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FEATURED

Casino to have cleaner air

## WinnaVegas debuting new air filtration system; casino also getting solar panels

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Mayan Beltran, left, WinnaVegas general manager, talks about new HVAC equipment and ductwork installed in the casino's bingo hall during a tour with maintenance manager Scott Gardner on Friday. The casino, owned by the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, is installing a new HVAC system with an air purifying system and a solar energy system energy and improve the air quality in the casino.

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SLOAN, Iowa -- If casino guests complain about anything, WinnaVegas Casino Resort General Manager Mayan Beltran said, it's often the smell of cigarette smoke.

And then there are the card dealers, servers and other casino employees who spend far more time in that same air the guests complain about.

"It's not so bad when they're periodic guests, they come in and out periodically; it's more dangerous for the employees that are there 40 hours a week and more," Beltran said.



That's all going to change this week, when WinnaVegas debuts its new Casino Air filtration system. It's the first of two major capital improvements at the casino and hotel.

The casino recently decided to install the new air filtration system as its 1992 HVAC system was approaching the end of its life. According to a statement from Casino Air, the old air handlers at WinnaVegas had "basically been destroyed by years and years of tar and nicotine abuse."

Since the old air handlers were suffering a sort of machine emphysema, the decision was made to add state-of-the-art smoke filtration to the new heating and cooling system. Casino Air, whose smoke filtration technology is used in casinos across the

country, says the new system will leave the air inside the casino virtually devoid of smoke, even as guests continue puffing.



"It's going to take out any tar, nicotine, paper ash, microscopic particles, it takes out allergens, germs, bacteria," Beltran said. "It's the top-of-the-line filtration system in the casino industry."

The new HVAC system also consumes about 40 percent less energy than the old system, which Beltran attributes to the fact that it recirculates air (already heated or cooled) back into the casino, rather than taking in fresh air from the outside and warming or cooling it.

"We've been patching (the old HVAC) together, keeping it running," he said. "It's old. It was only supposed to last 20 years, and it went 27 years almost. It was a matter of, we have to replace the HVACs anyway, and if we're going to replace the HVACs, let's look at what can we do to enhance the customer experience."

Meanwhile, WinnaVegas is in the process of installing sets of solar panels to power the casino and hotel. Panels have already been installed on the bingo hall, and work is ongoing to install solar panels in other areas on the roofs of casino buildings and on adjacent land.

WinnaVegas maintenance manager Scott Gardner said the project is already more than half done, well ahead of schedule thanks to the unseasonably nice weather. The casino expects all the solar panels to be installed by April.

Beltran anticipates the solar panels alone will save the casino \$2 million in electricity costs over the next 20 years. The casino is also replacing all its old incandescent and fluorescent light bulbs with more efficient LED bulbs.

The Winnebago tribe, which owns the casino, is happy to have a budgetary win for the casino dovetail with an environmental win.

"Obviously, financially, if you can save money, that's great," he said. "But for us, our culture, being tribes, we're all about eco-friendly. If you think about it, we try to use everything from the Earth and save the Earth. When we killed a buffalo, we used every piece of the buffalo."

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