

Wage freeze at casino

Employees at Casino Niagara and the Niagara Fallsview may feel the pinch of rising gas and food prices more than others.

On April 9, Niagara Casinos President Art Frank sent a memo to the casinos' 5,000 workers with the subject line, „Wages.“

In the three-paragraph note, Frank informed them that tough economic times since 2002 „has created a very difficult business environment for us and the entire region of Niagara.“

„After reviewing our wages and salaries to other commercial casinos in Ontario, to similar positions in the local area and to our competition in New York, we believe it is necessary to freeze all wages and salaries this fiscal year,“ it continues.

„On behalf of the Executive committee, I want to thank all of you for your effort during this difficult time ... and I look forward to your continued support,“ the letter concludes.

Greg Medulun, spokesman for Niagara Casinos, said he's unable to talk about specific human resources matters.

However, he confirmed letters were distributed and the move was the first since Casino Niagara opened in December 1996.

„No one likes a wage freeze of any sort,“ he said. „I think the vast majority of associates understand the decision was made for the good of the organization.“

He also confirmed the announcement comes at the start of the company's fiscal year, which runs from April 1 to March 31.

Despite the wage freeze, Medulun said, „our compensation and benefit package remains the best in Ontario.“

The Review attempted to contact the Canadian Auto Workers union to see if it would once again look at forming a drive to

unionize casino workers in Niagara, but was unsuccessful.

The union represents workers at Casino Windsor and negotiated several benefits for workers there that casino workers in Niagara don't receive.

It made several high-profile attempts to unionize workers at Casino Niagara in 1999, 2001, 2003 and at both casinos in 2005, but failed to get the 40 per cent of staff required to sign union cards required for an application with the Ontario Labour Relations Board. Alex Dagg, an executive vice-president with Unite Here, which represents workers at several Niagara hotels, said casinos were brought into Ontario to stimulate the economy and create good jobs for workers.

„I don't think (Niagara Casino) jobs are particularly good jobs,“ she said.

She declined to say if the union has been contacted by any casino staff looking to form a union.

„We have many contacts in many places in Niagara. We're interested in Niagara,“ she said. „It's up to the workers in the casino whether they want to take some action to improve their conditions.