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JUNE 28, 2010

A Losing Proposition

9 news reports from Colorado. "From the outside, it looks like any other foreclosure. The home on the 15000 block of Atlantic Place in Aurora has a 'for sale' sign in the yard and the front door is littered with notices. But when Efrain Diosdado opens the gate to the backyard, it really tells the story of how long the home has been vacant. As the crew headed by Diosdado starts working through the weeds, they discover a number of tires, an old air conditioning unit, three grills and an untold amount of trash. They have to clean it all up before they can even attempt to mow the grass that now looks like a jungle. 'Looks like a forest back here,' he said of the 3 to 4 foot weeds."

"Since 2009, the city has required and charged banks to register foreclosures and clean them up. 3,700 homes have been registered. Right now 1,300 are on the list. John Knight lives near the home Diosdado's crew was cleaning up. He says it has been empty for about a year. Knight, a long-time resident who is also looking to sell his home soon to downsize, says he was excited to see the city clean up the property. 'It's been looking bad for quite some time,' Knight said. 'It's really discouraging, because you do take pride and ownership of a house, it's a small cut de sac. When you have one house not very well taken care of, it depreciates the entire neighborhood. It looks great now.'"

In <u>Denver Times</u> from Colorado. "The number of homeowners in Colorado in active trial modifications - the first step in the federal government's \$75 billion plan to keep people out of foreclosure - has dropped by almost half since the beginning of the year, shows an InsideRealEstateNews.com analysis. Zachary Urban, spokesman for the Adams County Housing Authority, said that the 'most critical aspect' of the drop in trial modifications is the rules change that requires lenders to be more selective in letting consumers into the program. 'That has punctured the bubble, if you will, of home modifications,' Urban said."

"And that is a good thing, he said. 'We saw this rise in trial modifications and it was just not sustainable,' Urban said. While it may seem like bad news to homeowners who would love to lock in rates as low as 2 percent, it often is not in the best interest of the homeowner, he said. 'The way we look at it is why give more money to the mortgage company when it is a losing proposition?'"

The Drescott Daily Courier in Arizona. "A homebuilder in Dewey-Humboldt finished



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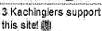
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Apr. 09, 2010 Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal

Lake Las Vegas to leave bankruptcy in two months, official says Development may emerge from bankruptcy in months

By <u>HENRY BREAN</u> LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Lake Las Vegas is on track to emerge from bankruptcy in about two months with \$24 million in hand to reinvest in the Henderson community, a company official said.

Jim Coyne, senior vice president and chief operating officer for Lake Las Vegas Resort, said a federal bankruptcy court recently signed off on the development's 670-page disclosure statement and reorganization plan.

Creditors could vote to approve the plan in late June, clearing Lake Las Vegas to emerge from bankruptcy protection.

"We have turned a major corner," Coyne said.

The announcement came during a Thursday night town hall meeting that drew more than 500 people to a ballroom at what will soon be the development's sole remaining resort, the posh 493-room Loews Lake Las Vegas.

Coyne said the \$24 million in financing would be used for road and utility improvements left unfinished during the bankruptcy.

In July 2008, the Atalon Group, which had taken over ownership of the Lake Las Vegas development seven months earlier, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection with more than \$700 million in liabilities.

Since then, two of the development's three 18-hole golf courses have shut down, as has Casino MonteLago, its only gaming establishment.

The 349-room room Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas is set to close its doors on May 2.

Clark County Commissioner Steve Sisolak said he organized Thursday's meeting after hearing a variety of concerns from residents of the 3,600-acre master-planned community.

As victims of the economic downturn go, the folks at Lake Las Vegas don't seem like the most sympathetic bunch.

Sure, many of them have seen their houses lose a third or more of their value. And all the business closures have left the development with few attractions for visitors and entertainment options for residents.

But this isn't some neighborhood of tightly packed single-family starter homes. Lake Las Vegas is one of the valley's most opulent addresses, a lushly landscaped enclave of custom homes, mansions and high-end condos, more than a few of which serve as second or third vacation getaways for their owners.

This is where you'll find a guard-gated community priced for the upper-middle-class, and inside of that another guard-gated community for the truly rich and, in some cases, famous.

That said, homeowners in Lake Las Vegas were hit harder than others were when the housing market collapsed.

From 2008 to 2009, the development saw the eighth largest decline in home values among 56 ZIP codes across Southern Nevada.

According to Las Vegas-based SalesTraq, the average home value in Lake Las Vegas' 89011 ZIP code sagged 31 percent last year from \$199,000 to \$137,550.

As one woman put it during Thursday's meeting, it's painful to read real estate fliers touting houses in the high \$200,000s just down the street while living in what used to be a million-dollar home.

Others complained during the meeting about unsightly brown grass on the empty golf courses, vacation homes turned into party houses by short-term renters, decorative waterfalls that no longer run, and a recent algae outbreak that killed hundreds of fish in the development's signature man-made lake.

One resident said the golf courses are central to the success of the entire community, and he urged the development to do whatever it can to get them back open. "Why would anyone drive 20 miles off the Las Vegas Strip to come out here and do nothing?" the man said. "Because that's what we have out here right now -- nothing."

But Coyne and other officials assured the crowd that things are beginning to turn around for Lake Las Vegas.

Sisolak said the shuttered golf courses and other businesses are worth more open than closed, and he fully expects what is now the Ritz-Carlton to be sold, rebranded and reopened in short order.

In the meantime, he encouraged those in the audience to patronize the resort, restaurants and shops that remain at Lake Las Vegas.

"Those folks are really hurting," he said.

Contact reporter Henry Brean at hbrean @reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0350.

Find this article at:

http://www.lvrj.com/news/lake-las-vegas-to-leave-bankruptcy-in-two-months--official-says-90419129.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

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April 10, 2010

Were The Prices Right To Start With?

The Vail Daily reports from Colorado. "Home loans have been harder to get ever since the nation's housing bubble burst a couple of years ago. But money's still out there, for the right borrowers. Jeff Wilson of Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, was asked about the future of interest rates and whether the current wave of foreclosures has crested....(and) whether or not people can get money for home loans. Wilson said reports that home loans have dried up are just 'sensationalistic headlines,' adding that Wells Fargo is writing mortgages for all kinds of property all over the nation."

"The problem, though, is who can get loans. Wilson said that current lending standards reflect those that were in place between roughly 1986 and 2002. 'It was 2003 through 2007 that was the aberration,' he said."

The Denver Post in Colorado. "What has become known as the 'Roaring Aughts' in Colorado's resort communities was a time like no other. Retiring baby boomers drove up home prices, spending millions on 30-year-old condos with a view. The construction trade boomed with an appetite for newer, bigger homes. Working-class locals stepped up from apartments to condos to single-family homes in a matter of years, tapping escalating values. 'We were drinking too much of the Kool-Aid. I had a couple more sips than I should have had, that's for sure,' said Aspen-area loan consultant Drew Sakson, who last year lost five of his investment and commercial properties and is fighting to stay in his longtime home. The fight has cost him 30 years of savings."

"With his income nearly zero, Sakson qualifies for employee housing, but he can't sell his condo in the depressed market. He's late on his payments. 'I had the ability to pay when this thing hit,' Sakson said. 'I thought I could ride it out. . . . I never knew it was going to get this bad."

"For years, mountain brokers touted endless appreciation that bested the stock market. When properties appreciated at rates of 10 percent or more a year, 'all you needed for a loan was a pulse,' Sakson said."

"John, a former top-producing loan officer for Bank of America who owes \$1.2 million on his 5,000square-foot home in Edwards and is in foreclosure. 'I'm the first, and there are probably another few hundred behind me,' said John, who at 41 worked as a VP for two regional banks in the Vail Valley and as recently as two years ago earned \$600,000 annually making loans. He asked that his last name not be used for fear of damaging his banking career."

"Everyone was getting greedy, and everyone was living like kings, and everyone was making money thinking it was never going to end. Now everyone is getting scorched. Everyone,' he said."

"In 2007, his home was worth \$1.8 million, \$1 million more than he paid four years earlier. He tapped that equity and bought two investment homes. Those, too, he will lose to foreclosure, he said. Today, John is not making any money. He's packing his stuff, joining a mass exodus of formerly flush locals fleeing the valley. 'There's no more work up here. It's not about to end, and it's never going to come back like it was,' he said."

The <u>Aspen Times</u> in Colorado. "The number of residential real estate sales and total sales volume have both plummeted since the boom years of 2005 to 2007, reported broker William Small, but the decline has slowed. 'There are some indications that the market has bottomed out, but it's still too early to say things are turning around,' he said. 'I think it's safe to say the worst is behind us.'"

"Banker Kurt Adam, president of Community Banks of Colorado, was less optimistic. The lending market remains tight, interest rates will rise, and the national debt will continue to have a crippling effect on the economy, he predicted. 'The good old days that we saw on many of the charts and graphs — I don't think will ever happen again,' he said."

The <u>Greeley Tribune</u> in Colorado. "Looking back now almost a year after regulators shut down New Frontier Bank...the total cost is expected to reach well beyond the current estimate of \$670 million. 'My guess is the loss will be closer to \$1 billion,' said Carroll Miller, a bank investor and former board member of New Frontier."

"For all the bad associated with the bank — the fortunes lost, the call for criminal proceedings, the failed businesses — the environment inside the bank left a permanent mark on employees. 'It was a special place,' said Joe Tennessen, a former VP at the bank, who lost his retirement but landed at the helm of Greeley's Habitat for Humanity months after the closure. 'During the good times, we all said to each other, 'You better enjoy it, because this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.' It was indescribable. It was an absolutely spectacular place to go to work.'"

The <u>Gazette</u> in Colorado. "Classic Cos., which has constructed thousands of homes in the Pikes Peak region over 20 years as Colorado Springs' largest local builder, is doing something it's never done before — auctioning some of its inventory of homes. Classic has hired a national auction company, to sell 10 upscale homes that the builder has constructed at its Flying Horse development on Colorado Springs' far north side."

"Classic built 25 pricey homes as part of its Village of Sonoma, which is one of the neighborhoods at Flying Horse. About two-thirds of the 25 homes were sold in 2005 and 2006, said company Chairman Jeff Smith. But as the real estate market began to tank, he said, buyers who had contracted to purchase the remainder of the 25 Sonoma homes backed out of their deals because they couldn't sell their existing homes. Classic has been renting eight homes for the past 18 months, Smith said."

"Classic has been renting eight homes for the past 18 months, Smith said. Classic, both a builder and developer, wants to sell the homes because it needs to pay some bills, he said candidly. 'We just need to pay off some bank debt,' Smith said, declining to say how much."

"One of the properties to be auctioned is a more than 10,000-square-foot custom home that sits on Flying Horse's Tom Weiskopf-designed golf course. Minimum bids for the home will be \$2.6 million — a 41 percent price cut from Classic's original asking price of \$4.4 million. Other homes will carry minimum bids that are substantial discounts from their original asking prices."

The <u>Arizona Republic</u>. "The Centerpoint condominium towers in downtown Tempe failed to sell at a foreclosure auction Tuesday, forcing the lender, ML Manager LLC, to take over the property. Peoriabased ML Manager, the successor to real-estate lender Mortgages Ltd., asked a minimum bid of \$8 million to sell the property at the foreclosure auction. Because there were no bidders, ML Manager now owns the property."

"Our plan is to market the towers to a buyer who will finish them,' said Mark Winkleman, chief operating officer for ML Manager."

"He said proceeds from the sale of the project will go toward paying back investors. Mortgages Ltd.'s loan to Tempe Land Co. LLC, the former developer of Centerpoint, was for approximately \$135 million. Winkleman said several people attended the foreclosure auction, but no one made a bid. 'There have been reports of problems with the towers and that they need more work than they actually do,' he said. 'The 22-story tower is 90 percent done.'"

"Centerpoint broke ground in Tempe in 2005. The development was to include an estimated 375 condos, an upscale retail plaza, fine dining and a winery. Tempe leaders hailed the coming of hundreds of affluent condo dwellers. Now, weathered plastic tarps and boards drape the vacant property. Downtown Tempe stakeholders have complained the towers, which are secured by a chain-link fence, are an eyesore. There have been reports of transients breaking into the condos, looking for shelter."

"Shannon Randle is a manager for Churchill's Fine Cigars, which is across the street from Centerpoint. 'If I was the city, I would try to have (the owners) put a 10-foot wooden fence around it and put up advertising for all the downtown businesses on the sides (of the fence),' he said. 'They should have that for us as complimentary service for what we have to put up with.'"

"The <u>setting</u> was a lobby turned into a meeting room with rows of plastic chairs at the Carnegie Center next to the state Capitol. The occasion was a public meeting hosted Wednesday by the Arizona Housing Department to share and receive feedback on how it plans to spend \$125 million in new federal funds to fight the foreclosure crisis. Amid the numbers and bureaucratic terminology, the meeting provided a visceral glimpse of the wrenching downward spiral everyone involved in the foreclosure crisis feels and how this latest financial package is more triage than bailout."

"Housing Department Director Michael Trailor recapped the grim trajectory. That the new federal aid would only help less than 10 percent of the households sent a new ripple through the crowd. Some seemed surprised. Others nodded in agreement, studying a handout passed out by Trailor's staff. 'We are on track for 50,000 foreclosures in the Valley this year,' he said. 'We are hoping we can use this \$125 million to help 4,000 homeowners.'"

"Standing at the front of the crowd with microphone in hand, Trailor said he wants to use the money to help homeowners who had 'demonstrated personal responsibility' in their purchase. Help would not be available for people facing foreclosure due to 'self-inflicted wounds,' such as taking large sums of cash out through refinancing or home-equity lines of credit or risky loans. Only homeowners living in 'modest' primary residences would be eligible, not investors."

"And anyone who applied for help would have to demonstrate their risk of foreclosure was due to reduced income from unemployment, a medical condition, divorce or death. 'We can't be all things to everyone,' Trailor said. 'This \$125 million might seem like a lot of money. But when facing Arizona's foreclosure problem, it's not."

"As the questions went on, some sparked heated debates, others set off frustrated murmurs. Near the scheduled end of the meeting, one man seated at the back of the room, wringing his hands, asked, "Why is Arizona only getting \$125 million of the \$1.5 billion?""

The <u>East Valley</u> Tribune in Arizona. "While homes sold briskly in March compared to previous months, it's not necessarily good news, according to a new study. In March, the existing-home market saw more activity and foreclosures than it has since last July, according to a Realty Studies report from the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University."

"Activity in March was driven more by increased foreclosure activity, bargain hunters, short sales and the federal income tax credit for new home buyers, said professor Jay Butler, who authored the report. Almost 6,500 single-family homes were resold in the Valley in March, up from more than 4,600 in February and about 5,900 in March of last year."

"Foreclosures remained a major force in the market,' the study said. 'Foreclosures and the resales of foreclosed-on homes accounted for 64 percent of the existing-home market activity. Almost 4,400 new foreclosures happened in March. That's way up from just over 3,300 in February and about 2,700 in March of last year."

From ABC 15 in Arizona. "Canadian investors are buying Arizona real estate, helping the housing market in the west Valley. 'It is the buying opportunity of a lifetime,' said Bill Chipman, an investor from British Columbia whose business group is buying real estate in Arizona, Texas and Nevada. 'Our business plan is to buy 500 homes but I hope we can do 1,000,' he said."

"Real estate sales to Canadians are reportedly up 80 percent over last year. Real estate values have plunged in areas like Avondale, sometimes by more than half what they were a few years back. But there is hope according to realtor Greg Swann. 'Phoenix has great opportunities. It's like California without the beaches or California,' he said."

The Winnipeg Free Press. "These days, however, it's not just the favourable climate that makes Arizona an attractive locale. It's the ridiculously low real estate prices that have really caught Gerry's attention. 'There are houses along golf courses that were \$500,000 three years ago and now they're \$120,000,' he says."

"Although real estate prices in desirable U.S. hot spots like Arizona, California and Florida will likely never be more affordable than they are today, certified financial planner Wynn Sweatman says it's equally important to consider the other costs involved in owning and living in a home south of the border. Owning and maintaining two homes will increase their costs, putting pressure on their ability to maintain their current lifestyle in retirement, so their investments may have to provide even better returns, he says. 'They could end up wishing they had more in cash reserves and less in real estate.'"

"Still, buying a home in Phoenix likely has a substantial upside as an investment. Assuming they purchase a home today for \$120,000, and that it will increase in value by five per cent annually, the asset would be worth about \$171,000 in 10 years and \$278,500 after 20 years. Sweatman says the figures are conservative estimates, considering current real estate values are extremely depressed."

"What does \$1 million buy in an Ahwatukee Foothills neighborhood these days? A lot more than it did five years ago. Longtime Foothills real-estate saleswoman Pam Eagan, for instance, has clients who are scrutinizing three \$1 million cash offers for a custom five-bedroom, 4,700-square-foot home. The house, priced at \$1.2 million, has a remodeled kitchen, a lap and diving pool with a spa, and balcony views of lights from Phoenix and Tempe."

"Five years ago, the house would have listed for \$1.8 million - and perhaps sold for even more if buyers got into one of the notorious bidding wars of 2005, Eagan said. 'The prices have just come tumbling down,' longtime Ahwatukee real-estate broker Mike Mendoza.said. 'It makes you ask the question 'were the prices right to start with?' I just saw one listing that I know the people bought for \$1.65 million, and it is listed for \$950,000. Another one sold a few years ago for \$1.65 million and now is for sale a \$1.35 (million)."

"No matter where a potential million-dollar homeowner wants to live, the biggest stumbling block is financing, those who make a living in real estate say. 'You used to be able to buy anything with fog in

a mirror,' said Tempe mortgage broker Scott Harward, who works with many Ahwatukee sales representatives to arrange financing for buyers. 'But not anymore.'"

The <u>Las Vegas</u> Business Press in Nevada. "The country's largest private development, MGM Mirage's CityCenter, was sued by its general contractor for \$490 million in unpaid construction bills. On March 25, Perini Building Co., a unit of Tutor Perini Corp., Sylmar, Calif., sued several entities controlled by property owners MGM Mirage Inc. and Infinity World Development Corp., a unit of Dubai World, the investment arm of the Persian Gulf state."

"We are doing whatever we have to do to protect ourselves and our subcontractors,' Tutor Perini Chairman and CEO Ronald Tutor said. 'They simply stopped making payments and started offering excuses. Their position is absurd.'"

"On March 23, MGM/Infinity demanded 'that Perini cease all construction activities at the Harmon,' and directed security to escort the contractor off site and change the locks, the lawsuit alleges. The oval-shaped glass tower was scheduled to open later this year. A timely completion now seems unlikely since 'MGM/CityCenter is delaying the ability of Perini to complete its work under construction agreement,' the lawsuit alleges."

"The Harmon was scaled back from 48 stories to 26 stories in January 2009. MGM Mirage eliminated 200 high-end condominium residences, of which only 44 percent had sold, but retained the 400-room hotel component. The move saves an estimated \$600 million in construction costs, and defers another \$200 million for interior finishes."

"By canceling the Harmon condominium component, we will be able to avoid the need for substantial redesign of the Harmon resulting from contractor construction errors,' CityCenter President and CEO Bobby Baldwin said in a previous statement. It also keeps the project focused on 'maximizing' sales at CityCenter's other condo towers, he added."

The <u>Las Vegas</u> Review Journal in Nevada. "A government program that went into effect Monday is expected to speed up the short-sale process and prevent lenders from filing deficiency judgments against home sellers, a move that could go a long way toward mitigating the foreclosure crisis in Las Vegas, real estate industry sources said. It will bring much-needed relief for the estimated 70 percent of Las Vegas homeowners who are caught with negative equity, owing more than their houses are worth, Randy Bridges of Realty One Group in Las Vegas said."

"This is the government's way to kick lenders in the butt to get them going and get them to abide by these guidelines,' Bridges said. 'This would be a good opportunity for our elected officials to restore the confidence that has been lost recently."

"The Home Affordable Foreclosure Alternatives, part of the Obama administration's \$75 billion Making Home Affordable program, stipulates that the bank has forgiven the mortgage debt in a short sale and cannot pursue a deficiency judgment for the difference. Aside from that, the best part of the program is that lenders have 10 days from the date a short-sale offer is submitted to get back to the seller with a decision, Bridges said."

"That is outstanding,' he said. 'It's huge. I don't think it'll work, but we'll give it a try."

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Posted By: Ben Jones @ 6:50 am Comments (73)

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But weeks went by, and nobody contacted them, and they weren't able to reach anyone — other than representatives at a call center in India.

http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2010/03/01/homeowners-say-banks-underwater-spurning-loan-program-rules/?test=latestnews

Reply to this comment

Comment by Kim 2010-03-01 13:13:31

"According to the suit, they went to a Treasury-sponsored "borrower outreach" event in Cincinnati at the end of October at which bank representatives offered them modified home loans and pledged to send them the paperwork "within weeks." The documents never came, they say."

In a post this past weekend I predicted this would happen to the attendees of the Florida outreach. There were scores of computers in the photos but no discernable printers, possibly indicating that modification paperwork would not be available on the spot.

Now we read that its already happened to others.

Reply to this comment

Comment by <u>Arizona Slim</u> 2010-03-01 14:00:46

They're about to do one of those HOPE NOW thingies here in Tucson. Methinks that a lot of underwater homeowners are about to be very disappointed.

Reply to this comment

Comment by wmbz 2010-03-01 11:42:34

The mother of all bailouts to come.

J.C. WATTS ~ Las Vegas Review-Journal

I'm all for bipartisan agreements that make sense. However, when I look at what is unfolding in Congress in the name of bipartisanship on banking reform, it makes me extremely nervous.

Here we go again.

Sens. Chris Dodd, D-Conn., and Bob Corker, R-Tenn., are working on bipartisan legislation to revamp the regulatory structure of the financial services industry. The House passed Rep. Barney Frank's version Dec. 11. The bill from Frank, D-Mass., would create a controversial Consumer Financial Protection Agency and codify a permanent bailout authority for the federal government.

The big question for Americans who hate bailouts is whether the Senate will follow the House's lead and grant the Federal Reserve the statutory authority to bail out individuals, partnerships or corporations to the tune of \$4 trillion.

On Page 506 of the House-passed bill, which is titled the "Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act" is the following language: The amounts made available under this subsection shall not exceed \$4,000,000,000,000.

This so-called "reform" and "consumer protection" legislation authorizes a \$4 trillion bailout fund for Wall Street. That is more money than President Obama's 2011 budget (\$3.8 trillion), the gross domestic product of Germany (\$3.7 trillion), and between five and six times the amount of the Troubled Assets Relief Program. A majority of House members actually voted for a bill containing \$4 trillion in new bailout authority. You just can't make this stuff up. It is really in the bill.

Reply to this comment

Comment by Professor Bear 2010-03-01 12:12:09

How should one reconfigure the operation of one's household in order to qualify as "bailout worthy"?

Reply to this comment

Comment by In Colorado 2010-03-01 12:33:43

And yet somehow there's no money for the unemployed.

Reply to this comment

Comment by wmbz 2010-03-01 12:03:16

Killer Hot Dogs

The federal government is toying with the idea of requiring hot dog manufacturers to change the shape of their product to "make them safer." A very small number of kids under 10 have choked to death on them.

The death rate per hot dog is incredibly small. American kids younger than 10 eat approximately 1.8 billion hot dogs per year, which works out to an average of about 45 hot dogs per child per annum. That pegs the death rate per hot dog from choking at 0.0000007 percent. If crossing a street were so safe, parents would breathe a sigh of relief.

< What about the tots who choke on hamburgers, lollipops, and candy bars? Shouldn't the federal government do something about that, too?

I hate to hear of the death of any child, but to think the government is going to eliminate accidents by forcing expensive re-tooling for making hot dogs is a new heigh in wasteful bureaucratic protectionism.

Reply to this comment

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Registration Number / Date:

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says.

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Lake Las Vegas to leave bankruptcy in two months, official

says.

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