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## Central City betting two new casinos will help boost the town's economy

By Joanne Kelley, Rocky Mountain News  
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CENTRAL CITY - Eddie Lynn insists he's not a gambling man, but the English-born casino executive is placing a big bet that this boom-and-bust town will be on the upswing again soon.

With a new parkway leading directly to Main Street from Interstate 70, Lynn and partners have shelled out some \$13 million readying two gaming parlors scheduled to open here Thursday. Scarlet's will be housed in the former Bullwhackers Casino, and the Teller House Casino will open in the historic building next to the opera house.

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"Me? I don't gamble," Lynn said this week when asked how often he feeds a coin or bill into a slot machine.

Still, Lynn was among the investors who poured \$14 million into renovating the Teller House back in 1991, only to shut it down a few years later when gamblers flocked in far greater numbers to the more accessible Vegas-style casinos erected in nearby Black Hawk.

"With the opening of the new road, the market is going to turn around," predicted Lynn, who is president of 3C Gaming Inc. "There are a lot more attractions in Central City than in Black Hawk that you

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can do with your family. Our goal is to get people back into the community."

Now the state's biggest gambling draw, Black Hawk had been just a stop on the road to Central City before the state legalized limited-stakes wagering 15 years ago.

Central City boomed during a gold rush in the 1800s, while Black Hawk developed as a mill town a mile down the road. When the gold prospectors left, the town depended largely on tourists, who came to see historic structures, including the Teller House, with its "Face on the Barroom Floor," in addition to the Central City Opera.

When gaming was legalized, Central City stuck to the original plan of putting gambling operations behind picturesque old storefronts. Black Hawk, which adhered to that initially, eventually allowed large-scale modern buildings with huge parking garages.

When gamblers came to town via Colorado 119, there was little reason to continue past Black Hawk and drive an extra mile to Central City, which had smaller casinos with fewer dining options.

But the new eight-mile parkway, which opened Nov. 19, cuts down on the drive time for Front Range residents and may already be working in Central City's favor.

Town officials estimate the \$45 million road has brought more people to town.

A traffic gauge on the side of town where the parkway connects to the city counted an average 3,756 cars entering town each day in January, up from 3,514 a day in December and 2,347 in November.

"Short of the parkway, there wouldn't be anything else to attribute that to," said City Manager Lynnette Hailey.

The two new casinos will boost Central City's gaming properties to seven from the mere five that remain from the early days of gambling. Some 184 jobs will be added in the first phase of the project.

By the end of the year, Lynn said, his company hopes to break ground on a 700-car garage on the site of the town's parking lot across the street from Scarlet's. More casino space will go upstairs and will be connected to Scarlet's by a pedestrian bridge. An extra 250 new jobs will be created as a result.

Central City's biggest casino said it welcomes the new competition.

"We've operated as more or less an island," said Joe Behm of Fortune Valley Casino, the property located closest to Black Hawk. "We've done a majority, if not all of the marketing for the city. Now we're going to have a competitor that will also market the city."

The Central City Opera, which has leased the Teller House to Lynn's company, also expects to benefit from the new casino investments.

In addition to a New York style deli, the Teller House will begin offering fine dining when Madeline's restaurant opens in May, just in time for the opera season. Around the corner, Scarlet's will offer American cuisine with seating for 120.

"The major impediment to going to the opera was that there wasn't a nice restaurant to go to before or after the show," said Valerie Hamlin, the opera's events manager.

As part of the lease agreement, Teller House will still house a museum collection and a banquet room on the upper floors for special events. In its previous incarnation as a casino, Teller House had slot machines upstairs. Now, slot machines will only be in rooms on either side of the bar and deli area, away from the main entrances.

"It was much more invasive than what they're doing now," Hamlin said.

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