

Layoffs hit Odawa Casino Resort

By Noah Fowle
Petoskey News-Review

PETOSKEY, Mich. — The Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Casino Resort was quiet this morning, as the resort announced approximately 100 job cuts on Monday.(G. Randall Goss/News-Review)

There was turn of bad luck for some employees at the Odawa Casino Resort on Monday. Faulting the rising cost of gas and subsequent poor attendance, management reported that as many as 100 employees were laid off, including tribal and non-tribal members.

“We were ultimately forced to face the reality of too many employees serving too few customers,” said general manager Sean Barnard.

Although some staff members reported being caught off guard by the reductions in a series of mandatory meetings on Monday, tribal chairman Frank Ettawageshik said that he and other tribal leadership were kept abreast of the reductions.

“We knew about it all along,” he said.

Warren Petoskey, an elder with the tribe, said rumblings about layoffs started last month.

“I heard a rumor three weeks ago that this was coming,” he said. “This morning I got an e-mail that said they laid off 40 percent of their workers.”

Barnard denied reports that as many as 200 workers had lost their jobs in Monday’s cutbacks. He confirmed that 55 full-time employees had been let go, in addition to 45 part-time seasonal positions. Although those who lost their jobs were being put in contact with an official from Michigan Works! for outplacement services, Barnard would not give details on the severance package offered to them. He said specific details were “too personal” to divulge publicly.

“We’ve been reviewing our options,” said Barnard. “We did not rush into this. We’ve been working on this for some time to make the right decision.”

Ettawageshik said that there has been an ongoing process to adjust the size of the staff to meet the appropriate needs of the casino’s customers. According to Ettawageshik, the recent round of layoffs were “a continuation of that adjustment.”

Despite the layoffs, Ettawageshik confirmed the tribe was still posting profits and said there were no major financial concerns heading into the second half of the year.

However, Petoskey, who is planning a run for tribal office in 2009, said he believes the tribe is in jeopardy.

“There has been a lot of questions about reporting profits and accountability of the casino. It’s been hard for us because there is such cross section of information,” he said. “There’s a number of things going on from an ethical standpoint that are questionable.”

Barnard acknowledged earlier this year that the casino was suffering as part of the state’s economic downturn. He said that because it was becoming more expensive for customers just to get to the casino, many were cutting back on the frequency and lengths of their stays.

“Our customers can’t afford to game, drive and eat,” he said. “I think they are picking two out of the three.”

Although the current outlook is not positive, Barnard did not think the recent layoffs were a sign of worse things to come for the casino.

“Casinos are suffering along with everyone else. We’ll have to ride it out and be as efficient as we possibly can,” he said. “In the long-term we’ll be fine.”

Elders take fight against casino to Washington

By Lisa Garrigues
Indian Country Today

WASHINGTON — In the teachings of their ancestors, the mountain named Avikwalal spoke to the Quechan people and warned them of dangers to come. Now, as construction continues on a \$200 million casino resort that some in the Quechan nation hope will bring prosperity, others have taken their fight to save what they are convinced is sacred land to the halls of Congress.

“We have always been told generation to generation to stay away from that area, to leave it alone. Part of my teachings is that it is a medicine mountain,” said Priscilla Prettybird.

Prettybird flew from the Quechan reservation near Yuma, Ariz., in July to Washington, D.C., to include a demand for a halt to the resort on land now called Pilot Knob in the manifesto that was delivered to Rep. John Conyers by participants in the

cross-country Longest Walk II.

“Building this resort is causing the destruction of our tribe,” she said. “In our teachings, it will harm us mentally and physically.”

A member of the group Pipa A’Kootz (“the elder ones”), Prettybird was arrested by Imperial County police for attempting to build a sweat lodge on the site when construction began two years ago.

Yolanda Escalanti and Elsie Rea, who drove their car as a support vehicle for the Longest Walk II from Tennessee to Washington, D.C., both supported the original Paradise Casino, built in 1996, which had provided jobs and new income for the tribe.

“When the new resort was proposed, the majority voted for it because our tribal president promised great sums of money: promises that were too big, impossible. And people thought the resort was going to be somewhere else,” Escalanti said.

A referendum was held in which a majority of the tribe agreed to go forward with construction. But the Pipa A’Kootz have questioned the referendum procedure, saying it was presented as a “done deal,” and filed a complaint with the tribal council in which they allege a photograph was taken of bags that were left unsealed after the election, some voters were instructed to vote “yes” by election officials, and a group of elders was told they couldn’t take a trip they’d been promised until they voted “yes.”

The per capita that each person received from the original casino was recently cut, Rea said, as were medical and social service programs.

Though tribal President Michael Jackson has blamed the economy for the cuts, the Pipa A’Kootz and their supporters believe too much money has gone into constructing the new resort and have questioned the financial management and

transparency of Jackson and his administration.

The casino management team, comprised of tribal and nontribal members, has had increasing influence on the tribe’s affairs since the construction of the first casino, said tribal member Valerie O’Brian.

“Why are we building this casino with no money?” she asked.

A petition of 150 signatures has been submitted to the tribal council to stop the construction.

About 1,000 of the 3,300 people in the Quechan tribe live on the reservation.

Rea, who works for the original Paradise Casino, said many are afraid to speak out against Jackson for fear of losing their jobs or not receiving money when they need it.

Bringing their complaint to Conyers was a “last resort” for opponents of the resort, said Escalanti.

“We went to the FBI, and they said, go to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. We went to the BIA, and they won’t

help us.”

Jackson said the controversy was a “political issue” brought about by a small group of people who had lost their election for tribal council, and that full financial reports had always been provided to the tribe.

In an e-mail, he wrote that “extraordinary measures” have been taken to ensure that no cultural sites, objects or artifacts were disturbed or affected as a result of the construction project, which was 50 percent completed.

“The Quechan Tribal Council would never build a building that will destroy our sacred sites and history that our ancestors left behind for future generations to learn by,” he said. “Our elders are excited about our new project and are in full support. The Quechan Nation is like any other tribe: building for the future to meet the unknown and prepare our next generation to have a better quality of life.”

Crow coal



Associated Press

In this April 11, file photo, Carl Venne, chairman of the Crow Tribe, stands outside the tribal government complex in Crow Agency, Mont. The Crow Tribe has partnered with a subsidiary of an Australian company to pursue a \$7 billion industrial plant that would convert coal into diesel fuel on the Montana reservation. Venne says construction would begin in several years and coal for the project would come from a tribe-owned mine on the reservation.

Crow coal-to-liquids plant could be boon for Mont.

CROW AGENCY, Mont. (AP) — The Crow Tribe and state leaders say a proposed \$7 billion coal-to-liquids plant promises an economic boon for the reservation and Montana.

But the project must first overcome economic and political hurdles that have

kept any coal-to-liquids plant from being built in the United States.

State officials say the plant — a partnership between the tribe and the Australian-American Energy Co. — would be the most valuable economic development project in

Montana history.

Covering its \$7 billion price tag will be a challenge in the current economic slowdown. Also, environmental groups say they will step in to oppose the plant if it does not include measures to capture greenhouse gases.

Seminole Council to build safe house for domestic violence

Shawnee News-Star

BETHEL, Okla. —At a special call meeting July 22, the Seminole Nation General Council passed legislation authorizing a sum of \$250,000 to be given to the tribe’s domestic violence program. The money, which comes from the Gaming Revenue Reserve Account, was transferred by the Seminole Nation Business and Corporate Regulatory Commission in an effort to build a safe house for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

The \$250,000 awarded by will satisfy half of the domestic violence program’s goal to raise \$500,000 for the project.

Oklahoma is ranked seventh in the nation in the number of domestic violence cases reported each year. Also, American Indians are victims of rape and sexual assault at more than double the rate of other racial groups.

Currently the domestic violence program must collaborate with shelters throughout the state to assist victims in their search for a safe haven. The proposed safe house will be the first domestic violence shelter owned and operated by the Seminole

Nation and will be available to both native and non-native families.

To raise additional funds for the project, the domestic violence program will host a domestic violence awareness banquet Sept. 15 to kick off the 40th annual Seminole Nation Days Celebration. The banquet will feature a guest speaker, a style show and door prizes. There also will be a large art auction featuring the work of several internationally acclaimed artists of Seminole heritage. All proceeds from the art auction will go toward the safe house project.

Tickets for the domestic violence awareness banquet are \$20 and may be purchased at either the Treasury Department at the Seminole Nation Tribal Complex in Wewoka, or the Domestic Violence Program Office at Mokuskey Mission in Seminole.

Additionally, the Domestic Violence Program will accept donations from any organizations or individuals willing to contribute to the safe house fund. Donations can be mailed to: Attn: Domestic Violence Program, Seminole Nation Treasury Department, P.O. Box 1498, Wewoka, OK 74884.

Catoosa City Council voted not to appeal trust acquisition of Cherokee Nation

Catoosa Times

CATOOSA, Okla. — The acquisition, which was first made approximately 10 years ago, requested to put seven acres of fee land into trust at 161st East Avenue and I-44. Council members discussed the opportunity to file an appeal with the Interior Board of Indian Appeals, U.S. Department of Interior regarding the propoerty the Cherokee Nation wants to put into trust.

The original application, dated Aug. 5, 1996, stated commercial plans for a travel plaza.

According to Shawn Slaton, senior vice president of Cherokee Nation Enterprises who attended the council meeting, CNE has no intention of putting a travel plaza on the site.

“When you put land in trust, can you do anything you want with it?” Council member Cathie Langston asked Slaton.

Council member Mike Appel questioned that once it’s in trust, would another

application be made for gaming.

Slaton answered that CNE has no intention of having gaming at this site. He also made known that Cherokee Nation owns the property at I-44 and 161st East Ave., not CNE.

Mayor Rita Lamkin stated Principal Chief Chad Smith had indicated a Native American museum to compliment the travel center that is located nearby.

The 1996 application to move the land from “unrestricted fee status” to trust was opposed by Catoosa a decade ago.

“Things have changed since that time,” Lamkin said. “We have a good working relationship with the Cherokees. I’m not in favor protesting the application.”

“I think it opens an opportunity to do more business with them,” said Appel.

The Rogers County Assessors Office collected \$4,968 in 2007 ad valorem taxes on the property. The acreage is zoned commercial. Trust land is not subject to ad valorem tax.