

Mohegan
Sun opening
new casino

UNCASVILLE, Conn. (AP) — Mohegan Sun, already one of the largest gambling facilities in the world, will open a new casino Friday even as the industry struggles to draw customers amid a weak economy and high gas prices.

The 64,000-square-foot Casino of the Wind includes a 42-table poker room, more than 650 slot machines and 28 table games. The new space is the first phase of Mohegan Sun's \$925 million expansion, which will include a 920-room hotel and more stores and restaurants when finished in 2010.

"It shows we're continuing to evolve," said Mitchell Etess, president and chief executive officer at Mohegan Sun. "We need to do things to make people want to come here and there's no doubt adding new exciting attractions accomplishes that goal. I think people are really going to be amazed how beautiful and visually stimulating the Casino of the Wind is."

Mohegan Sun, owned by the Mohegan Tribe, is in Uncasville in eastern Connecticut, nearly 50 miles southeast of Hartford and about nine miles west of Foxwoods Resort Casino.

The opening comes three months after Foxwoods, run by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, opened its \$700 million MGM Grand. The 30-story, 2-million-square-foot property includes a new casino, hotel, a 4,000-seat performing arts theater, restaurants run by celebrity chefs, luxury stores, the largest ballroom in the Northeast and new convention space to accommodate thousands.

Both Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods are hoping the new gambling centers will boost business. Both reported decreases in their July slot machine revenue.

At Mohegan Sun, slots slipped about 14.6 percent or \$16.1 million from July 2007, when the casino hit an unprecedented high point as more than \$1 billion flowed through its slot machines. Foxwoods posted a 3.2 percent decrease in slot machine income compared with July 2007, or about \$2.4 million.

The casinos had experienced eight months of declines in slot revenue until May, when they went up two-tenths of a percent at Mohegan Sun and 7.7 percent at Foxwoods. The Foxwoods spike was attributed to the opening of MGM Grand.

The casinos have cited rising energy prices, diminished consumer confidence and competition from other casinos.

Clyde Barrow, who directs the University of Massachusetts New England Gaming Research Project, said that while the timing of the new space at Mohegan Sun may not be ideal, the project makes sense in the long run. He said the new casino will be in place to capture growth once the economy improves.

Mohegan Sun is reintroducing poker, which it discontinued a few years ago, as the game has grown in popularity in recent years. Its first major poker tournament is planned for October.

The new slot machines add about 10 percent to the 6,000 slots the casino has now. That will free up space for large crowds to gamble, such as when concerts end, Etess said.

The new hotel will meet strong demand, Barrow said, noting that Mohegan's existing hotel has a 93 percent occupancy rate compared with 63 percent for Boston hotels.

The new project does not substantially expand gambling, but Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods are trying to become national destinations with more entertainment and convention meeting space, Barrow said. Toward that end, Mohegan Sun is planning concerts by Janet Jackson, Enrique Iglesias and The Who to celebrate its new casino.

A two-story Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville restaurant will open next month. The restaurant is the best grossing restaurant in Las Vegas, according to Etess.

Slots keep running despite ruling

By Dan Herbeck
Buffalo News

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The slot machines continued to beep and jangle and rake in the cash Tuesday night, but new doubts surround the Seneca Indians' Buffalo casino after the latest ruling in federal court.

Opponents of the Buffalo casino were thrilled with U. S. District Judge William M. Skretny's 20- page ruling. They insist the decision will force the federal commission that oversees Indian-run gambling to shut down the Seneca Buffalo Creek Casino.

The judge ordered the National Indian Gaming Commission to determine "forthwith" whether some enforcement — including a shutdown of the casino — is required.

And Skretny directed the gaming commission to consider the matter in light of his July 8 ruling that the Senecas, in his view, cannot legally operate a casino on their Buffalo property.

Skretny expressed frustration with the Indian gaming commission in Tuesday's court order.

He noted that the commission has taken no action

toward shutting down the Buffalo casino since he issued an order seven weeks ago, stating that the Buffalo casino was operating illegally.

"[Federal law] mandates that the [gaming commission] take prompt action once it has reason to believe a violation exists," Skretny wrote. "... The Chairman is directed to take such action as is consistent with the Court's July 8, 2008 Decision," Skretny wrote.

Richard J. Lippes, one of the attorneys for the Citizens for a Better Buffalo, a group opposing the casino, picked up on that theme.

"On July 8, the court said, 'You are gambling illegally. ... This land is not gaming-eligible,'" Lippes said Tuesday. "If they are going to stay consistent with the judge's July 8 order, ... they must close the casino."

Seneca Nation officials — including the tribe's president, Maurice A. John, and the president of its gaming corporation, Barry Snyder — disagree. They are unhappy with Skretny's ruling, but they see it as just another step in a court fight that they eventually expect to win.

Snyder said it will be "business as usual" at the

Senecas' small temporary casino off Michigan Avenue unless the gaming commission orders the tribe to shut it down.

And construction will continue on a much larger \$333 million casino and hotel project at a nearby site, said the Senecas' treasurer, Kevin Seneca.

"Everything's going to continue as of right now," Seneca said at a news conference hours after Skretny issued his ruling. "This is a long and [laborious] legal process, and when it is done, we believe we will prevail and casino gaming will remain legal [in Buffalo]."

So far, the gaming commission has given no indication how it will respond to the court order.

"We're still in the early stages of reviewing this ruling," Shawn D. Pensoneau, a spokesman for the gaming commission, told The Buffalo News late Tuesday. "At this point, we don't have any determination on what action we'll take."

When asked about Lippes' contention that Skretny's order will require the commission to shut down the casino, Pensoneau said: "I'm not sure where they're getting

that information . . . My understanding is that we could accept the judgment, but there is also an appeals process in the federal courts."

If Skretny's latest ruling is appealed, it would have to be filed by the U. S. Justice Department.

A Justice Department spokesman, Andrew Ames, said no decision has been made yet on whether to appeal.

Kevin Seneca said he was frustrated by Skretny's latest ruling and did not consider it good news for the casino. He said he cannot understand why casino opponents are trying to derail a project that, in his view, will revitalize downtown Buffalo and create at least 1,500 jobs.

According to Lippes, Citizens for a Better Buffalo opposes the project because it will also create hardships for many people, including those addicted to gambling.

Casino opponents filed their federal lawsuit more than 19 months ago — in January 2006 — claiming that the federal government illegally gave the Senecas permission to open a casino on land that the Indian tribe purchased in Buffalo.

In what was seen by casino

opponents as an act of defiance, the Senecas moved forward with their casino project, despite the pending court case. They received permission from the federal agency to operate their small Buffalo casino in July 2007 and have since begun construction of a much bigger project nearby.

Skretny directed the gaming commission and its chairman, Philip N. Hogen, to "comply forthwith" with its legal responsibility to decide what enforcement action is required.

The judge set no deadlines, but casino opponents want the gaming commission to move quickly to shut down the casino.

"The judge said they should 'comply forthwith.' To us, that means 'now, immediately,'" said Jane Bello Burke, another attorney for the anti-casino group.

Seneca Nation officials disagree.

"[Skretny] simply directed that the National Indian Gaming Commission should decide what to do next," Snyder said. "The [commission] did not order closure after the judge's July decision, and we do not expect it to order it now, either."

Mbywangi
pledges to serve
all indigenous
communities

BBC

An indigenous woman in Paraguay who says she was sold into forced labour as a girl has been made minister for indigenous affairs.

Margarita Mbywangi, a 46-year-old Ache tribal chief, is the first indigenous person to hold the position.

She has been an activist for many years, defending her tribe's interests.

She was appointed by the new president, Fernando Lugo, who was sworn in on Friday, ending more than 60 years of government by the Colorado Party.

The BBC's Gary Duffy in Sao Paulo, in neighbouring Brazil, says the new president, a former Catholic bishop, seems keen to demonstrate a decisive break with the past, through his ministerial appointments.

But some Indian leaders have voiced fears Ms Mbywangi will give preferential treatment to her own tribe.

The mother-of-three promised to meet those who opposed her appointment, in order to ease their concerns.

"We are immediately going to help colleagues from different communities who are experiencing a difficult situation due to lack of potable water, food and clothing," she told local Channel 2 television.

The new minister said that as a four-year-old girl she was captured in the jungle and was sold several times into forced labour with the families of large land owners.

She told the television station that she had also been sent to school, so she could read and write, and was now studying for a high school diploma.

The new minister also identified indigenous land rights as a priority, as well as protecting forests.

Dedication song



Associated Press

Native American Felix Gouge, a full-blood Creek Indian from Oklahoma City, sings during the dedication for the American Indian Cultural Center Promontory Mound at the American Indian Cultural Center and Museum construction site, in Oklahoma City, Tuesday.

State's Native students still struggle with ACT

By Kayla Gahagan
Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. — Colleges often use ACT scores in admission decisions, course placement and scholarships and loans.

Native American student scores decreased slightly from 2007. In 2004, the average composite score for Native American students was 17.1. In 2008, it was 17.5.

"We've seen some good progress over the last five years, but we need to con-

tinue to focus on strategies that will help our Native American students reach their highest potential," state Education Secretary Rick Melmer said.

Native American students constitute 11 percent of the student population in the state's public schools; only 2 percent of students enrolled in South Dakota's state universities are Native American, according to the South Dakota Department of Education.

Melmer noted that programs such as GEAR UP --

formally known as Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs -- which emphasize rigorous academics and social support to encourage Native students to complete high school and pursue postsecondary education, are important.

He said he was pleased with the overall state results this year.

"Not only did we see an increase in our composite score for 2008, but we also saw a significant increase

in the number of students taking core courses that help students with college readiness," he said.

Of the 6,959 students in the graduating class of 2008 who took the ACT, 68 percent indicated that they took ACT's recommended core curriculum. That is up from 58 percent in 2007. ACT's core curriculum mirrors South Dakota's requirements for high school graduation and the Opportunity Scholarship.

"We're driving more

students into rigorous, challenging core courses, which means they'll be better prepared for postsecondary work and success," Melmer said.

Students who reported taking core coursework achieved an average composite score of 22.8, compared to 19.8 for those who took less than the recommended core. Those who took core classes also consistently outperformed their non-core counterparts in each of the four ACT subject areas.