

Fortunes fall at casinos

By Nathan Hurst
The Detroit News

DETROIT — Revenue at all three Detroit casinos declined 6.74 percent in November, figures released Wednesday show, marking the first time in the state's nearly decade-long history of regulated gaming that the city's gambling halls posted monthly revenue below the same month a year ago.

It's also a sign the region's gaming market -- which until now, has been bucking negative trends seen in larger markets such as Las Vegas and Atlantic City, N.J. -- is suffering under Michigan's recession.

"It held out a long time it seems, but now we're seeing the effect of the economy," said Rick Kalm, executive director for the Michigan Gaming Control Board, which released the figures during its monthly meeting.

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The decline doesn't just affect the casinos, which collectively spent more than \$2 billion in the past couple of years constructing permanent facilities and resort hotels, but also the state and city, which tax gambling revenue.

MGM Grand Detroit, the city's best-performing casino, saw its first year-over-year decline in revenue since it opened its new permanent casino and hotel last year-- down less than 1 percent in November compared with last. The Illitch-family-owned MotorCity Casino saw a 7.06 percent decline.

Greektown Casino, which entered bankruptcy in late May and continues to build a hotel scheduled to open in February, posted a 16.36 percent decline.

Greektown also announced big changes in its management board at Wednesday's board meeting, including the installation of Detroit businessman and restaurateur Ted Gatzaros on the casino's five-member management board. Gatzaros has a long history of involvement with Greektown, dating back to the initial licensing of the casino. He was subject to a lengthy investigation by the state gaming board that lasted a decade.

He was finally approved to take an ownership stake in Greektown last year, when Gatzaros acquired 1 percent of the casino, then quietly added another 1 percent stake earlier this year.

He is still owed millions of dollars by Greektown related to an earlier stake he held -- along with former friend and fellow businessman Jim Papas -- but later sold because of complications with the gaming board's background investigation.

Gaming board chairman Damian Kassab questioned Gatzaros' new role on Greektown's board, since that group will weigh options and plans to exit bankruptcy before a judge. The casino has until Feb. 1 to file its own plan to emerge from bankruptcy, and a lawyer for Gatzaros, Robert Young, said his client's main concern is returning Greektown to profitability.

"The concern then, the concern today and the concern tomorrow is operations," said Young, who also offered assurances that Gatzaros would recuse himself from any votes related to a sale that would benefit his own interests.

Gatzaros hasn't publicly said what his plans for Greektown are, but multiple sources with knowledge of the casino's operations and restructuring have told The Detroit News that Gatzaros has an interest in beefing up his investment in Greektown, and possibly taking control of the casino.

Other members of Greektown's new board of directors are Louis Glazier, an accountant and attorney from Farmington Hills, and Jacob Miklojck, a Lansing-based gaming consultant; both Glazier and Miklojck were approved by the gaming board with Gatzaros on Wednesday.

Joe McCoy, chairman of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa, Greektown's current owners, is the fourth member of the new board.

A fifth candidate, whose name hasn't been announced, is being vetted by the gaming board, and Greektown is expected to announce a new chief executive sometime this week.

Indian group responds to Campbell Brown

By Rob Capriccioso
Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Campbell Brown, an up-and-coming star at CNN, is increasingly making a name for herself by taking on political hot topics of the day and commenting on them through what she and the network label her "no bias, no bull" lens. After turning that lens on American Indian families and the Indian Child Welfare Act -- in turn angering many in Indian country -- she now says no harm was meant.

"There is no bias here against Native Americans," Brown wrote via e-mail when asked for comment by Indian Country Today after the Dec. 16 airing of her program. During a brief segment of that show, she said Native Americans should "focus on strengthening your families." She also called the Indian Child Welfare Act "a ridiculous law."

Her e-mail to ICT continued: "This is about a specific incident, a specific law and how it is being applied in this case. I am certainly happy to review anything that demonstrates to me that this family was treated fairly, and how this little boy could possibly be better off in foster care."

Brown's on-air comments saw her look straight at the camera to tell the sad tale of a non-Indian Utah couple who recently had their adopted six-month-old son removed from their home.

The anchor explained that the adoptive parents "lost their son because the

birth mother is part Native American," noting that the boy's mother is a member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. She said that the tribe had gone to court and ended up winning the right to take custody of the child.

"A federal law called the Indian Child Welfare Act gives the tribe a legitimate claim," Brown said, adding that the 1978 law was designed to keep Native American children with Native American families.

After raising questions about the blood quantum of both the birth mother and son, Brown said she was outraged that the boy wouldn't be going back to his birth mother.

"He is expected to go into foster care, perhaps with other siblings already in foster care. ... because the birth mother has been declared unfit," Brown said.

"So, a little boy is being taken away from loving parents who have cared for him for the last six months and put into tribal foster care because that is what the law says is the right thing to do.

"To me, that is a ridiculous law."

Lastly, Brown offered the following prescriptive: "If there is concern in the Native American community that children are being lost to the tribe through adoption because of unfit parents, then focus on strengthening your families so that your children won't be parentless."

And that was it. Until the next morning, that is, when several bloggers started posting about how a CNN anchor had disparaged ICWA and had

seemed to make the presumption that Native families are inherently weak. And then the e-mails started buzzing, the phones started ringing, and calls for action were uttered.

The National Indian Child Welfare Association was one of the first Native groups to speak out on the matter, specifically framing Brown's words as an egregious instance of media bias against Native Americans. The organization's official statement denounced CNN for its "deeply flawed, 'ill-informed,' and 'deeply offensive rhetoric.'"

"We denounce these ignorant and exploitive comments as the lowest point of journalistic endeavor," the statement went on. "The true facts of this case speak volumes, beyond the frenzied attacks of irresponsible media spokespeople."

Jacqueline Johnson Pata, executive director of the National Congress of American Indians soon weighed in, saying Brown's commentary warranted a direct response. She said NCAI hopes to get the show to air a fair recognition of what she called Brown's "inaccurate" commentary.

And then came a critical response from the Native American Journalists Association.

"When frontline media emotionally attempts to exalt what is best for Native Americans, you can usually relate it to the historically founded conquer-and-assimilate process of the first immigrants," said Ronnie Washines, president of NAJA.

"They just don't get it. And what makes it all the more negative is that they are teaching their children to accept the same thought process when it comes to dealing with the Native American issue."

Despite his criticism, Washines, a program administrator of the Yakama Nation's multimedia services division, said he would not be calling for a boycott of CNN or Brown's show. "I have always found it useful as a Native and a Native journalist to just let people be themselves in order to know what flows from their hearts and through their mouths," he said.

Terry L. Cross, the Seneca director of NICWA, said he is reticent about calling for a boycott, although he believes Brown's commentary contained an "irresponsible" and "anti-Indian bias." He noted that no one from Brown's program contacted NICWA about the case or law.

"For CNN to endorse an ill thought-out commentary, I think is highly irresponsible," Cross added. "We certainly would like to try to educate CNN -- we want fair and honest treatment."

Despite the backlash, Brown is holding firm. After her initial e-mail comments, ICT wrote back to her, asking whether she has thought beyond the circumstances of this one family as to why there needed to be a law like ICWA in the first place.

This time, a CNN spokeswoman replied: "Her commentary from last night is in regard to this specific family."

Coping in America



Destria Cellicion, 34, right, of Phoenix, and a member of the Zuni Pueblo tribe, top right, sits in her modest living room as two of her children, P.J., 2, left, and Alexis, 1, center, play Dec. 10, in Phoenix. Cellicion lost her job, her home, and feels helpless with five of her six children living with her.

Associated Press

Idaho tribal church destroyed in fire

LEWISTON, Idaho (AP) — Members of a tribal church congregation in northern Idaho are mourning the loss of more than a century of religious history after their sanctuary burned down.

Corbett Wheeler, an elder at the Nez Perce Indian Northfork Presbyterian Church, says the congregation is still in shock after their Ahsahka building was destroyed in a fire Wednesday.

Parishioners were only able to save a few Bibles and hymnals, while the church pulpit, pews, piano and just about everything else went up in flames. There were no known injuries.

Wheeler says he expects the congregation to rebuild on the site where the church was founded in 1890.

Clearwater County Sheriff Chris Goetz says the blaze is still under investigation, but a wood stove appears to have started the fire that engulfed the building.

Utah man says 19 pardons unexpected

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A Utah man who received one of 19 pardons doled out by President Bush said it was completely unexpected.

David Lane Woolsey was convicted in 1992 of an aiding and abetting violation of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act for digging up ancient Indian ruins on public lands in Garfield County.

He was sentenced to three years probation and 100 hours of community service.

"It feels pretty great," said Woolsey, who is currently working on an oil rig in Wyoming. "I didn't even expect it. I don't know what got him (the president) to do it."

The pardons were announced Tuesday, less than a month before Bush leaves office.

Woolsey's wife, Nadine,

said the couple filled out a clemency application on the Internet more than two years ago.

"We had no connections. We're not rich," she said.

Woolsey said he wanted the pardon so he could regain his gun rights to go hunting with his son.

"I've been looking for jobs, and I think you get discriminated against," Woolsey said. "I felt like I was left out, and I get my civil rights back."

Woolsey's former attorney, Ed Brass, said this is the first time in his more than 31-year career that a client has gotten a presidential pardon.

Brass said Woolsey's case came at a time when authorities were cracking down on archaeological thefts.

"It's extremely unusual," Brass said.

Fraud charges cloud future of Massachusetts casino plan

MIDDLEBOROUGH, Mass. (AP) — The fate of a proposed casino in Middleborough is up in the air as town officials and members of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council grapple with former chairman Glenn Marshall's admissions of fraud.

Middleborough selectmen have voted to meet with the tribe on the casino contract, but will wait until after the tribe's Feb. 8 election.

The Cape Cod Times reports one of the candidates for chairman of the tribal council has called for an emergency meeting of the governing board to discuss the situation.

Earlier this month, Marshall agreed to plead guilty to violating campaign finance laws while working with convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

The tribe is planning to build a \$1 billion casino in Middleborough.

Cherokees donate to Obama committee

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — The Cherokee Nation has made the maximum donation allowed to President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration committee.

Spokesman Mike Miller says the tribe hopes the \$50,000 donation sends a mes-

sage to Obama's administration that the tribe wants to be involved with any possible policy development.

The Cherokees were the only entity in Oklahoma to make the maximum donation. The next largest donation from the state was a \$25,000 gift

from Oklahoma Democratic Party finance chief Reggie Whitten of Edmond.

No one else in the state donated more than \$500 to the inauguration.

Miller says such donations are determined by Chief Chad Smith and the tribal council.

New York judge, for now, blocks Indian cigarette tax law

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — A judge has temporarily barred state officials from enforcing a new law that would tax cigarettes sold on Indian reservations.

State Supreme Court Justice Rose Sconiers signed the order this week in

Buffalo. A wholesale company and a businessman had sought to ban the law until the state takes certain actions, including giving tax-exempt coupons to Indian tribes.

Sconiers scheduled a Jan. 27 hearing

for state officials to show why she shouldn't issue a permanent injunction against the law.

The law, signed by Gov. David Paterson this month, is not set to take effect until February. It bans manufacturers

from selling unstamped tobacco products to wholesalers that would supply Indian-owned stores.

Paterson spokesman Morgan Hook says the state will comply with the judge's order while it reviews it.