

Spokane Tribe reaches gambling deal with state, feds

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP)—After years of operating casinos in defiance of the law, the Spokane Tribe of Indians on Thursday announced it had reached a tentative deal with federal and state regulators to bring its gambling offerings under their control.

The proposed compact calls for the Spokane Tribe to have much greater freedom than other tribes in the state, and may prompt some of those tribes to seek the same deal.

Under the agreement, the Spokane Tribe can operate up to five casinos, with a total of 4,700 video gambling machines. That is a number in harmony with other tribes in the state. But the Spokanes can offer much higher stakes at some tables, and will be allowed to operate video gambling machines that will ac-

cept coins or currency, rather than paper tickets.

The Spokanes are the last tribe in Washington that runs a casino without a compact. There are currently 25 Indian casinos in the state, which generate about \$1.2 billion a year using machines that take paper tickets instead of cash.

"We have reached a proposed compact that will serve the tribe and state well," Spokane Chairman Richard Sherwood said in a news release.

The deal, after 15 years of conflict, will provide economic benefits to the tribe and region, and ensures that gambling will remain limited and well-regulated, Sherwood said.

Gambling revenues will be used to improve health care and provide higher education for tribal members, as well as law

enforcement and government services, he said.

The deal was reached between the tribe, the Washington State Gambling Commission and the U.S. Department of the Interior, and still must be approved by all the entities.

"I'd like to thank the Spokane Tribe and state negotiators for their hard work to reach this tentative agreement," Gov. Chris Gregoire said in a news release.

The Spokane Tribe has operated several casinos for years on its reservation north of Spokane. The tribe and the state were not previously able to reach agreement on the terms of a compact.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in 1998 that the state was not negotiating in good faith with the tribe and dropped a federal injunction

against tribal gambling operations. The state and the tribe resumed talks in 2004.

From here, the deal will be the subject of a public hearing within 30 days of the Legislature receiving the proposal. The state Gambling Commission will hold a public hearing Feb. 8 to decide whether to send the proposal to the governor. The tribal chairman, governor and secretary of the interior must all sign the compact.

Under the deal, the Spokane Tribe would be the first allowed to offer cash-operated, single-push-button video-gambling machines.

State Sen. Margarita Prentice, D-Renton, who sits on the Gambling Commission, was sharply critical of the deal. On Wednesday, she told The Seattle Times the proposal was "really

offensive" and a much greater expansion of gambling than the public wanted.

She did not return telephone messages from The Associated Press on Thursday.

Gregoire last year rejected a proposal that would have allowed the tribe to run 7,500 machines in return for giving the state a cut of the proceeds.

The new proposal provides no cut for the state.

The proposal would allow the tribe to raise betting limits on 15 percent of its slot-style machines from \$5 to \$20 a turn. The tribe can also have no more than 2,000 video machines at any one location.

The tribe can also operate up to 75 gambling tables at one facility, and up to 50 at other casinos.

The Spokanes, also for the

first time in the state, could offer high stakes betting on table games such as poker and blackjack for 120 days a year at a few tables at one location. Those high wagers would be available only for players who pass financial screening and aren't known to be problem gamblers.

The compact will make it easier for the tribe to secure financing for a proposed 40,000-to-60,000-square-foot casino and hotel with at least 100 rooms at Chewelah, north of Spokane. It already operates a casino there.

The tribe also wants to open a retail complex at Airway Heights, a Spokane suburb, with a \$67 million casino-hotel and a 2,500-seat entertainment venue. It would need separate federal approval to operate a casino off its reservation.

Potential Lake Tahoe casinos anticipate competition

RENO (AP)—A casino planned east of Sacramento along could drain \$75 million a year from Lake Tahoe's south shore economy, but casinos there plan to tap into new markets to buoy business.

"It is pretty clear that, for the community, it is definitely a threat, not just to gaming, but to tourism in general and many businesses in South Lake Tahoe—lodging, stores that sur-

vive and thrive on tourism," said John Packer, director of communications at Harrah's and Harveys in Stateline.

The new casino is expected to save gamblers from the Sacramento area who would head to Lake Tahoe some 67 miles of driving over Echo Summit, which can be treacherous in winter.

Lakes Entertainment of Minnesota plans to develop and manage the casino for the

Shingle Springs Rancheria of Miwok Indians.

A similar situation occurred when the Thunder Valley Casino opened off Interstate 80 in June 2003, saving gamblers a drive over Donner Summit to Reno and Sparks. That casino had 1,900 slots and 100 table games, almost exactly what is planned at Foothill Oaks.

Thunder Valley took the blame for a slump in Reno and

Sparks casinos that they only appear to be recovering from more than three years later. In May 2003, the month before Thunder Valley opened, Washoe County casinos reported \$93.6 million in revenue.

This year, they reported \$91.2 million, not quite back to the pre-Thunder Valley level, but up 3 percent from 2005 before the recovery. So far this fiscal year, the casinos' revenue is flat with last year.

Companies operating in the region with public stock still cite the casino as a drain on revenue during slow months.

"Casinos in Northern Ne-

vada have dealt with the initial blow that came when California casinos, particularly Thunder Valley, opened," said Packer, whose parent company, Harrah's, also has a Reno casino.

"They have found different ways to work around it. Certainly, there was some loss in business, untracked casino play, but it has been offset for Harrah's in our ability to use our database and Internet marketing to backfill where those losses occurred, to some extent."

Harrah's and Harveys at Tahoe could use the same strategy of direct marketing to Harrah's registered gamblers

nationwide and charter flights into Reno-Tahoe International Airport to replace business lost to Foothill Oaks.

"But the impact could be greater for those that depend more on retail players," Packer said. "The Lakeside Inn, Horizon and Montbleu don't have the database of players that Harrah's has. They are more dependant on the drive-up market." Columbia Sussex owns the Horizon in Stateline. It recently bought the former Caesars Tahoe for \$45 million and spent another \$45 million redesigning it into Montbleu, debuting the new property this year.

Pioneer of Native education programs dies

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP)—Emma Olga Olsen, a pioneer of Native education programs and a longtime Alaska Native Sisterhood leader, died Tuesday. She was 87.

A funeral service was planned Friday at the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall.

Olsen didn't have much chance to advance her education after eighth grade since the high schools were segregated.

"She wanted to go to a high school, but could not do that," said Marie Olson, Emma's niece. "That was one of her goals later in life, to support many of the children that wanted to go to high school."

Olsen was born July 22,

1919, in Dundas Bay to Sam and Sally Hopkins. She was a Yaashundoosteen, of the Tin.aa.Hit (Copper Shield House) of the Kiks.adi, Frog Tribe.

Her parents brought her up in the Alaska Native Brotherhood and instilled a deep appreciation for her culture, Olson said.

"(Her parents) were not only performers for special events, but also at potlatches," Ebona said. "Emma could speak the Tlingit language fluently. She always knew what was happening when people were speaking publicly or at potlatches."

Olsen married her husband of 61 years, Oscar P. Olsen, on April 12, 1945, in Juneau.

She served 15 terms as presi-

dent of Alaska Native Sisterhood Camp 2, where her focus remained on education. She began the Tlingit Tea for Teachers program and supported the Juneau's Indian Studies programs. She also talked about revitalizing the Tlingit language.

"She had an interest in education that included everyone, and particularly the Alaska Native child," said her nephew, Andy Ebona. "She was obviously interested in the high dropout rate and felt that those issues needed to be addressed more firmly. The alternative forms of education were also a priority, especially for those kids that were not succeeding in the regular school system."

Big Foot High School to reconsider logo, nickname

WALWORTH, Wis. (AP) — Big Foot High School is named after Chief Big Foot, the last chief of the Geneva Lake Potawatomi. The school uses his image as one of its logos and uses Chiefs as a nickname.

School officials plan to consider if any changes need to be made after teacher Marsha Ries pre-

sented a letter to the school board in December protesting the use of the chief's image on logos and the use of Chiefs as a school nickname.

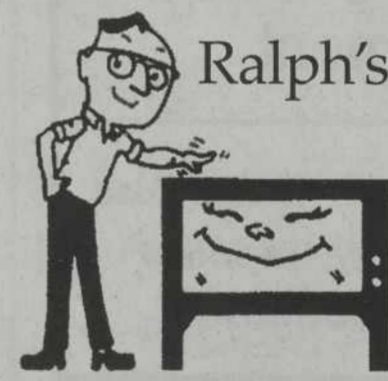
Big Foot High School is one of 39 high schools in Wisconsin that use an American Indian related team name.

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