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## **New \$92M Casino Queen Facility Opens Today**

*By Robert Carr*

EAST ST. LOUIS-The \$92 million new Casino Queen, a 221,000, two-story gaming facility being built partly on a small man-made pond, opens today. The casino replaces the former Casino Queen, a riverboat sitting nearby, made outdated since the state changed the law allowing casinos to be built on any body of water. The new building, it's 38,000-sf gaming floor basically setting over 340,000 gallons of water, is allegedly part of a \$150 million plan that would include a future showroom, more entertainment facilities and a parking garage.

The five families who own the casino had been set in May 2006 to sell to Columbia Entertainment, a sister company of hotel operator Columbia Sussex, for \$200 million. That deal fell apart, but the families kept on with the new construction, says Casino Queen president and part owner Jim Koman, who's also president of local development firm Koman Properties Inc. The new casino project had been set at \$60 million, but some costs ran higher, Koman tells GlobeSt.com. "They wanted to do a number of different things, such as increase the size to give us more room," he says. The former plan called for 207,500 sf.

He says the other two phases of the \$150 million plan would include the parking deck and an 800-seat amphitheater. However, with groundbreaking set for 7 p.m. central standard time today, there's other things to worry about, he says. "We've been on a fast track to get this open, we're just focused on the new facility, making sure customers are happy. We'll see how the revenues go, and proceed from there," Koman says.

The former riverboat is for sale, Koman says, for \$6.5 million. "It definitely floats, it has working engines and everything," he says. The casino is the city's largest employer, with more than 1,100 workers.

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