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## **FROM STEEL FACTORY TO SLOT MACHINE: PITTSBURGH'S FIRST CASINO OPENS ON NORTH SHORE RIVERFRONT**

**With opening of new casino, downtown Pittsburgh expands along the Allegheny River; continues ongoing conversion of city's former brownfields into recreational and lifestyle destinations.**

**Pittsburgh, PA** – The Rivers Casino, which opened on August 9th, is the most recent project on Pittsburgh's North Shore and is the newest outcome of the City's 20-year-long plan to expand the downtown area. The Rivers Casino follows the development of new mixed-use buildings, two stadiums, and museums. These venues are transforming the city's riverfronts from underutilized, industrial sites to urban and cultural destinations. Developed by Holdings Acquisitions Co. LP, it was designed by Las Vegas-based architecture firm Bergman Walls and Associates in collaboration with Pittsburgh-based architecture and planning firm, Strada Architecture LLC for the exterior architecture. Strada was also the urban planner and landscape architect for the project.

The Casino shows that Pittsburgh – chosen by President Obama to host the G-20 conference in September – is indeed changing from industrial city to a 24-hour metropolis.

The casino overhauls a 12.6-acre site that housed a variety of industrial uses, ranging from a steel factory to a railyards. It creates a new recreational space that is accessible by foot, bike, and boat as well as by car and, in the future, by a light rail system. It overlooks the "Golden Triangle," the part of downtown Pittsburgh that is formed at the point where the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers flow together to create the Ohio River.

With this and other projects, the City is bringing a wealth of new attractions to residents and visitors. On the North Shore, the City inserted a new street grid and is encouraging the development of mixed-use buildings, hotels, entertainment, and housing. Additionally, the Casino ties into a continuous riverfront park system that features bike and walking trails.

The State of Pennsylvania's Act 71 of 2004 legalized gambling, but it is far from the only attraction at the new casino. The 450,000-sf, two-story building has 125,000 sf of gaming facilities; 70,000 sf of dining facilities, including four restaurants and four bars; shell expansion space for additional gaming and nightclub facilities; and a separate parking structure for 3,800 cars. It also has a 1,000-seat, grass-step outdoor amphitheater and a public esplanade that follow the river's edge.

Unlike most casinos, the building is open to the outdoors. The architects stretched out the building's long floors, which were necessary to accommodate the long-span spaces needed for gaming facilities. As a result, the building spreads out horizontally along the waterfront site; two curved wings meet at a glass tower or drum that rises up at the middle of the site, which also serves as the main connection point between floors. The public spaces flow from inside to outdoor terraces and sinuous balconies. Decorative steel bars project out from the façade and recall the numerous steel bridges that traverse Pittsburgh's three rivers. Local sandstone was mixed freely with metal panels, mixing Pittsburgh's signature natural and industrial materials.

"The Rivers Casino represents one more step in the transformation of Pittsburgh from a 20<sup>th</sup>-century industrial city to a green 21<sup>st</sup>-century city focused on new technologies," said Strada Principal Michael Stern. "We were delighted to take on the challenge of planning and designing a large destination facility and create a new type of amenity for Pittsburgh on a complex but spectacular riverfront site. In the casino, a patron can literally walk from the gaming floor, across the esplanade and amphitheater and onto a riverboat. Nowhere else in the city can you do that."

Scott Walls, President of Bergman Walls, added, "The design team wanted to create a total entertainment complex that houses a casino gaming floor, dining establishments in all price ranges, and entertainment. We used the river's edge to create a public promenade and open the dining venues to views of the river and skyline of Pittsburgh. In a typical casino, all the entertainment elements turn inward. At the Rivers Casino, we turned them outward to embrace the city and its natural beauty. It is a project of which the people and the City of Pittsburgh can be proud and enjoy."

Ed Fasulo, President and C.O.O. of Rivers Casino, said: "Bergman Walls & Associates, Strada Architecture LLC, and the entire design team have been, indeed, a pleasure to work with. It is not often that an architectural firm is able to sift through all the rhetoric to fulfill an owner's vision and objective. We wanted a destination that would make people feel comfortable and at ease...a gathering place. The design team has met and exceeded all of our expectations."

A major goal of the project was to restore the landscape, promote visual and physical connections to the rivers, and mitigate the effects of the casino and garage on the environment. Strada integrated a complex system of storm water management that meet or exceed the strict new guidelines of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. Rainwater from the parking garage is filtered and roof water is cooled before entering the Ohio River. All surface water in the riverfront park passes through a series of specially designed soils that detain water and promote plant growth before it enters a level spreader that dissipates the water across the restored riverbank.

As the latest project to be built along the Allegheny waterfront, the casino joins a string of new cultural and civic destinations along the North Shore Riverfront Park that are the new face of Pittsburgh as it grows beyond the "Golden Triangle" and outgrows its industrial past.

### **About Strada**

[www.stradallc.com](http://www.stradallc.com)

Formed in 2000, Strada is a multidisciplinary architecture firm that comprises an integrated team of architects, interior designers, urban designers, and landscape architects. Experts in architecture and the industries that they serve, Strada's principals focus on the diverse issues facing its clients and their communities. The firm specializes in architectural design and urban planning, retail and corporate development, historic and neighborhood preservation, public landscapes, higher education, and green design.

### **About Bergman Walls & Associates, Ltd.**

[www.bwaltd.com](http://www.bwaltd.com)

Bergman, Walls & Associates, Ltd. was formed in 1994 as an architectural firm specializing in architectural and interior design for resorts, casinos, condo-hotels, retail, dining, and entertainment venues. Their founding partners both worked with Steve Wynn to create The Mirage and Treasure Island. Many of their projects are icons that define Las Vegas and the gaming industry including Paris Casino Resort, Caesars Palace Towers, Trump International Hotel & Tower, The Signature at MGM Grand, L'Auberge du Lac Hotel & Casino and Snoqualmie Casino.

### **Additional information**

[www.theriverscasino.com](http://www.theriverscasino.com)



*The Rivers Casino replaces a former steel factory and adds a new destination along a riverfront park that has revitalized Pittsburgh's North Shore. Photo © 2009 Brad Feinknopf*

**DESIGN TEAM**

Architect of Record, Design Architect, and Collaborating Exterior Design Architect: Bergman, Walls & Associates, Ltd.

Collaborating Exterior Design Architect, Urban Planner/Landscape Architect: Strada Architecture LLC

Structural Engineer: The Harman Group

Civil Engineers: Chester Engineers; GAI Consultants, Inc.

MEP and Fire Protection Engineer: AE & Associates

Roofing/Curtain Wall: CDC Consulting Engineers

Interior Designers: Cleo Design, Inc.; The Hannah Jones Group; Floss Barber, Inc.

Food Service: JEM West

Lighting Designer: Illuminating Concepts

Acoustical Engineer: Chips Davis Design

Security/Surveillance: Mike Malia & Associates

Elevator Design: HKA Elevator Consulting, Inc.

Signage Design: Eslick Design Associates, Inc.

Code Analysis: JBA Consulting Engineers

ADA Consultant: Accessibility Development Assoc.

Parking Consultant: The Harman Group

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