

Pechanga tribe, water district reach tentative deal

By Jeff Horseman
Riverside Press-Enterprise

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — The Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians and a local water district on Wednesday announced the framework of a deal that officials said will resolve the tribe's water claims while avoiding the courtroom.

The agreement between the tribe and the Rancho California Water District guarantees the tribe's access to local water sources, according to a news release issued by the Temecula-based district and the tribe.

"This framework agreement, while still subject to additional federal review and approvals, marks a historic milestone in our long battle to preserve our water rights," Tribal Chairman Mark Macarri said in the release.

As part of the agreement, the tribe will spend part of the money from a settlement it expects to get from the federal government on the Rancho California Integrated Resource Plan Project, a long-term strategy to meet southwestern Riverside County's water needs through 2050.

This could mean \$10 million to \$20 million in federal dollars for the project, the release stated.

The settlement is unrelated to the ongoing legal dispute involving the Cahuilla and Ramona Indian bands and a variety of defendants, including the Rancho water district. The tribes are asking a federal judge to clarify their rights to water in the Santa Margarita Watershed.

"(The settlement) is one that helps us all avoid the extremely costly and combative legal battle that was precipitated last year with respect to other tribes with claims in the Santa Margarita Basin," Rancho water board Chairman Larry Libeu said in a statement.

The agreement is expected to be finalized in the coming months. It will need the approval of the U.S. Congress.

Santa greets Cabazon kids thanks to Morongo tribe

Bob Otto
San Bernadino Sun

CABAZON, Calif. — Some of the children knew he was coming, but others were caught by surprise when Santa Claus knocked on their classroom door and walked in.

Shouts of "Hi Santa!" and "It's Santa Claus!" rang out Wednesday as he greeted them with a "Merry Christmas!"

For more than 10 years, the Morongo Band of Mission Indians has made Christmas a special time at Cabazon Elementary School with Bringing Christmas to Cabazon, sponsored by the tribe's outreach program.

Santa and his helpers visited the school bearing gifts of backpacks filled with school supplies and new Nike shoes. They also brought stockings stuffed with fruit and candy and gift certificates to Morongo Canyon Lanes Bowling Alley.

"The children are so thrilled," said kindergarten teacher Karrie Morlan. "Santa made our day, our week, our year."

Santa visited 12 classrooms from kindergarten through fourth grade, giving all 255 students their gifts. But without a doubt, the Nike shoes were huge hits with the kids.

"For the rest of my life, this will be special," said Ilayna Nelson, 7, a second-grader. "They (shoes) smell new and good."

Julianna Aguirre-Rios, 9, a fourth-grader, was so happy to receive a new pair of shoes that she kissed them.

"I'm happy. Now I don't have to wear my old shoes anymore," Julianna said.

Red Hawk Casino draws 10,000 on first day

By Diana Lambert and Loretta Kalb
Sacramento Bee

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The Red Hawk Casino drew a full house Wednesday night as thousands braved the cold, fought traffic and opened tight pocketbooks to check out the state's newest Indian gambling site.

Casino officials estimated that 10,000 people arrived by 6 p.m. The Shingle Springs facility allowed guests in hours earlier than its scheduled 7 p.m. opening in hopes of avoiding traffic backing up on Highway 50 near the casino's offramp. But by 8:30 p.m., eastbound traffic on Highway 50 was backed up about one mile.

Inside, guests queued up at the 2,000 slot machines, squeezed into seats at 75 gambling tables and sampled fare at the casino's six restaurants.

"I think it's marvelous, absolutely gorgeous," said Sue Ball of Shingle Springs as she watched gamblers put coins into the slots. "It's a shorter trip than Tahoe or Jackson."

From the looks of the opening, the decision by the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians to spend \$530 million to build a casino on 160 acres of tribal land just west of Placerville could pay off.

Red Hawk officials said 80 percent of the first-night guests signed up for the casino's "rewards club," an incentive program for return customers.

"We think this market is very resilient and very buoyant," said Red Hawk's general manager, Peter Ford-

ham. "We've been well-received by Sacramento."

The opening was also good news for Indian casinos, which have seen big revenue gains since they began offering Nevada-style gaming nearly a decade ago.

In Region 2 of the National Indian Gaming Commission, which is dominated by California's Indian casinos, gross revenues jumped to \$7.8 billion in 2007, up from \$1.2 billion in 2000, said Shawn Pensoneau, a spokesman for the independent gaming commission.

The question is: Will the ailing economy threaten that trend?

The nation's unemployment in November reached its highest level in 15 years as 533,000 people lost jobs. Experts fear the foreclosure crisis is widening. And many businesses that aren't closing their doors are seeing big losses.

Just last month, Thunder Valley Casino in Lincoln put work on hold for a hotel and performing arts center while evaluating whether to scale back the project. The United Auburn Indian Community, owners of the casino, broke ground on the project in July.

Cheryl Schmidt, director of Stand Up for California, a gambling watchdog group, said she believes the Red Hawk Casino is taking a risk.

She questioned whether it can live up to its promise to pay the state 25 percent of its net win, which she said is more than any other California tribe pays.

"I've heard in recent days that some Southern California tribes may not be able to make their state payments," Schmidt said.

"Red Hawk truly is taking a gamble at this time," she said.

Nevada casinos have been hit by the harsh economy, too, according to data from the Nevada State Gaming Control Board.

In Washoe County, which includes Reno, gambling revenues fell 9 percent in October compared with a year earlier. Douglas County, which includes the large casinos at Lake Tahoe, saw gambling revenues decline 24 percent.

Statewide, the Nevada picture was just as grim. Gambling revenues fell 22.3 percent in the October-to-October survey.

It's a one-two punch for the Nevada gambling industry, which also copes with the effects of California's growing number of Indian casinos.

"Definitely, (there is an effect) on the northern part of the state and especially this new (Indian) casino," Frank Streshley, a senior financial analyst for the board, said of the Red Hawk Casino.

"A vast majority of the visitors into Reno and Tahoe are from Northern California. They are drive-in customers from Sacramento and the Bay Area.

"And when they have the convenience of driving closer, especially for the day-trippers, that has a big impact on gaming both in Tahoe and in Reno."

The effects were immediate when

the Thunder Valley Casino opened in Placer County in 2003 and when the Cache Creek Casino Resort expanded in Yolo County the next year, he said.

The penchant of gamblers to keep their money closer to home helps drive California tribes to the casino bandwagon.

Locally, the Ione Band of Miwok Indians and the Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians each wants to build casinos in Amador County, which already is home to Jackson Rancheria Casino and Hotel.

Stand Up for California's Schmidt says she hopes the proximity of Red Hawk Casino will deter the two Amador County tribes from pursuing casinos. "It's a little county of 38,000 — it doesn't make sense," Schmidt said.

Still, even in a recession, plenty of people are eager to gamble.

Gambling appeals to a certain economic sector, she said, noting that casinos tend to market to senior citizens with time and money and to ethnic groups with a "propensity toward gambling."

There are various motivations for gambling, she said.

Some people are addicted to the action.

"They have to be a part of it," she said.

Others think they will win and, when they lose, return to the casinos to recoup.

Then there are the folks seeking easy money, Schmidt said. "Everyone is looking for that golden ring."

Learning the culture



Stuart S. White/Tribune Photo

Lori Archambault teaches fourth and fifth-graders in the White Clay Immersion School at Fort Belknap, Mont. She got her teaching degree with the help of the Fort Belknap teacher training program.

Bobby Flay to open restaurants at Mohegan Sun

Norwich Bulletin

UNCASVILLE, Conn. — Mohegan Sun announces the newest culinary star to call Mohegan Sun home: critically-acclaimed chef, author and television personality Bobby Flay. The Food Network talent will open two new restaurants in partnership with Mohegan Sun: Bobby's Burger Palace in Casino of the Earth and Bar Americain in Casino of the Sky. Both restaurants are scheduled to open in summer 2009.

Bobby's Burger Palace (BBP) offers an array of burgers inspired by Flay's extensive travels throughout America. Located in Casino of the

Earth, this new burger restaurant will be approximately 4,100 square feet and will pay tribute to America's regional flavors and traditions. Flay opened his first BBP in Long Island, New York in July 2008 and most recently a second opened in New Jersey earlier this month.

In Casino of the Sky, Flay will open his second Bar Americain just outside of the hotel lobby in the space currently occupied by Fidelia's. The restaurant blends the intimacy of a brasserie, injected with authentic American flavors and styles.

Flay's current Bar Americain in New York, which opened in March of

2005, rejuvenates old classics and celebrates the abundance of America's diverse and delicious heritage. The New York mainstay has received rave reviews including two stars from The New York Times.

"It is a very exciting time for Mohegan Sun as we partner with Bobby Flay," said Mitchell Etess, president and chief executive officer for Mohegan Sun. "Flay brings a wealth of knowledge in the industry, not only as a chef, but as an author and television phenom. It is names like Flay, Todd English, Jasper White, Michael Jordan and Jimmy Buffett that continue to define Mohegan Sun as a leader in the

hospitality world."

"I'm thrilled to be opening two of my restaurants at Mohegan Sun," said Flay. "It's my first foray into New England and I'm looking forward to adding to the excitement that makes this property a world-class destination."

Flay is a graduate of the French Culinary Institute in New York. He began his career at 17, and is known throughout the industry for his southwestern fare. He opened his first restaurant, Mesa Grill, in 1991 and then opened six more venues throughout the United States, as well as the Bahamas.

Brothers plead not guilty in Cut Bank beating

By Eric Newhouse
Great Falls Tribune

CUT BANK, Mont. — Three brothers pleaded not guilty to felony charges Wednesday in the beating of Glacier County Commissioner Ron Rides at the Door.

Todd, Brian and Aron Molenda entered their pleas in District Court in Cut Bank. Their attorney, Meghan Lulf Sutton, refused to allow them to speak with the press.

"My only summary of their case is that they are innocent," Sutton said.

The Molendas are accused of knocking Rides at the Door to the ground and kicking him as he attempted to break up another fight at about midnight on Sept. 20, outside a local bar.

The brothers also allegedly uttered racial epithets as they beat Rides at the Door. Glacier County Attorney Larry Epstein declined to file felony charges under the state's hate crime statute, saying that Rides at the Door was attacked because he told the Molendas he would call the police. Epstein instead filed misdemeanor charges, which were later dropped while the state

Attorney General's Office examined the case.

That office concurred with Epstein's reasoning that the case did not meet the definition of a hate crime, but filed its own felony assault charges on the grounds that the Molendas allegedly used weapons — their boots — in the commission of the crime.

District Judge Laurie McKinnon did not set bond for the defendants, but did require them to abstain from alcohol and stay out of bars.

If convicted, the Molendas could face a maximum term of 20 years in prison, a fine up to \$50,000, or both.