

Gambling not immune from downturn

By John Penney  
Norwich Bulletin

NORWICH, Conn. —What a difference a month makes.

Less than four weeks ago, patrons got their first look at the gilded walls, Brazilian granite waterfalls and rows of slot machines ringing the Mohegan Sun’s new Casino of the Wind, while tribal leaders and casino officials spoke confidently about the future of the local gaming industry — this despite a steady dip in slot revenue, rumors of a downgrade in credit ratings and challenges presented by a stagnant economy.

And those factors slammed together Monday when the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority announced the suspension of any future construction associated with its \$734 million Project Horizon expansion.

The change in plans was chalked up to uncertainties in the “regional and national economy,” a pervasive climate that should not have come as a surprise to any business, industry analysts and local economists say.

Arthur Wright, a former University of Connecticut economist and now the co-editor of The Connecticut Economy, which analyzes the state’s economic climate, said the economic invulnerability routinely attributed to casinos is nonsense.

“Casinos are not recession-proof,” Wright said. “But, I think the thought was that as the economy got bad, people would stay local and go to the casinos. But, when gas prices went up and housing market fell, it worked against them just like many of the other sectors.”

Fewer daytrippers

He pointed to falling slot revenue as the biggest indicator of predictable trouble, which he said speaks to a decline in their most valuable base — daytrippers coming in from out-of-state.

Mitchell Etes, Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority president, said Monday \$80 million slated to be invested in the postponed Earth Expansion portion of Project Horizon will be redirected toward existing facilities.

He also said the authority began discussions with Bank of America and other lenders regarding existing agreements relating to completion of the project.

At Mohegan Sun, slots in July slipped about 14.6 percent, or \$16.1 million, from July 2007. Foxwoods posted a decrease of 3.2 percent, or \$2.4 million, in slot machine income for the same period, according to the state Division of Special Revenue.

The casinos saw eight months of declines in slot revenue until May, when they rose two-tenths of a percent at Mohegan Sun and 7.7 percent at Foxwoods. The bump at Foxwoods, owned by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, coincided with the opening of the \$700 million MGM Grand.

And Foxwoods’ expansion may have helped put the kibosh on its neighboring casino’s plans, said Clyde Barrow, director of the University of Massachusetts New England Gaming Research Project.

“(The MGM) has not had a significant impact to Foxwoods’ in proportion to what they spent,” he said. “And I wouldn’t be surprised if Mohegan looked at that and decided to wait on their plans.”

Not alone

Barrow said casinos all over the country are scaling back expansion plans, including plans by Pinnacle Entertainment Inc. to build a \$2 billion casino in Atlantic City, N.J. The company said construction is in limbo until the international credit crisis passes.

Barrow said Mohegan Sun officials probably made the right move in halting construction for the short-term. He said the overall economy most likely will continue to worsen, keeping gamblers away from slot machines.

Flagstaff jail teaches inmates to avoid debt

FLAGSTAFF (AP) — Page resident Mellowdi Yazzie, 30, was caught earlier this year driving with a suspended license following a DUI conviction.

At the time, she had a warrant out for her arrest because she had failed to comply with court-ordered payment of fines. She was sentenced to the Coconino County Jail. She’s the first to admit that her trouble with the law primarily had to do with her inability to manage her finances. She got into debt and didn’t pay her fines.

But that’s changed now. Yazzie, along with other Native American female inmates at the jail are learning to save for the future by participating in the county’s WiSe Up program.

“It helped me refocus on my priorities,” Yazzie said. “I’ve been trying to hide from the credit department for a while. So I needed this class.”

Janetta Beaumont, adult program coordinator for the Coconino County Career Center, said WiSe Up is about offering “financial literacy” to Generation X women. Through a series of lessons, women are taught how to save for their children’s education and retirement and keep clear of the heavy burden of debt.

The program in Coconino County is designed for Native American women countywide, Beaumont said, but classes at the jail are available for any woman interested in participating. The program is funded by a grant of about \$10,000 from the U.S. Department of Labor Women’s Bureau and is meant to serve about 100 women, Beaumont added.

Why the jail?

Beaumont said that often Native American women are the breadwinners in their families.

“It can stabilize them and keep them from getting back into jail,” Beaumont said.

The program is broken down into a series of lessons meant to get a woman to look at her own timeline of life and look at the big picture to set goals and figure out how to achieve them.

For instance, Beaumont said one of the most important goals for the women in jail is to eventually own their own home.



Associated Press

Mellowdi Yazzie recently finished the Wise Up program, a class at Coconino County Jail in Flagstaff, Ariz., that teaches female inmates about gaining financial security and independence. Yazzie will be leaving jail soon, her goals: move away from Page, Ariz., get a house and start a career in child psychology.

Among the lessons are:

Money basics: How to make a budget. Start a savings account in order to begin “paying yourself.” 401 K planning. Paying bills and incidentals.

“And then what’s left over is for fun things,” Beaumont said.

Credit: The women are shown how easy it is to get into trouble with credit cards and how credit cards function. The inmates often share stories of credit card horrors, Beaumont said.

Insurance: The women are taught to identify good rates and plans for a variety of insurances.

At the end, the women are shown how to become an investor. They are taught the difference between certificates of deposit and the upside and downside of investing in the stock market.

Beaumont said the inmates often come to deeper understanding of their lives.

“It helps them realize they have to be strong for themselves and their kids, because many of them do have kids,” Beaumont said.

Yazzie, who graduated from the program recently, said she’s a single parent and needs to find financial security for her children instead of living paycheck to paycheck.

As for her debt to the criminal justice system, Yazzie said she is already applying her newly taught principles.

Instead of having her parents bail

her out and having to owe them money, she decided to serve out her time. Also, she was accepted as a trustee at the jail, and trustees get two days of jail time for every day they serve. That means she’ll be out of jail in less than two weeks, she said.

And trustees get the chance to attend quilt sewing classes.

“I get the chance to learn to sew, finally,” she said, smiling.

As for her future, she said she hopes to finish her bachelor’s degree and go onto graduate school and study adolescent psychology.

As for the WiSe Up program, Yazzie said, “Do it. You’ll learn a lot of different ways to manage your money.”

Social workers tried to save James Many White Horses

By Zachary Franz  
Great Falls Tribune

GREAT FALLS, Mont. — Social workers acted quickly and reached across state lines in an effort to find the Great Falls boy who ultimately turned up in the trunk of his mother’s car, according to an affidavit prosecutors filed in District Court on Monday.

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services first got involved with Summer Many White Horses, 31, after she was arrested in Great Falls on July 21 for drunken driving.

Many White Horses’ 11-year-old daughter was in the car at the time and was taken into state custody, but DPHHS couldn’t find 2-year-old James Many White Horses, according to the affidavit. James’s mother said the child was in Yakima, Wash., staying

ing with a relative, according to the affidavit.

A DPHHS employee asked social workers and police in Washington to check the relative’s house. They did, but did not find the boy, the affidavit states.

A court hearing was held Aug. 14 — four days after Many White Horses was released from jail for the DUI charge — to begin the process of deciding who would have permanent custody of the children. At the hearing, Many White Horses told DPHHS her son was staying with a friend in Portland, Ore., according to the affidavit.

A dispositional hearing was set for Sept. 3.

DPHHS contacted social services in Portland, and social workers there contacted Many White Horses’ friend. James wasn’t there, either.

Many White Horses did not show up for the Sept. 3 court hearing. The next day, a social worker called Great Falls police to request that James be listed as a missing child. Local media outlets were contacted, and police found Many White Horses the following day, Sept. 5. They found James’ body the same afternoon after Many White Horses told them it was in the trunk of her car, the affidavit states.

Before her July 21 arrest, Many White Horses did have legal custody of both children, despite a lengthy criminal history. She is a registered violent offender who been arrested several times for assault, drunken driving and other charges, and gave birth to James while serving a prison sentence.

A spokesman for DPHHS declined to comment on the case, citing confidentiality issues.

Omaha Tribe to get money for health programs

MACY, Neb. (AP) — The Omaha Tribe will receive \$676,000 from the Indian Health Service to alleviate a shortfall that jeopardized its medical programs.

The funding was announced Friday by U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson, who had criticized the federal agency earlier this year. The Nebraska Democrat had said the Indian Health Service was squandering federal dollars and leaving tribes to pick up the pieces.

Nelson’s office says the Omaha Tribe faced a shortfall this year because the agency required them to accept a lower payment rate for certain health services.

Nelson says the funding is a victory for tribal members whose health services were threatened.

Job hunters see Shingle Springs casino as good bet

Sacramento Bee

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — For Becky Green, a single mom living with her grandparents, Jeff Young, a contractor without any houses to build, and Susan Case, who yearns to return to bartending, the Red Hawk Casino is an employment jackpot waiting to pay out.

Monday, all three were among 500 people at the second day of the casino’s job fair in El Dorado Hills seeking work as waiters and waitresses, housekeepers, slot technicians and other positions.

So far, more than 14,000 people have applied for 1,750 jobs at the Shingle Springs Indian casino scheduled to open in December.

As many of those waiting in line outside the Red Hawk job center remarked, in an economy rife with layoffs and unemployment, a business offering job security and benefits is worth checking out.

“I’m looking for something that pays more than minimum wage. There’s no way I can make it as a single parent living

ing on that,” said Green.

She said she and her 5-year-old daughter are living with her grandparents in Folsom while she searches for work.

Department stores are hiring for the Christmas holiday season, she said, but the jobs are part-time, pay minimum wage and offer no security.

Green hopes to land a job at Red Hawk as a waitress, something she did at a Payson Casino in Arizona.

“People tip great at casinos, especially if they’ve been winning,” she said.

Young arrived at the employment center at 7:30 a.m. Monday and discovered he needed to fill out some additional paperwork.

By 2 p.m. he was inside the building, where fellow job hunters were scouring computers for job listings, completing applications and being interviewed for positions.

“I want a more steady, secure job with retirement,” said Young, a 50-year-old general contractor from Placerville.

With four culinary arts certificates, Young applied for a position as a baker’s apprentice. Red Hawk will open with six

restaurants, including a steakhouse, a sushi bar and a buffet.

Young said that while he has very little contracting work lined up, he does have mortgage payments and three kids and a wife to support.

Although many applying at Red Hawk have never worked in a casino, others, like Case, who lives in rural southern El Dorado County, are savvy veterans of the gambling industry.

“I love people and I need to get back in the business,” she said. For more than 20 years Case was a bartender and cocktail waitress in Nevada casinos, helping to open Harrah’s Laughlin in 1988.

All that experience, she said, taught her the importance of catering to customers. Which, of course, helps generate tips.

During the two-day job fair, Red Hawk officials said, more than 800 people showed up to fill out job applications. An estimated 200 were offered jobs on the spot.

“This has been wildly successful,” said Peter Fordham, the casino’s general manager. “Everybody’s obviously cog-

nizant of the challenges of the economy today.”

The vast majority of applicants, Fordham said, live within 20 miles of the casino under construction off Highway 50.

Of the 14,000 total applicants, for example, nearly 1,500 are from Placerville, a city with an estimated 10,000 people.

But job seekers have also come from as far away as Las Vegas and Reno, with 50 applicants from South Lake Tahoe.

Fordham said the most popular jobs are tip-producing positions such as table game dealers, bartenders and food servers. However, dealing positions were filled earlier this summer and a dealing school began this week.

When it opens, the 270,000-square-foot casino, owned by the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, will have 75 table games and about 2,000 slot machines and gambling devices.

Among the hundreds applying Monday were those like 24-year-old Ryan Linton of Placerville. He isn’t particular about what job he’s offered.

“I’ll take anything,” he said.