

Companies to run casinos in York selected by committee

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Staff Reporter

A provincial committee has chosen the company it wants to operate a permanent casino for eastern York Region, says a member of the province's gaming commission.

The selections took place in a Toronto boardroom last week over four days of deliberations, said Randy Barber, who is vice-chair of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario.

Commission members are responsible for picking companies to operate single "charity gaming clubs" and six clusters — each cluster having casinos in several Ontario cities or regions. Two of these clusters include a site in York Region.

Commission board members weighed bids from 13 short-listed companies to make their choices, Barber, a Markham town councillor, said Tuesday.

"We did Ben Franklins on all of them," he said, meaning that pros and cons were considered in each case, until "all

of a sudden the scales tip."

But the identity of the preferred companies won't be released to the public until next month, said officials at the commission and at Ontario's ministry of consumer and commercial affairs, which supervises it.

The choices only show a preference, Duncan Brown, the commission's chief executive officer, stressed yesterday, adding that some bidders may have expected more than the government will offer in a contract. Over the next two weeks, he said, companies will be approached and told: "This is on the table for you to accept. Are you prepared to accept it?"

For eastern York Region, the operator is almost certain to come from these companies, which were on a cluster short list released by the government last week:

- Casino Austria (Ontario) Group Inc. One of its three principals is Casino Austria, which operates casinos in 12 countries, including the Great Blue Heron Charitable Casino and Bingo in Port Perry, Ont., which opened this year.
- CHC Casinos Corp., owned by CHC International Inc.

CHC runs Casino Rama near Orillia, Casino Rouge in Louisiana and 75 hotels in the Americas, combining "the resources of the world's largest cruise corporation (Carnival) and North America's leading casino and hotel operator," according to its profile in a government press release.

• Crown Charity Gaming Inc., a subsidiary of Windsor Casino Limited, WCL, which operates Casino Windsor and its riverboat, Northern Belle Casino, is itself a consortium of ITT Caesars World Inc. and Hilton Hotels Corp.

• Fundtime Corp., whose partners are W.I.N. Gaming Corporation of Ontario, Canada — which runs Monte Carlo gaming events — and a Canadian subsidiary of Consolidated Press Holdings of Australia.

• Grand Charity Gaming Clubs, a company formed by Fantasy Gaming Entertainment, Inc., a partner in the Great Blue Heron, and Grand Casinos Inc., which owns or manages several U.S. casinos.

• RPC Anchor Gaming, which combines Revenue Properties, an Ontario-based real estate company "currently assisting the expansion of a chain of gaming properties

from three to 10 locations throughout Las Vegas," with Anchor Gaming, a public gaming company which supplies and operates slot machines in Nevada and runs two Colorado casinos.

• Star of Fortune Management Limited, a private Canadian company whose directors include former RCMP officers and Otto Jelinek, a former federal minister.

• Trillium Gaming Inc., an Ontario company. Its gaming clubs would be operated by The Navegante Group, selected as the interim operator of Casino Rama.

Where the casino might be is not known, but the commission has said potential operators are responsible for gaining necessary approvals from local governments. "Once the selection committee (the commission board) has selected the successful proponents, the proponents will propose to the commission specific sites for the location of charity gaming clubs," the release said.

The government should release more information on how the casinos will operate, Barber said. "I'm as much in the dark as my fellow councillors because that information has not been released to anyone."

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As always, live lobsters will be flown in from the east coast for the next festival, which runs August 19 - August 24th and for which reservations are strongly recommended. "We sold about 200 lobsters at the last event, in addition to our regular menu items.

This is something a lot of people seem to enjoy - they particularly like the fact that it's flown in fresh and cooked here.

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Lobster Bonne Femme and Lobster Thermidor." The restaurant also features periodic special events with the emphasis on international specialties including Italian, Cajun, Jamaican and Indian cuisine.

An Elizabethan feast, which is held each fall, attracts clients from a wide area. Outdoor barbecues are another customer favorite, and Pennanen and her staff once again barbecued a giant hip of beef during this year's Strawberry Festival. "The quality of food here is always well above average and our prices are reasonable," Pennanen said.

"We have a fully stocked bar and a good selection of wines from different countries and we've just redecorated and renovated the restaurant." Rich hues of blue and plum lend a touch of European sophistication to the ambiance, without detracting from the restaurant's country house charm.

The upper level features framed posters of jazz greats, while original

paintings by area artists are displayed on the walls downstairs. "We're featuring different artists every couple of months and the paintings are for sale."

Pennanen is an attentive and genial host, stopping at each table to chat to her guests, ensuring that everything is to their liking and exchanging friendly banter. "I try to make it feel as comfortable as I can, because I want everyone to come back again."

To make reservations for the Lobster Festival, call 640-8494.



Manager Jennifer Pennanen shows off one of the wine features of the Corner House. Photo: SJOERD WITTEVEEN

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