

Casino sees success in its first year

KANSAS CITY, Kan.(AP) — After an 11-year battle to get a downtown gambling hall, the Oklahoma-based Wyandotte Nation marks the first anniversary of its 7th Street Casino today with little fanfare but a lot of confidence that it has proven itself worthy of running such a venture.

A year ago Wyandotte Nation Chief Leaford Bearskin conducted a pipe ceremony and Mayor Joe Reardon cut a ribbon to open the casino in a former Masonic lodge. With a \$20 million facelift, the old building was a far cry from the series of mobile homes in which the tribe had set up a makeshift casino in 2004, and which the state promptly shut down.

On Thursday, even Bearskin was a little surprised that a year had gone by.

"We told the people up there that Kansas City would never be sorry that the Wyandottes are in town," Bearskin said in an interview from Oklahoma. "We still say that."

Reardon said he has been pleased with the cooperation of the Wyandotte Nation and the quality of its project, both on the inside and the outside of the building. He said he also is happy with the additional tax revenue the city has received.

When it opened, the casino was expected to gross between \$15 million and \$20 million a year, pumping much-needed tax money into the coffers of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kan. To date, the local government has received roughly \$397,000 in tax proceeds from the facility.

Second Chief Billy Friend estimated that the casino grossed between \$13 million and \$15 million between Jan. 10 and Sept. 30, the end of its fiscal year.

"It's been a great success the first year," Friend said. "It has met all of our expectations as far as head count and revenue count. It's done everything we expected it to, even in a slumping economy."

Reardon called the casino an important piece of the puzzle in the city's efforts to improve its urban core.

"I think what we've seen is that we do have a lot more folks downtown visiting that location," he said. "Anytime in an urban environment when you have people visiting and walking around, the vitality that occurs in the evening and during the day has been a positive thing for our downtown."

The tribe began its efforts to open a casino in 1996 when it bought the former Scottish Rite temple and surrounding half-acre of land. The three-story building now houses a steakhouse, lounge and a casino with more than 500 slot machines that operate like bingo games. Denominations range from penny slots to \$25, and gamblers have won jackpots of up to \$100,000 there, according to the casino's marketing director.

"It's going very well," Bearskin said. "We had quite a few problems with the state of Kansas some time back, but it's all in the past. We are working with the Unified Government, the mayor, and have a wonderful relationship going."

But the Kansas attorney general's office still contends the casino is illegal and has appealed a federal judge's order dismissing the state's challenge to the operation. That appeal, before the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver, is still in the briefing phase, said Ashley Anstaett, spokeswoman for Attorney General Steve Six.

The state argues that the Wyandotte Nation improperly bought the building and land for the casino using federal funds that were not allowed for such purposes.

Manitoba Métis win hunting rights case

CBC News

BRANDON, Manitoba — A man has won a five-year legal battle against the Manitoba government with a landmark court ruling on Métis hunting rights.

But the case has potentially wide-ranging implications beyond who can hunt where and when — a legal expert says.

Provincial court Judge John Coombs ruled Thursday on the case of Will Goodon, who was charged with hunting without a licence after he shot a ringneck duck near Turtle Mountain in October 2004.

Goodon argued his Manitoba Métis Federation harvester card was all he needed — but Manitoba Conservation officials disagreed and Goodon was charged under the Wildlife Act.

Métis, unlike status Indians and Inuit, do not have an automatic right to hunt, the province argued, since they had not established hunting as a traditional occupation of their ancestors outside Manitoba's original 1870 "postage stamp" boundaries.

The judge didn't buy that argument. "Many community witnesses [some related to the accused] gave evidence about their ancestors hunting at the Turtle Mountains from the 1800s to the present day," the judge said in a 28-page ruling.

"I have determined the rights-bearing community is an area of south-western Manitoba that includes the City of Winnipeg south to the U.S. border and west to the Saskatchewan border. This area includes the Turtle Mountains and its environs."

Métis must self-identify. The Métis federation had argued the Supreme Court of Canada recognized the right of Métis to hunt in an Ontario case where two brothers, Steve and Roddy Powley, were charged with illegally killing a bull moose near Sault Ste. Marie. In that case, the Supreme Court sided with the Métis.

The Powley case clarified the definition of a Métis person under Sec. 35 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court said to be Métis for constitutional purposes, a person must "self-identi-

fy" as Métis, be accepted as a member of a modern Métis community and have some ancestral connection to the founding historic Métis community.

In the end, the judge said, "the Crown presented no evidence justifying any infringement of Métis hunting rights in the Province of Manitoba," and therefore Goodon was entitled to hunt without a licence since his right to do so under Sec. 35 was established.

University of Manitoba law Prof. Karen Busby said the ruling could lead to governments having to consult — and possibly compensate — the Métis before development goes ahead on land considered traditional Métis territory.

"The implications could be significant," said Busby. "The most important aspect of this case is clear... if there are constitutionally protected hunting rights, it means those rights can't be interfered with unless the Métis people are consulted and if necessary compensated for those rights."

"This case isn't really just about hunting rights," Busby added. "Métis people have the right to preserve their

hunting rights into the future, and that's the really important aspect of this case."

Busby said that could mean any future hydro dams, hydro transmission lines, oil pipelines or development of Crown leases that could have an impact on hunting rights would require consultation with the Métis community — and compensation — before such a project could proceed.

Meantime, Manitoba Conservation Minister Stan Struthers told CBC News that the court ruling will help the province set up a system to allow Métis hunting rights, now that the area in which they can hunt has been established.

"It was a question of how do we make this happen out on the landscape?," said Struthers. "How do we implement that decision? And this isn't quite the whole province that the Métis Federation wanted, but it's an area of Manitoba that we can now do some good work on."

Struthers said charges against other Métis hunters in Manitoba could be dropped as a result of the ruling.



Courtesy Photo

The Hopi JrROTC visited sites in Hawaii in 2008, that offered glimpses of the Hawaiian culture and history. Another team is going this year, 12 cadets met the standards, raised the money, and are looking forward to the trip.

Hopi JrROTC going to Hawaii

By Kachina Jenkins
Special to the Independent

Throughout 2008, the Hopi JROTC Bruins participated in fundraising to raise money for the 3rd annual Hopi to Hawaii trip. The JROTC sold raffle tickets and food items during volleyball, football, basketball games and also hosted the Hit and Run softball tournament during the summer. JROTC's goal was to take 30 cadets to Hawaii. Their set standard for the trip for the cadets was to receive a 2.5 G.P.A. average in all classes, attend

team practices, meets, and Bruin Club meetings, go to at least 75 percent of dance practice, and help with donations.

Only 12 cadets met the standards. These lucky few are cadet 2nd Lt. Amber Naha, cadet 2nd Lt. Dominique Halwood, cadet 2nd Lt. Whitney Damnggard, cadet Private Kachina Jenkins, cadet 1st Sergeant Elsha Dosela, cadet Private Josette Delowe, cadet Private Trisha Puhuyesva, cadet Private Joseph Nahsonhoya, cadet Private Zachary Youvella, cadet Private Natasha Talahytewa, and cadet private

Monique Chapman.

"These cadets did an excellent job. It just too bad that there are only 12 cadets going instead of 30 cadets," Major Taylor said.

The cadets will be boarding the plane to sunny Hawaii on Jan. 15. Some activities on the cadets' agenda are the Aloha Stadium swap meet to shop and the Polynesian Cultural Center to learn more about the Hawaiian culture. On the third day, the cadets will be in class "B" uniform to represent the soldiers that have served in wars. The Hopi JROTC would like to represent the

USS Arizona soldiers that have perished in the war or during the bombing against Pearl Harbor, at the Pearl Harbor wreath laying service. The cadets will also be paired up with some of the JROTC cadets from Waianae High School for a day of friendly competition and cultural exchange. The cadets will be marching in the Martin Luther King Jr. parade, and afterwards they will be performing a Native American dance for the Hawaiian people.

Pleasant Point cuts tribal dispatch unit

By Diana Graettinger
BDN Staff

PLEASANT POINT, Maine — Getting rid of the Passamaquoddy reservation's dispatch service appears to be part of an effort to address economic challenges facing the tribe. Although tribal officials are reluctant to talk about the extent of the financial trouble, they confirmed a budget-cutting effort is under way.

For years dispatching was part of the Pleasant Point Police Department. When tribal members dialed 853-2551 for help, they talked to a tribal dispatcher who often was either a family member or friend.

More than 600 people live on the reservation.

Now tribal member calls are being handled by the county's Regional Communication Center in Machias. The

change went into effect on New Year's Day.

Four full- and 11 part-time dispatchers have been laid off, according to tribal officials. Tribal officials declined to comment on the amount of money saved by the action.

The RCC also dispatches all 911 calls for the reservation, something they have been doing for a while, but in the past the 911 calls were referred back to the reservation dispatch service who then sent police, fire or ambulance depending on the call.

The RCC now dispatches all reservation emergency personnel.

The Indian Township reservation is unaffected by the moves.

Some tribal members maintain that the cuts at Pleasant Point were necessary, others are wondering what happened.

Tribal Councilor Fred Moore said Thursday that he

was "shocked" when he learned that the reservation was no longer handling dispatch duties. "It was not something that was planned as far as I am aware," he said.

Asked about the economic woes on the reservation, Moore said he could "neither confirm nor deny" whether getting rid of dispatch was part of dealing with a larger financial problem at Pleasant Point.

He referred all questions to Chief Rick Phillips-Doyle.

Phillips-Doyle did not pull any punches Thursday when he talked about the economic challenges the reservation faces.

"We are in a time of cost savings. So we are looking to see how we can run a lean budget and that is one of the areas we can switch over," Phillips-Doyle said referring to dispatch.

"We have some challenges financially ahead and we are

dealing with it as best we can and [we are looking at] any resources or opportunities that we know of."

In addition to 15 full- and part-time dispatchers, Phillips-Doyle said people in other departments also were laid off. He did not elaborate.

The layoffs occurred, the chief said, because it was necessary for the tribe to put together a "lean budget." "Things going on in the state and the country also affect us and we are just trying to tighten up where we can," he added.

It will be next year before the tribal council revisits the question, the chief maintained. "When we start doing budgeting next year we will re-evaluate it," the chief said of the tribal dispatch service.

Not so, Moore said. He said that the tribal council was discussing ways to get dispatch back on the reservation.

Acting Pleasant Point Police Chief John Preston assured tribal members Wednesday that they would continue to receive 24-hour police, fire and ambulance service. "All three departments are making every effort they can to make this as easy as possible for the citizens of Pleasant Point," Preston said.

Discussions about transferring the reservation system over to the Machias center began last year.

RCC director Mike Hinerman said Wednesday that the switch was uneventful.

The RCC dispatches for most communities in the county.

"As far as the RCC goes it is basically just a few minor changes. It is not going to cost us any more people and it doesn't change the focus of the RCC at all," he said. "It is a countywide service and we are glad to provide it."