

PROGRESS 2017

Building a prosperous future in Umatilla County

Pendleton salon thrives in ways others fail PAGE 3

Health services drive private growth in Hermiston PAGE 5

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WILDHORSE THINKS BIG

Diversification with hotel, bowling alley, concert venue will insure survival should gaming cease

By **KATHY ANEY**
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The Wildhorse Resort & Casino knows how to grow. Twenty-two years ago, the establishment was a collection of 100 slot machines inside a temporary five-wide trailer. The tiny casino evolved over the next two decades into an entertainment complex replete with luxury hotel, 18-hole golf course, Cineplex, event center, sports bars, parking garage and a sprawling gaming area alive with the lights and sounds of 1,200 machines.

If the tribe's General Council and Board of Trustees agree, the tribal casino will expand once again — and in grand fashion.

Wildhorse CEO Gary George recently shared a long list of proposed changes and preliminary designs with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Board of Trustees. The updates include a second hotel tower, bowling alley, horse arena, new concert venue, parking garage, spa, added meeting spaces and other additions.

George said the bowling alley drove the expansion. Since closure of Rodeo Lanes in Pendleton, tribal members and the community at large have requested that the tribe add bowling. The diversification also would bring Wildhorse to a place where it could survive with or without gambling.

"At some point in time, gaming will come to an end. This is a means to diversify," George said. "In the end, gaming like everything else is kind of cyclical. In the past, it's come and gone."

George said the renovation will cost in the neighborhood of \$70-80 million with an additional \$20 million for architectural design, furniture and fixtures, building permits, infrastructure and other soft costs.

The CEO said he expects about a two-year construction schedule with the 228-room hotel, bowling alley and four more theaters first on the list. Once that's finished, the resort's older 100-room hotel will come down, leaving the clean lines of twin towers rising above the grasslands, visible to motorists on Interstate 84 for miles.

George envisions a 32-lane bowling complex with 16 lanes on either side of a centrally located gathering spot.

"It will be an area with chairs and sofas so people can gather and watch and have a sandwich," he said.

The area might also include spectator seating so people can more easily watch bowling tournaments, which the resort hopes to attract. The bowling center may include a pro shop and meeting/party rooms with private lanes.

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Image contributed by Wildhorse
A second hotel tower will rise from the Wildhorse Resort & Casino in the future. The expansion will also include a 32-lane bowling alley, horse arena and new concert venue, among other improvements.

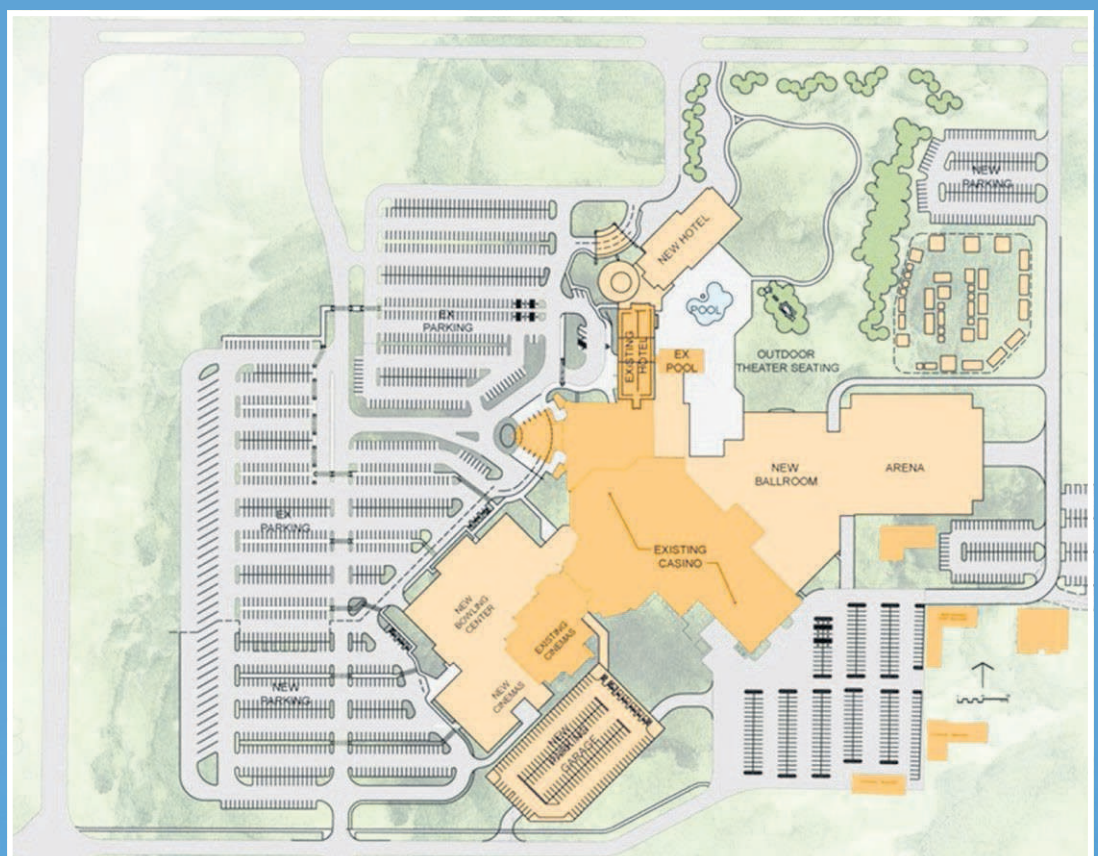


Image contributed by Wildhorse
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