

Opinion: Data center a good next step in Atlantic City esports development

People do a lot of things online and they all have this in common: They need a good secure connection and enough bandwidth for the data they'll need to receive and send.

Some of the casino hotels — Caesars Atlantic City and Harrah's Resort among them — and perhaps other operators want to do something big and special online. They want to become major East Coast players in the rapidly growing esports market.

Caesars hosted the city's first competitive video gaming event, last year's Gears of War Pro Circuit contest. Harrah's in May held a Rainbow Six Siege Pro League event.

With esports expected to generate \$1.3 billion a year by 2020, there is a considerable opportunity for making competitive online gaming a bigger part of Atlantic City's offerings.

A nearly concluded deal by a British firm to create a powerful data center, in leased space in the Atlantic City Convention Center, could provide a digital backbone for the tech-heavy esports events of the future.

Continent 8 wants to invest \$5 million to build a 6,000-square-foot data center, with the servers and internet connections needed for the network-intensive online competitions.

When teams battle in popular video games with chips ablaze, they need lightening quick networks to match the players' response times. And thousands of fans need not just unimpeded immersion in the contests, but going forward will want more data-intensive experiences such as augmented reality glasses and holographic displays.

The company already has invested nearly \$2 million in Atlantic City and has data rooms for online gaming at Caesars Atlantic City and Ocean Resort Casino. The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority has approved the lease terms for the Convention Center facility, and the deal is expected to be completed soon.

Probably the next big step will be a dedicated esports arena in the city. Several have opened out west, and the first in Las Vegas opened in March at the Luxor Hotel & Casino, a 30,000 square foot facility.

Esports will be another strong addition to Atlantic City's fabulously extensive fun and entertainment, one especially appealing to millennials.

And its development is sure to improve the internet infrastructure on Absecon Island and perhaps beyond. An attorney for Continent 8 said the new data center would "eventually serve the greater South Jersey region by expanding network capabilities and security."

Any improvement of broadband in the region would be very welcome.