

Q: I know you guys at www.travel55plus.com are all for travel, and love to promote Las Vegas. However, as a retired steelworker, I have very mixed feelings about what's happened to the closed Bethlehem Steel Plant, the biggest employer in our area for a century. On the site now is the just opened Sands Bethlehem Casino.

On the positive side, the casino has hired more than 500 local people in a town that really needs jobs. And next year, when the hotel is built on the site, there will be at least 250 more jobs. Of course, when the steel plant was here during its heyday, there were 25,000 employees and the economy was booming. But that's all gone now, and 750 jobs, even low-paying ones, are better than no jobs at all.



My mixed feelings include some good wishes for the new employees and revived local businesses, but in my mind, there could be something sleazy and obscene about the idea of a casino in our town. The economy is bad here, and people have trouble paying their bills. Many are losing their houses to foreclosure, and it seems to some people that about the last thing we need here is a casino. Will what little money we have left be taken from us in the glittering lights of the casino. What do you think?

A: Wow, that's a much deeper question than we usually get. We have no pat answer, except that the people of Bethlehem must accept the casino as a fact of the changing trends in the American economy. The hundreds of new jobs are a positive factor, and local farms and other businesses will benefit from supplying goods and services to the casino, and later, to the hotel.

Another point is that Bethlehem is situated just an hour's drive from New York City, Philadelphia and many nearby New Jersey communities across the Delaware River. People who in the past never came to Bethlehem, will now not only patronize the casino, but also bring millions of dollars annually to spend in area restaurants, hotels and retail stores.

We certainly know how you feel about the end of the era that made Bethlehem the proud steel capital of the world. However, you'll be much happier if you just make up your mind to accept the casino and try to look at the good it will do the community.

Does anyone else out there have an opinion, favorable or negative, about this?