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For Immediate Release

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Letter to the Editor: A Crab Bucket Mentality ***Former Elected Official wishes Nemacolin well during Casino Reorganization***

(Farmington, PA) – After reading comments about the Lady Luck casino at Nemacolin Woodlands on the WMBS Facebook page, I became a bit heated under the collar. I recalled a valuable lesson I learned from a Chamber of Commerce director long ago, that many individuals here have a "Crab Bucket Mentality," and I believe the comments in this thread was a perfect illustration.

Before I get into the meat of the argument, I want to be clear that I do not work for the Hardy family at any business under their umbrella. Nearly twenty years ago I did work for an entertainment provider that was often contracted to work within the facility. I have also been an overnight guest several times. However, I have no current financial ties to Nemacolin Woodlands, 84 Lumber, etc. I point this out, because my statements on Facebook had replies from those who wished to attack me personally rather than discuss the matter at hand. Several of them claimed I was a shill for Hardy family, and I want to dispel that rumor – despite my respect for Maggie and her late father Mr. Joseph Hardy. In fact, if you reviewed my campaign finance reports and statements of financial interest you will see they never even contributed to my campaigns.

Some commentators wanted to talk about my personal struggles, which I have been forthright about. Google my name you can read the stories and releases. Or send me a message and I will happily discuss them with you.

But, back to the story at hand, WMBS Radio, rightfully, posted these facts as news: "The Lady Luck Casino Nemacolin in Fayette County is making changes to combat declining revenues. The casino is planning to create a high roller area, reconfigure its gambling floor, change the layout of slot machines and upgrade its entrance. In addition, the Nemacolin Woodlands Resort, the casino licensee, recently decided to operate the venue itself ending a four-year agreement with Churchill Downs Inc. The changes come as the casino has seen its gross revenues slump for much of the past seven years after hitting a high of \$35.2 million in 2015. Last year revenues were \$22.2 million. Nemacolin officials presented the proposed improvements Wednesday before the state gaming control board unanimously voted at their meeting to renew the casino's resort license for another five years."

So, I went about my commenting there as I will here. Again, facts: Lady Luck casino was truly a unique experiment in Pennsylvania, a state that is no stranger to trying out different things. Only one of two Category 3 casinos, it was granted a Resort License that was meant only for resorts, hence the Resort License nickname. While this made it stand out, it also came with its fair share of challenges.

Over the years, the casino had a resort amenity fee that proved to be quite a bone of contention. During my time in office, I fought this fee over and over! The resorts license' owners decided to hire an operator, hoping that experience would be the key to successful operations. This decision did have its ups and downs, but it was always better than nothing.

It's important to note that sin taxes, such as those on cigarettes and gambling, are always promised to eliminate other taxes. However, the truth is that this promise is usually overstated by those in office, making it difficult for the entities affected to cope. Note in this instance, the casino management was not in charge of the hotel, so it had to pay higher shelf rates for rooms instead of comping guests, which hurt the business in the long run. In other states a room may costs a casino \$34 a night for cleaning, here the operators paid \$120+ to comp a guest (according to what the casino executives shared with elected officials at a meeting several years ago).

Despite all these challenges, Lady Luck was still a beacon of hope, thanks to its dedicated management. And with the Hardy family now taking the reins, there's every chance that we'll see even greater success. As a Fayette County resident, I wish them nothing but the best.

In other comments online I also mentioned that I thank the Hardy's for their millions of dollars in investments in our community through hotel taxes, the casino's local share agreement, wages to employees, and voluntarily made to charitable causes and projects.

And if you want to complain about the legislation that built this casino system, we can't forget that elections have consequences, and those in office have a significant role to play in shaping the success of various entities. As such, it's worth recognizing individuals such as Senator Pat Stefano, Rep. Charity Grimm Kruppa, and Rep. Ryan Warner (feel free to throw me in with those good folks during my time if you will), who have made a positive impact during their tenures. In the end, we can only hope that Lady Luck continues to shine bright and increases it's positive impact on the community.

In my online comments I had used the word "heroes" rather than "good folks." The crabs in the comment bucket wanted to come after me as if that was to mean that Veterans are not heroes. My son's hero is the fictitious Captain America and Jerry Seinfeld's hero is the alien Superman. Apparently, a few in the comment section missed economics class, but listened in public speaking class and took note of "if you can't win an argument, change the topic."

I often wonder if, after I have conquered my own demons and achieved personal happiness and success, I will need to return and fight once again in this region. Not all our elected officials are as honest or candid as they appear.

I'm Matt Dowling, now live in Farmington, and approve this message!

Matthew Dowling is a husband and father from Pennsylvania where he served as a State Representative for six years. Write him at Matthew@Coordinated360.com.

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