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Tropicana casino president dismissed

Fred Buro had slashed more than 1,000 jobs.

By Suzette Parmley
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Tropicana Casino chief Fred Buro, who had overseen the layoffs of about 1,000 employees at his Atlantic City casino this year, confirmed yesterday that he was fired by Columbia-Sussex Corp.



GERALD S. WILLIAMS / Inquirer Staff

Fred Buro was terminated by Columbia-Sussex Corp., the company that took over the casino in January.

He said the termination occurred late Wednesday. Columbia-Sussex announced Buro's replacement yesterday.

"I was asked to leave," Buro, the Tropicana's president and chief operating officer, said yesterday. He declined to go into the specifics, saying only that he was in the process of getting an attorney.

Columbia-Sussex, of Fort Mitchell, Ky., took over the Tropicana in January. Yesterday, it named Mark Giannantonio president and general manager of the hotel and casino. Giannantonio, most recently its executive vice president of operations, assumed his new position immediately.

William J. Yung III, owner and chief operating officer of Tropicana Casinos & Resorts, did not return calls seeking comment on Buro's departure.

People familiar with the situation say Buro complained to his superiors about the extent of the layoffs and deteriorating conditions at the casino. They included filthy bathrooms and hallways, unmade hotel beds, and violations of the health code, according to leaders of UniteHere Local 54 - the union representing 17,000 hospitality and casino workers - which has been monitoring the casino.

"I think Fred Buro is the latest victim of Columbia-Sussex's takeover of Tropicana," said Local 54 president Bob McDevitt. "He's a gentleman, and I knew in my heart he could not operate under the conditions that Columbia-Sussex was asking him to operate under."

McDevitt said his union was preparing to oppose Columbia-Sussex's permanent license application that goes before the state's gaming commission in January.

"Columbia-Sussex doesn't operate casino properties," he said. "They strip-mine them - taking everything out and bringing nothing back, and that's a recipe for disaster, not success."

Yung said in an interview earlier this year that the massive layoffs at the Tropicana were part of management's attempt to lower costs and bring the Tropicana's employment level in line with the other casinos in Atlantic City.

New slots competition has cut into Tropicana's total revenue. It was down 7.0 percent year-to-date in June 2007 from a year earlier. July's numbers come out today.

"In order to compete in the Atlantic City market, Tropicana cannot solely focus on cost-reduction measures," said Andrew Zarnett, gambling analyst with Deutsche Bank AG in New York. "They need to undertake and implement a complimentary program, in addition to enhancing customer service. Without doing that, they will be prone to declining market share."

Tropicana was recently targeted by the United Auto Workers, which is trying to unionize the city's 8,000 dealers. The UAW secured an Aug. 25 union vote for its 1,000 dealers from the National Labor Relations Board.