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Taj mainstays Scores and Robert's Steakhouse to reopen at Hard Rock

David J. Spatz, Special to the Cherry Hill Courier-Post Published 12:54 p.m. ET June 13, 2018



(Photo: Courtesy of Robert's Steakhouse)

Bob Gans and Mark Yackow stepped into a pair of time capsules of their own creation recently and discovered things really hadn't changed that much.

Other than a few things that needed some cosmetic attention, everything was pretty much the way they remembered it. Of course, they didn't have to think back too far to remember the day they sealed the capsules: Oct. 10, 2016.

That's the day Wall Street investor Carl Icahn closed the Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City. Already failing, padlocking the massive property was Icahn's final solution to a summer-long strike against the Taj, a casino originally developed by President Donald Trump in 1990.

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When the Taj closed, so did Robert's Steakhouse, developed by Robert "Bob" Gans in 2012. The closing of the Taj also meant the end of Scores, an adult entertainment complex at the Taj also developed by Gans. Scores held the distinction of being the only "gentlemen's club" — some call them strip bars — in an American casino.

Many industry observers and loyal Taj Mahal guests who watched the decline of the Taj felt that Robert's and Scores were probably the two best reasons to visit the Taj, which in its final few years began to deteriorate due to lack of attention from the non-Trump team running the property until Icahn took it over in a debt-for-equity swap.

However, when the new Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City emerges June 28 from what had been the remains of the Taj, people will find a few holdovers from the building's previous life.

Two of them are Robert's Steakhouse and Scores.

"We weren't in there for a year-and-a-half except for once in a while coming down and peeking in to see what the situation was with the facilities," Gans, a prominent New York develop, explained.

Then came word late last year that Hard Rock and two partners were buying the Taj Mahal from Icahn with plans to remodel it from top to bottom, de-Trump the facility and turn it into a Hard Rock gaming property.

And, having already known of the popularity of the steakhouse and the adult club, Hard Rock wanted Gans' two businesses to be part of the new

"When we went in to start (the re-opening), except for cleaning, staffing and bringing in our steaks and the place all looks just like it did when we left it," Gans said. "It's very, very exciting. It's an unusual feeling. I've been in business for 40 or 50 years and I've never done this before."

Robert's Steakhouse and Scores will both be opening at Hard Rock Casino

Yackow, who's been chief operating officer at Scores since it opened at the Taj in 2013, pretty much echoed Gans' observations about the 36,000-foot Scores. Gans didn't cut corners when he spent \$35 million on the build-out of Scores in the second-floor space once occupied by two under-performing restaurants, located across from the grand ballroom and just down the hall from the skybridge that connects the Hard Rock with its next-door neighbor, Resorts Casino Hotel.

The Spread at Scores Atlantic City. Courtesy of Scores Atlantic City

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Beyond replacing some outdoor furniture on its deck, Yackow said Scores held up well during the 20

"We needed to do some deep cleaning and dusting and we need to staff the place, basically everything. We're ready to go."

While it does have a room featuring exotic dancers and the ubiquitous strip club poles, it's still considered

"We have something for everybody," he said. "Between the sports bar, the deck, the main room, and

Gans said he's never quite had an experience like this during his career. He had a very successful opening of Robert's Steakhouse and it quickly gained a reputation for being one of Atlantic City's top prime steakhouse.

Under the watchful eye of the room's original executive chef Will Savarese, who's back on board helming the kitchen, Robert's dry aged prime steaks exceed the industry average for aging. But neither Gans nor Savarese will say for certain how long the beef is aged, but it's over 40 days.

Gans called the years leading up to the closing of the Taj a "perfect storm," referring to Hurricane Sandy, protracted courtroom action between management and the city's largest casino union and the labor dispute that led to the strike that ultimately led to Icahn's decision to close the property.

"And now the place is being reborn. When you see the new Hard Rock, you're not going to believe it," Gans said. "Nothing in there looks like it looked when we closed the facility. They've really done a wonderful job (remodeling) and we're really excited about being the only steak house in the casino hotel. The type of facility Hard Rock has (created) is just world class."

Now carrying the globally recognized Hard Rock brand, Gans is happy to be part of the action again and knows the company's reputation as an entertainment mecca will be one of the keys to making the property successful.

"I believe in the entertainment factor, and there's entertainment in every casino in Atlantic City," he said. "But I truly believe that the Hard Rock will either be number one or number two in Atlantic City for entertainment. And that's important."

Around town

Tenors of Rock entertain in the Concert Venue at Harrah's Resort Friday through Sunday. Show times vary. Tickets are \$20, \$25 and \$35, available through ticketmaster.com or (800) 736-1420.

With the rock band **Staind** technically on hiatus, front man Aaron Lewis returns to play a solo set in Borgata's Music Box at 9 p.m. Friday. Tickets are \$54 and \$69, available through theborgata.com or through ComcastTIX at (877) 544-8499.

Pat Monahan leads the rock band **Train** into the Tropicana Showroom at 9 p.m. Friday. Tickets are \$65, \$75, \$85, \$95, available through ticketmaster.com or (800) 736-1420.

Boz Scaggs returns to Tropicana with 50 years of hit music at 8 p.m. Saturday. Tickets are \$60 and \$80, available through ticketmaster.com or (800) 736-1420.

Asian singers and entertainers **Sharon Chan** and **Vincent Wong** perform an early-morning show at 1 a.m. Saturday at Caesars Atlantic City. Tickets are \$68, \$98, \$138, available through iemshowplace.com/tickets/ or (718) 888-3113.

Jewish-American music star **Matisyahu**, who specializes in reggae, beat boxing and alternative rock, performs in Borgata's Music Box at 9 p.m. Saturday. Tickets are \$35 and \$45, available through theborgata.com or through ComcastTIX at (877) 544-8499.

[. Fullscreen](#)

Sneak peek: Ocean Resort Casino in Atlantic City

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This June 12, 2018 photo shows a bank of illuminated slot machines under plastic wrap inside the Ocean Resort Casino as the former Revel property prepares to reopen under a new owner and a new brand on June 28. Wayne Parry, AP