

Quechan casino past halfway point

By Joyce Lobeck
Yuma Sun

YUMA, Ariz. — Even as a work in progress, the nearly 300,000-square-foot Quechan Casino Resort rising out of the desert west of Yuma is impressive.

The public got its first look during a media tour Thursday afternoon of the resort, now about 65 percent completed.

The Quechan Nation broke ground in June 2007. Since then, nearly 1 million cubic yards of dirt have been turned, more than 110,000 manhours have been spent and millions of dollars in revenue have been pumped into Yuma’s economy through the use of local subcontractors, vendors and suppliers whenever possible, said Steve Jones, senior project manager.

When completed, the resort will introduce a new level of entertainment for the region, said Mike Jackson Sr., tribal president.

The new 297,0000-square-foot resort will be anchored by a casino with a food court, a 276-seat cafe, 89-seat Ironwood Steakhouse and 142-seat sports bar with plasma television sets and a dance floor.

A 22,500-square-foot event center will hold approximately 2,300 for a concert or 850 for a formal dinner, and can be split into as many as six smaller rooms. The 166-room hotel complex has an elaborate pool area and lazy river. Other amenities include a health facility and on-site recreational vehicle parking.

“It not only will wow you,” said Jones. “It will be very comfortable for the guests.”

Located off Interstate 8 at the Algodones exit six miles west of Yuma and halfway between San Diego and Phoenix, the complex is expected to serve as both a regional attraction and a regional economic engine drawing visitors from Yuma and Imperial counties as well as from nearby Mexico and hopefully become a destination for I-8 travelers, said Jackson.

Mitzi Monge, a reporter from Mexicali, said the people there are excited about the resort and looking forward to spending time as “therapy” from their jobs and everyday lives.

Anticipated completion for the \$200 million project is mid-2009. Jackson said once the new casino is open, the tribe will close its current California Paradise Casino and convert the building to a community center for tribal members. The Arizona Paradise Casino will remain open.

“It will be beautiful,” Jackson said of the resort, “and it’s state of the art. It’s not just a casino but an entertainment center. It will be the first of its kind in Yuma and Imperial counties. I know people are looking for something to do. I invite people to come and enjoy it.”

Along with providing a one-stop entertainment venue for the Quechans’ neighbors, it’s also a vital link for the tribe’s financial future, noted Felix Montague, chairman of the Quechan construction committee.

“I feel this project has been one of the most challenging we’ve faced,” he said. “I want to thank our grandfathers for their persistence in fighting for these lands. This project is a hallmark of economic development by the tribe. It will be a lifeline for our future generations.”

Brian Golding Sr., economic development director for the Quechans, agreed. “This is the largest real estate effort by the tribe. I think it will bring us to a new level as an economic player. I look forward to the grand opening and the benefits it brings not only to the tribe but to the region as a whole.”

Jackson said the complex is just in the first phase of development, and he would like to see a water slide park and other attractions added in the future.

Reservations are now being taken for the event center for such activities as banquets and

Alaska Natives question Palin’s support

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin routinely notes her husband’s Yup’ik Eskimo roots. But those connections haven’t erased doubts about her in a community long slighted by the white settlers who flocked to Alaska and dominate its government.

Since she took office in 2006, many Alaska Natives say they’ve felt ignored when she made appointments to her administration, sided with sporting interests over Native hunting rights and pursued a lawsuit that Natives say seeks to undermine their ancient traditions.

Alaska’s population today is mostly white but nearly a fifth of its people are Native Americans - primarily Alaska Natives. Blacks and Asians combined make up less than 10 percent of the state’s population.

As a result, race relations in Alaska are different from those in other states. Palin inherited a complex, sometimes strained relationship with Alaska Natives. There is a wide economic disparity between its predominantly white urban areas and the scores of isolated Native villages, and competition between sport hunting rights and tribal sovereignty.

Early in her administration, Palin created a furor by trying to appoint a white woman to a seat, held for more than 25 years by a Native, on the

panel that oversees wildlife management. Ultimately, Palin named an Athabascan Indian to the game board, but not before relations were bruised.

When Palin this summer fired Public Safety Commissioner Walt Monegan, a Native, she replaced him with a non-Native. His successor resigned after 10 days on the job, when a previously undisclosed reprimand that stemmed from a sexual harassment claim against him came to light.

The Monegan firing is the subject of two state investigations. Palin is accused of firing Monegan because he refused to fire her sister’s former husband, a state trooper.

Two weeks after she was tapped as John McCain’s running mate, Palin named a Native to Monegan’s old position.

Palin spokeswoman Sharon Leighow said the governor’s Cabinet members and chief advisers represent the state’s diversity. For example, Palin’s communications director, Bill McAllister, is part black. Her commissioner for the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, Emil Notti, is a noted Alaska Native leader.

“The governor is colorblind when it comes to hiring,” Leighow said.

But Duke University political science professor Paula McClain, who went to high school in Alaska and

now specializes in minority relations, said Palin’s actions suggest she has “a political tin ear or that she simply doesn’t care.”

“In a state like Alaska, how can you not be aware of how not reappointing a Native is going to play? At best, she’s naive,” McClain said.

Alaska Natives - the term includes indigenous Eskimo, Aleut and Indian populations - tend to lean Democrat. Many prominent Native leaders have endorsed Democrat Barack Obama for president.

But the mother of Palin’s husband, Todd, is a quarter Yup’ik Eskimo. Each summer, he heads to his birthplace in Western Alaska to work in the Bristol Bay commercial salmon fishery.

Palin’s family ties would suggest she would be more sensitive to Native issues, said Stephen Haycox, a University of Alaska Anchorage history professor. But in her 21-month tenure, the governor has used those ties mostly to highlight her experiences in commercial fishing, moose hunting and general outdoorsmanship.

“She has not manifested, so far, any extraordinary measures on behalf of Alaska Natives,” Haycox said.

Alaska Inter-Tribal Council Chairman Mike Williams of Akiak said he’s been seeking an audience with Palin to address tribal concerns ever since

she was elected governor, but her staff keeps telling him that her schedule is full.

“She’s so busy that she doesn’t have time for the tribes. There needs to be respect and a dialogue,” said Williams, who is also Yup’ik Eskimo.

This time of year, Williams is busy putting away meat, fish and berries for the winter - supplies that are critical to survival in cash-poor rural villages - and he said he wants to explain to Palin how increased pressures from sport hunting and fishing as well as oil and mining have eroded native hunting lands.

Palin’s Director of Community and Regional Affairs, Tara Jollie, a member of the Chippewa tribe of North Dakota, said the popular governor’s schedule is busy, but she has attended events such as the yearly gathering of the Alaska Federation of Natives and a recent bridge dedication honoring a native leader.

Jollie also said many of Palin’s initiatives, like energy assistance and sharing state revenues with municipalities, are particularly important to the rural Natives coping with some of the highest fuel costs in the nation.

“It’s her nature to want the best for all Alaskans,” said Jollie. “She would treat her native constituency exactly the same as any other constituency.”

Tribe member found armed, wearing bulletproof vest

By John Asbury
Riverside Press-Enterprise

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — Riverside County sheriff’s deputies arrested an 18-year-old man Wednesday they say has eluded them for several weeks in connection with a stolen-car incident.

Whitecloud Robert Trujillo was wanted following a police pursuit Sept. 7 in a stolen vehicle, sheriff’s officials said.

Deputies on that day found the stolen car with ammunition inside it at a residence on the Soboba Indian Reservation.

Last weekend, Trujillo, a member of the tribe, was found at a San Jacinto home in the 1800 block of Cognac Court. Police at the time were investigating a separate drive-by shooting in Valle Vista, according to a sheriff’s report.

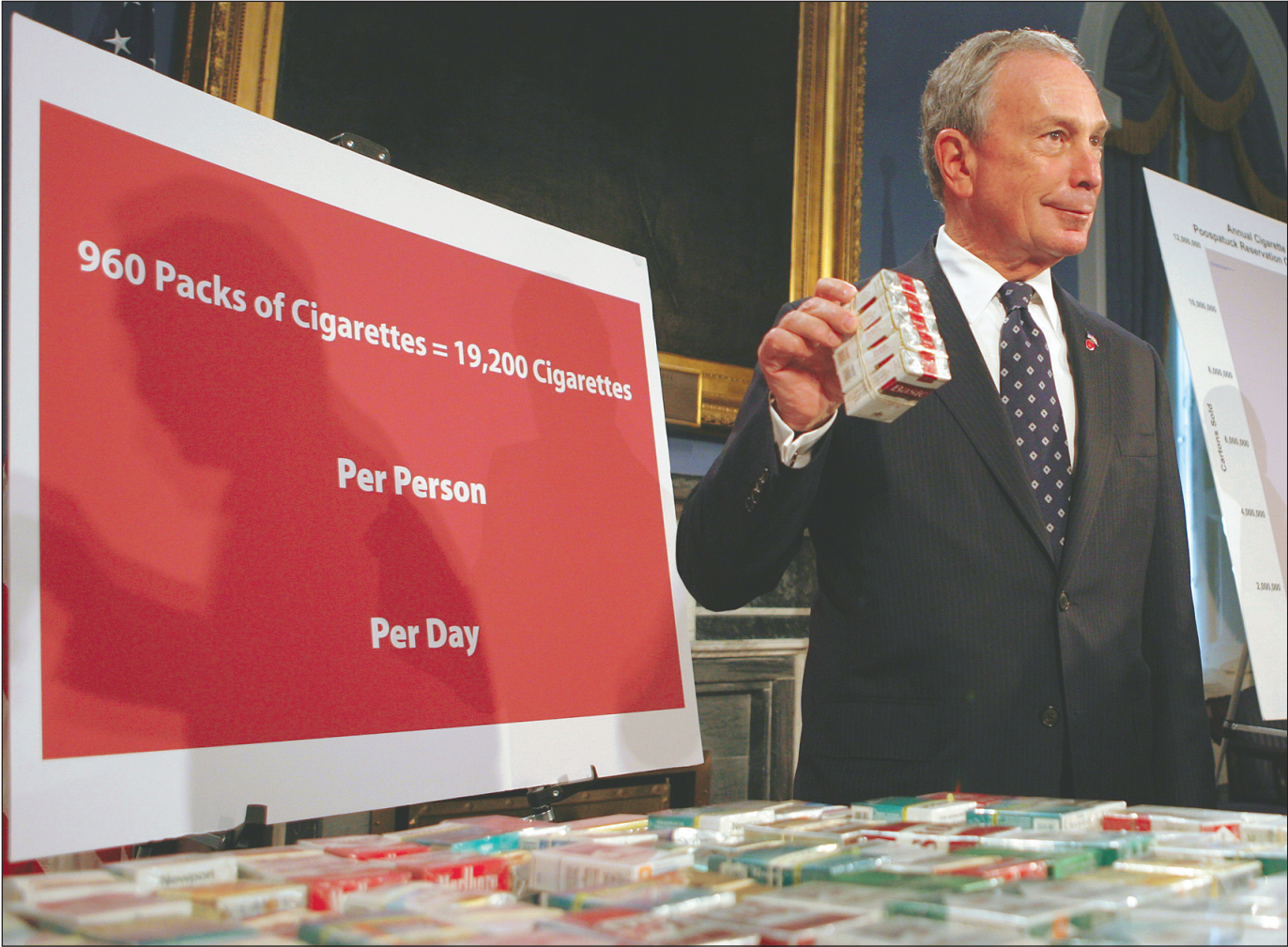
Police also arrested Janei Clara Sanchez, 21, of the Soboba tribe.

Her car was reportedly used during the drive-by shooting of an unknown target and she was wanted for questioning.

She was also held on possession of methamphetamine, according to the report.

At the time of his arrest, Trujillo was wearing a bulletproof vest and was armed with two

Tax-free cigarettes



Associated Press

In this photo provided by the Office of the Mayor, Mayor Michael Bloomberg stands near a display of cigarettes during a news conference at City Hall in New York where he announced that the city has filed a lawsuit against eight smoke shops on an Indian reservation on Long Island, Monday. The suit accuses them of breaking state and federal law by selling massive quantities of tax-free cigarettes to bootleggers who resell through in the city. Bloomberg said this costs the city and state hundreds of millions of dollars a year in lost tax revenue.

Lawmakers oppose easement

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Some South Dakota lawmakers made it clear Tuesday that they oppose any state involvement in a proposed easement that would protect the west side of Bear Butte from development.

Rep. Thomas Brunner, R-Nisland, had suggested a resolution that sought to put a legislative study committee on record as opposing the Game, Fish & Parks Department’s involvement in any easement at Bear Butte, no matter what source of money is used.

After a lengthy discussion, Brunner said there was no need for the legislative panel to vote on the measure because the debate made it clear that some lawmakers oppose such an easement.

The Legislature earlier this year rejected Gov. Mike Rounds’ plan to prevent developers from putting biker bars and other noisy businesses on ranch land near Bear Butte. Supporters said the measure would protect Bear Butte, a mountain on the north side of the Black Hills that is a national historic site and a sacred religious site to many American Indian tribes.

The defeated bill would have provided \$250,000 from

the state to be combined with money from other sources to buy an easement from a private landowner near Bear Butte.

Opponents said the bill would have harmed private property rights and economic development in the area where the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally is held each year.

State Game, Fish & Parks Secretary Jeff Vonk said Tuesday the department is looking for an alternate source of funds to finance the easement and prevent commercial development on the land near Bear Butte. A foundation would be the likely source of money for such a project, he said.

In such an easement, the ranch family could continue to use the land for agricultural purposes but could not develop it for commercial use or a housing area. They would continue to pay property taxes on the land’s agricultural value.

Rep. Betty Olson, R-Prairie City, said she opposes perpetual easements because perpetuity is a long time. She said she doubts Bear Butte needs to be protected, but the state or Native American tribes should just buy the land if it needs to be protected, she

said.

Vonk said tribes would prefer to buy the land rather than use an easement, but the landowner is not willing to sell now.

Brunner said he supports private property rights, which means the landowner has the legal right to sell an easement. But the state should not be involved in such a deal, he said.

“My argument is solely with the state’s involvement,” Brunner said.

Reuben Bezpaletz, a staff lawyer for the Legislature, said easements are not perpetual because the law includes a fundamental rule against tying up land forever. Easements can be changed when the buyer no longer wants to use the land for whatever reason the easement was created, he said.

For example, easements granted to railroads usually end when a railroad ends service on the route, Bezpaletz said. Rail right of way then frequently goes to adjacent landowners or is converted for use as a hiking and biking trail, he said.

“They are certainly not perpetual. They are indefinite,” Bezpaletz told the lawmakers.

Native American groups want quarantined Y’stone bison

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Five American Indian groups from Montana, Wyoming and South Dakota are in the running to receive a small herd of bison spared from a capture and slaughter program at Yellowstone National Park.

The herd of 40 bison has been kept under quarantine for almost three years to ensure the animals don’t have the livestock disease brucellosis.

Most bison attempting to migrate outside the park are slaughtered to prevent the disease’s spread to cattle. The quarantined herd is part of an experimental program to keep some of those bison alive and restore the animals across portions of the West where they once flourished.

The program is jointly run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Montana officials will have final say over where the bison are relocated.

The five groups seeking the animals are Montana’s Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Reservations, Sinte Gleska University on South Dakota’s Rosebud Sioux Reservation, Wyoming’s Northern Arapaho Tribe and a Blackfeet Tribe member in Montana.

“There’s a lot of interest with all the tribes,” said Ervin Carlson, president of the Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative, which submitted a preliminary application for the bison program on behalf of the Northern Arapaho and Fort Peck tribes.

“They want to see them come out of there (Yellowstone) and not be slaughtered,” Carlson said.

Because Yellowstone’s bison are considered among the most genetically pure in the country, Carlson said tribes could use them to bolster the genetics in existing herds that have intermingled with cattle.

Ken MacDonald, a division administrator with Fish, Wildlife and Parks, said the tribal groups have until the end of November to submit detailed plans to accept the bison.

A decision on where the bison will go will be made in January and the animals could be moved in February or March, MacDonald said.

The animals have been tested multiple times for brucellosis. The disease, which causes pregnant cows to abort their calves, can lay dormant for months without being detected.