

# Wind Creek turns green next week

The Bethlehem Gadfly coronavirus, Wind Creek Casino June 23, 2020

 *Latest post in a series about Wind Creek Casino* 

Wind Creek is certainly one of the indices of our economic health.

*from Jon Harris, “Wind Creek Bethlehem to reopen next Monday.”  
Morning Call, June 22, 2020.*

A new age of casino gambling in the Lehigh Valley will get its start next Monday when Wind Creek Bethlehem reopens for the first time in more than three months.

Wind Creek, which closed to the public March 15 to help stem the spread of the coronavirus, made the announcement Monday. The news comes days after the Lehigh Valley learned it would enter the green phase of the state’s reopening plan Friday, a phase that permits casinos to open at 50% occupancy.

During the pandemic, Wind Creek Bethlehem was able to pay its roughly 2,400 employees through the end of May but furloughed 2,095 of them June 1, as the downturn entered its third month. Wind Creek Hospitality President and CEO Jay Dorris told The Morning Call this month that the casino hopes to bring all employees back as operations ramp back up.

With the potential shift in consumer preferences following this pandemic, however, Dorris said Wind Creek was tapping the brakes on a \$250 million plan to transform the crumbling Bethlehem Steel No. 2 Machine Shop into an indoor water park and entertainment complex.

But Wind Creek still wants to break ground by late summer on its \$100 million hotel expansion, a project that could take 14-16 months to complete.

While a reopening date did not become clear until Monday, Wind Creek had kept patrons informed of what to expect when the casino reopens. That included plans for small groups of invited guests to start, followed days later by a reopening to the public at a reduced capacity.

“Wind Creek Hospitality has crafted a reopening plan that includes utilizing a gaming reservation system,” said Kathy McCracken, executive vice president and general manager of Wind Creek Bethlehem. “This will help our team manage appropriate capacity in the building as well as providing a way to continuously clean the gaming floor throughout the day.”

Safety precautions include temperature checks for everyone entering the facility and masks or facial coverings for employees. Guests are asked to bring their own masks.

Players who do not have their own masks will be able to get them on site for small donations supporting Second Harvest Food Bank of Lehigh Valley & Northeast PA. Smoking will be allowed only in an outdoor area in the north parking lot.

One of the Lehigh Valley’s largest employers, the casino had some employees test positive for COVID-19. That included Jonathan Shen, a 31-year-old table games supervisor who died April 22 following a four-week battle with COVID-19.

During an interview June 12, Dorris declined to disclose the number of employee cases but noted the casino had the situation arise and tried to be proactive in giving employees the necessary leave to get treated and recover. He said Wind Creek was following all guidance, including notifying those who were in close contact with someone who tested positive.

“We’ve had to deal with it, and we’re going to be dealing with that for some time now going forward,” he said.