

New Red Lake casino, hotel to open next year

Molly Miron
Bemidji Pioneer

RED LAKE, Minn. — Blackjack, poker and slot machines, a hotel, restaurant, gift shop, banquet hall and entertainment center are designed to give the new casino on the Red Lake Reservation the competitive edge in northern Minnesota.

Red Lake Tribal Council members and representatives from DSGW Architects, designers of the project, and Woodstone Builders, general contractors, broke ground Monday for the new casino. The complex will be located just east of State Highway 89 on the southern border of the reservation. The project is scheduled for completion in November 2009.

Red Lake Chairman Floyd “Buck” Jourdain Jr. said the new casino’s location and attractive amenities will draw patrons from the Bemidji area.

Red Lake Tribal Council members and representatives from DSGW Architects and Woodstone Builders don hard hats and dig in with ceremonial shovels for the groundbreaking Monday for the new Seven Clans Casino complex. Pioneer Photo/Molly Miron

It will employ 50 people and allow the Red Lake Humanities Center, where the casino is currently located, to revert to a true school and community center suitable for children’s activities, he said.

Ray Brenny, COO of Red Lake Gaming Enterprises, said the restaurant will be accessible both from the casino and by a separate entrance. The convention center will seat 300 for banquets and 700 for entertainment. The 40 hotel rooms will be designed as suites, each with a fireplace. The hotel also will have a pool.

Red Lake owns Seven Clans casinos in Thief River Falls and Warroad.

“We wanted to make sure our rooms were as nice, or nicer, than Thief River Falls,” Brenny said.

The casino will begin business with 270 slot machines, with capacity to increase the number to 300.

“Future designs – we actually wrapped a golf course around it,” Brenny said. “We’ve sketched in a future powwow grounds.”

Jourdain said the main part of the building reflects the shape of a traditional long house, as was recommended by the culture committee.

“We came up with a concept unique to Red Lake,” Brenny said.

The flanking fa?ades will be finished with sparkling blue tile that mimic the effect of sunlight on the water of Red Lake.

“At night, we’re going to have some lights shining on it,” he said. “It will look like the moon shining on water.”

Rick Rothausen, Red Lake Gaming CFO, said the total package of the loan Red Lake will take from the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux will be \$31 million – \$21,767,300 for the casino project and the remaining \$9,232,700 to repay the lawn enforcement center and greenhouse construction loans, future purchase and development of property on Lake of the Woods and a Twin Cities Center and renovate the Humanities Center.

Rothausen said the loan will be amortized over 15 years, and Jourdain said the monthly payments will be about \$125,000. He said that is half the amount of the payments for \$27 million casino expansion at Thief River Falls and Warroad. Red Lake retired that debt in January.

“We’re having a record year,” Rothausen said of Red Lake Gaming. “Our revenues are higher than they’ve ever been.”

Net income for 2007 was \$5.9 million from the three casinos, according to the Red Lake Gaming Enterprises Annual Report. Red Lake Gaming employed 879 people in 2007 with a total payroll of more than \$20 million.

Charter school tailored for tribe succeeds

TUCSON (AP) — In one Tohono O’odham story, there was a boy whose mother loved to play toka, an Indian game akin to field hockey.

The boy followed his mother to faraway matches, only to be ignored.

Forgotten and lonely, the boy wandered into the desert, crying, and turned into a saguaro that grew strong and stately.

That story is why the saguaro is symbolic of the Ha:san Preparatory & Leadership School, a charter school with about 150 students — 99 percent of them American Indian and most of them members of the Tohono O’odham Nation.

For school administrators, the mainstream educational system stands in for the neglectful mother who hasn’t nurtured those seeds of knowledge in eager children.

It doesn’t take a policy wonk to see that something isn’t quite working.

About 13 percent of American Indians have bachelor’s degrees, less than half the national average. Indian students also have lower retention rates after one year of college than any other ethnic group.

Younger students also fare poorly — for example, 82 percent of Arizona’s Anglo fifth-graders passed their reading exams last year, compared with 47 percent of Indian fifth-graders.

Although academic results so far have been mixed, educators at Ha:san (pronounced HAHshun) say their innovative approach shows great promise.

Foreign-language requirements are met with two years of Tohono O’odham language training, though Spanish is offered as well.

The students learn traditional native art and traditional tribal songs and grow traditional crops, such as squash and beans, in a school garden.

The students still learn American history — it’s a standard required by the state — but teachers understand there’s going to be some resistance to hearing about what happened on the colonial frontier. In learning the material, students are asked to consider history from the native perspective, since those voices aren’t always heard in textbooks.

Half of the teachers are American Indian, and all of the teachers spend one hour of professional development a week integrating language and culture.

Nineteen-year-old Frances Ortiz decided to go to the school two years ago to be surrounded by other Indian students.

“I thought it was important so that I could learn more about my culture,” she said.

Other schools she attended might have had social clubs for Indian students but lacked the academic focus. She strug-

gles with the language, she said, but thinks it’s important to learn because she worries that it will disappear without more commitment from her generation.

The school is not located on the reservation, in part because when it was founded 11 years ago, there was concern among some tribal members that the charter would take the best and brightest students and harm the existing school district.

Over time, the relationship with the tribe has grown and the location, near the University of Arizona, helps serve as a bridge between the more insular world of the reservation and the larger community, said the school’s grant writer, Lynne Colombe, a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe South Dakota.

“Students grow up in a place where everyone looks like them and talks like them so it’s difficult for kids to view outside institutions as a place where they will fit in,” she

said.

Aside from the linguistic and social barriers, she said, there also remains a trust issue.

Resistance to institutions, she said, protected the culture from being erased. On the other hand, she said, education is an important piece of getting tribal members’ needs met — and the school’s goal is to return future professionals and cultural leaders to their communities.

“When students tell me there are no jobs on the reservation, I tell them there are no jobs for ditch diggers. Those jobs are all taken,” she said. “But there are jobs for teachers and doctors and nurses.”

The Nation has been so supportive of the school that it provided \$500,000 last year to keep it running. The Shuk Toak district of the Nation also provided \$16,000 to help offset transportation costs given the distance students must travel.

Director William Rosenberg came on in September, only to find by December that the school was running over budget from turnover in administration, a loss of enrollment and higher transportation costs.

Test scores are lower than the state average in all subjects and are comparable with the schools in the Indian Oasis-Baboquivari School District, which serves the reservation. But under No Child Left Behind, both Ha:san schools made yearly progress. The Baboquivari middle and high schools did not.

As part of their graduation requirement, students must apply to three universities. Colombe said the school has a 100 percent acceptance rate, although she estimates about half actually attend.

Tom Young, an 18-year-old senior, said the academic expectations and the college focus are two big reasons he’s willing to take a 90-minute bus ride each way from the reservation.

Karen Francis-Begay, an adviser on American Indian affairs to the UA president, said 1,006 American Indians attend the UA, about 2.6 percent of the enrolled population. Although that’s higher than ever before, she said she’d like to see that number double in five years to more accurately reflect the pool of college-eligible students.



Greg Bryan/Arizona Daily Star

Junior Shawn Thompson, top center, sings with classmates in the middle of a circle of students on the basketball court at Ha:san Preparatory & Leadership School in Tucson, Thursday, Sept. 25. The student body starts and finishes each week with a traditional Native American tribal song to wish the students well throughout the week and over the weekend.

Foxwoods set talks for possible labor deal under tribal law

By Michael Gannon
Norwich Bulletin

MASHANTUCKET, Conn. — The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and the union representing dealers at Foxwoods Resort Casino have agreed to consider negotiating under tribal laws, according to a statement released jointly Friday by the United Auto Workers and the tribe.

“The UAW and the Mashantucket Pequot Gaming Enterprise agreed to enter into discussions for 30 days to determine if an agreement can be reached to bargain under tribal law,” according to the statement.

In doing so, neither side will waive its rights or legal positions under the National Labor Relations Act, according to the statement.

The agreement to talk could represent an olive branch in an often stormy relationship since the table game dealers voted to unionize under the UAW in November.

The Mashantucket Pequots repeatedly have declined to bargain with the union, claiming they are exempt from federal labor laws because they are a sovereign nation. They also claim existing tribal laws already provide a mechanism to form a union and to bargain for workers.

Neither Roger Kerson of the UAW nor Lori Potter of Foxwoods could be reached Friday for comment. Denise Gladue, a dealer for 14 years and an assistant floor supervisor, declined to comment on the matter when reached Friday night.

Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, whose office has supported the dealers, said the agreement has enormous promise in a statement released by his office.

“We will continue to fight for union members’ rights, and welcome these discussions as a means of achieving such rights as quickly and fairly as possible,” he said.

On Oct. 1, The National Labor Relations Board ordered the tribe to bargain with the UAW, a decision the Mashantucket Pequots are considering appealing.

Casino officials said Sept. 30 they will lay off 700 workers by Oct. 17 because of declining revenues at Foxwoods and MGM Grand at Foxwoods.

Birch Hill to remain open for Native group’s burials

By Rebecca George
Fairbanks Daily News Miner

FAIRBANKS, Alaska — A local Native organization will be allowed to conduct burials at Birch Hill Cemetery this winter, despite recent confusion about whether the burial site would remain open to the group.

Last week, Fairbanks Native Association Interim Executive Director Doreen Deaton expressed concerns that the Native community would be unable to perform winter burials this season without access to the cemetery. The owner of Birch Hill Cemetery, Tim Wisniewski, said he wasn’t aware of FNA’s concerns.

“Winter burial disputes from FNA have never been communicated to the current owner of Birch Hill Cemetery,” Wisniewski stated in an e-mail. “If they wanted access to the cemetery through the main gates, all they have to do is let us know, and we’ll gladly open it for them,” he said in a telephone interview.

City officials also had gone in to block the access path for vehicles, but Public Works Director Mike Schmetzer confirmed there was plenty of room for a snowmachine and foot traffic.

The controversy was part of a larger dispute that appeared after the city of Fairbanks sold the property rights to Fairbanks Funeral Home Inc. in 2007. Wisniewski blames the dispute on a lack of communication between the parties involved.

“Any time these issues

arose, the current owner was bypassed and city of Fairbanks was contacted,” Wisniewski’s e-mail stated. “Several attempts to rectify these concerns were unsuccessful.”

The property lines remain in dispute between the two entities.

FNA is utilizing about 2 acres of the cemetery for burial purposes. The lot can hold anywhere from 600 to 1,000 graves. An additional 6 acres are being used for an access path directly to the plot.

When the city sold the cemetery to Fairbanks Funeral Home Inc. it was not clearly stated exactly how much land was granted to FNA.

“We were told to respect their section, just like everyone else’s section in the cemetery,” Wisniewski said.

Cemetery owners are feeling the crunch on the hill as land is becoming more and more scarce for burials.

“I can understand if they were promised land by the city, and we respect their traditions, but the documents only asked that we respect their plot but failed to let us know exactly how much land that consisted of.”

Still, city officials see it differently.

“They had adequate opportunities to know what portion of the land was designated to FNA,” Cole said.

But recently, city officials and cemetery owners with Birch Hill Inc. have learned that part of the access path and a few graves lay outside the Native plot boundaries.

Pechanga tribe gets land for preserve

San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — President Bush last week signed legislation turning over more than 1.7 square miles of federal land to the Pechanga Indian band for use primarily as a wildlife preserve. The land includes 119 acres in San Diego County.

The Temecula-area tribe has been seeking

the land for years, saying it is important to the tribe’s culture and history.

The law transferring the land limits how the tribe can use it. The tribe is not allowed to build a casino or any structure except those supporting wildlife, and is to maintain public access.

Also included in the transfer is an 20-acre Indian burial ground near Lake Elsinore.