock was palpable. The chaos inside was under wraps. It was quite a feat to actually have the doors open to the public on Jan. 28. Finishing touches were still taking place right up until the last minute.

It certainly has not been the year owners Jon and David Park envisioned. The brothers borrowed \$60 million to turn the dilapidated, outdated Horizon hotel-casino into what they

believed would be the premier property in Stateline. They hired Warner Hospitality to handle the day-to-day operations, which included Don Marrandino as the general manager.

Marrandino was gone by early March and Warner was fired in October.

Lawsuits are lingering. One is between the Parks and SMC Contracting, the firm that did much of the remodel. The other is between the Parks and Warner.



The pool at the Hard Rock is an issue still to be resolved. Photo/LTN file

It wasn't long before the employees were jumping ship or being forced out. The property was in **shambles last summer**.

Fast-forward to today and things still aren't perfect, but they are a lot better.

An employee who spoke with *Lake Tahoe News* last summer about how horrible the place was is still at Hard Rock. "Things are going much better," he said, but he still wanted to remain anonymous. "We are transitioning. Warner leaving was a blessing. That is where I had most of my complaints and issues. Things didn't get like this overnight. Warner dug

quite a hole.”

**Since October** it has been up to casino veterans Jim Roets and Rick Stevens to provide stability, order and a sense of leadership. Their 90-day agreement is nearing the end.

What the future holds remains to be seen. Management companies have been on property assessing the Hard Rock. Paragon Gaming is believed to be at the top of the list of contenders. They, like Warner, are based in Las Vegas.

Hiring a general manager and human resources director were two of the things Roets and Stevens were tasked with. Originally the plan was to get a GM who understood the Tahoe market and not have an outside company like before. No one would speak to why there has been a change in philosophy.



The casino has been busier of late compared to August when this picture was taken at the height of the turmoil. Photo/LTN file

An HR director has been hired as well as others for that department.

“They are handling all of human relations in a much more effective manner than ever before. We’ve augmented some of our food and beverage staff,” Roets told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I find

in general the employees here are feeling good about being here and have some optimism that we are doing things right.”

A key position – director of non-gaming operations – is now vacant. Corinna Osborne has taken a job with Park Heritage, the parent company of the Park brothers based in Minden. She is vice president of business development and special projects.

Until her job is filled in Tahoe she will remain an integral part of the hotel-casino.

“When we made the shift back in October it was a positive move for the property and community,” Osborne told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I’m definitely not touting the company line. It’s something I believe.”

She noted, though, that it takes time to make all the necessary changes.

Some of those changes may not be able to be made soon because it is 50-year-old building. It has an old heating and air conditioning system. Employees and guests have noticed this. The casino floor often runs hot, though there was a short span when it was cold and employees wanted to be wearing more clothing, but were denied.

When rooms are warm this time of year it’s not possible to kick in the A/C.

There were issues over the holidays with the hot water in some rooms. Hotel officials believe that has been resolved permanently.

A good sign is weekend nights are filling up. And when the gaming numbers came out for November it was the first time in months that the Stateline casinos posted year-over-year gains. It’s too soon to know if this is a trend or an anomaly.

The ski season, Roets said, has been good for the hotel-

casino. Hard Rock partnered with Powderhouse ski shop, which opened a retail location on property for hotel guests to easily access equipment.

On New Year's Eve the casino had music out front, with crowds dancing to stay warm.

"People want and expect a countdown. We added that. It was received better than we could have imagined," Roets said.