

Casino industry gradually charging for parking



Stateline casinos – for now – are leaving their parking lots open to everyone. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

What happens in Vegas doesn't always stay in Vegas.

When it comes to the casino industry Las Vegas is a trendsetter. And the latest trend is charging for parking at casinos.

“Paid parking is a topic we have recently been discussing at STAR. It’s not something that has a lot of understanding yet, but the point is over this last summer both Hard Rock and MontBleu began charging for parking periodically,” Mike Bradford with the South Tahoe Alliance of Resorts told *Lake Tahoe News*. “This action is something that historically was

considered verboten. Now I think there is growing recognition there is probably a place for it.”

Among the five Stateline casinos there is vast acreage covered in asphalt as well as multistoried parking structures. Today, it’s usually free to park – even in valet, though tipping there is the norm. People not patronizing the casinos even park in those lots. Skiers are regularly at Harrah’s to avoid the high-priced city owned garage at Heavenly Village.

The overflow of concert-goers for the Harveys summer concerts is what led Hard Rock and MontBleu to charge people last summer.

“What ended up happening is customers were using our parking lot and going across the street so it was displacing our casino guests,” Marimille Dacia, MontBleu marketing director, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We charged \$20 cash and then gave \$20 credit to (use in the casino), so if you used our facility, you got your money back.”

MontBleu charged during the outdoor concerts and the celebrity golf tournament. Dacia said at this time there is no plan to charge for parking on a regular basis.

No one from Hard Rock Lake Tahoe returned calls.

The MGM properties in Vegas were the first to charge; implementing the policy earlier this year. Last month, Caesars Entertainment, which owns Harrah’s and Harveys, announced it was going to institute paid parking at its Southern Nevada properties.

“Our priority is to ensure that our hotel guests, local residents and Total Rewards loyalty members have an improved parking experience,” Bob Morse, president of hospitality at Caesars Entertainment, said in a press release. “Guests who stay, game and shop at our resorts have said that parking spaces and valet services have become increasingly scarce, so

we believe that implementing a paid parking program while also investing in LED parking guidance systems will help address these issues.”

For now, at least four of the Stateline casinos do not intend to charge for parking on a regular basis. But the powers that be are keeping an eye on their counterparts down south.

“It is private property. The open parking in back is intended for guests of our properties, so if we wanted to do something, it would be within our rights to do so,” John Packer, spokesman for Harrah’s-Harveys, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Bradford, who operates the Lakeside Inn, said while his lot will remain free for now, the bigger discussion by STAR has been looking at the possibility of generating income from the lots for the greater good of the community.

“As we ultimately talk about how to fund local transit and how to make it work, parking is one of the pieces of that puzzle,” Bradford said. “There is no immediate direction to formalize that approach, but the evolution of forming that is possible.”