

Proposal for Indian casino in downtown Kansas City moves ahead

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (AP)—Wyandotte County's Unified Government has endorsed a revenue-sharing agreement with an American Indian tribe that wants to build a casino in downtown Kansas City, Kan.

The agreement comes even as the state is appealing a federal court ruling that allowed the Wyandotte Nation of Oklahoma to open a casino in a former Masonic temple, after more than a decade of controversy.

"We believe it is reckless to proceed with Class II gaming before all legal issues are resolved," said Ashley P. Anstaett, spokeswoman for Kansas Attorney General Paul Morrison.

Anstaett said current law prohibits the tribe from conducting gambling on the site if it is not gaming-eligible Indian land. The state contends that when the tribe bought the half-acre site in 1996, it used federal money not allowed for such purposes, disqualifying the land for a casino.

The 10th Circuit Court of

Appeals in Denver has heard arguments in the case, and lawyers say a ruling is expected soon.

Hal Walker, chief counsel for the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kan., said the agreement approved Thursday was negotiated with the assumption that the state will lose its appeal.

"The consensus among attorneys in all parties is ... that it's very probable, almost without doubt, that (the tribe is) going to win the appeal," Walker said.

Under the agreement approved Thursday, the Wyandotte Nation would reimburse the Unified Government for water, police, fire and other municipal services to its proposed \$20 million casino.

Any casino opened at the site would be restricted to providing only Class II games, which play like slot machines but pit players against each other in networks based on bingo odds. The city has agreed to support the

tribe if it tries to get state approval to add traditional games such as craps and blackjack.

The tribal casino is separate from a proposal to open a state-owned casino in Wyandotte County. That casino would be owned by the state and operated by a private developer.

The Wyandotte tribe briefly offered slots in mobile units on the site, but in 2004, the National Indian Gaming Commission said the land the tribe claimed in downtown Kansas City, Kan., did not qualify as tribal land for gambling purposes.

That decision was overturned last summer by U.S. District Judge Julie Robinson, and it is that ruling the state is appealing.

As the court case goes on, the tribe has hired contractors to resume remodeling work to convert the Masonic Lodge into a casino with around 400 slots and a steakhouse.

"The people of KCK will never be sorry the Wyandottes

are part of their community," Wyandotte Nation Chief Leaford Bearskin said Thursday. "It will be good for both of us."

Thursday's agreement would give the Unified Government 3.5 percent of the first \$10 million in casino revenue, 1 percent from the next \$10 million and one-third of a percent from the third \$10 million. The Unified Government would get nothing from revenue exceeding \$30 million.

The city also agreed to provide free parking in city lots to casino customers.

The agreement also requires the tribe to follow zoning, building and public safety codes similar to those enforced by the city.

If the state wins its appeal, Walker said the casino could not operate. The tribe could still negotiate a formal compact with the state to open a full-scale Class III casino on the site, which the Unified Government has agreed to support.

Minnesota tribal IDs aren't being recognized

BEMIDJI, Minn. (AP)—Some American Indians in Minnesota say their tribal identification cards aren't being recognized as legitimate forms of ID off the reservation, despite a state law that says they can be used in place of state driver's licenses.

The law, passed last year, applies only to instances in which people are required by the state to show identification, such as when buying tobacco or alcohol, or when pawning an item at a pawn shop. But even then, some businesses post signs by cash registers saying that tribal IDs aren't accepted.

Audrey Thayer, coordinator of the Greater Minnesota Justice Project, a program of the American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota, said a lawsuit over tribal IDs has already been filed in Hennepin County, and more suits could be on the way.

"I'm moving rather quickly now to negotiate, and work with the county and the cities in the areas up here so that we don't have to have suits," she said. "No one wants to have suits filed against them."

Kevin Mahto, a member of the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe, knows all about getting his ID rejected.

He lives near a Bemidji pawnshop, and knows owner Don Josefson by name. But when he recently tried to pawn a full-length coat for \$25, he couldn't do it.

Since Josefson's pawn shop is government-regulated, Josefson had to ask for an ID. He can accept Cana-

dian IDs or IDs from other states, but the computer system he's mandated to use doesn't accept tribal ID.

"This is not New York City. This is Bemidji, Minnesota," Josefson said. "I know a good deal of these people personally, and unless they've been lying to me since they were 15, they are who they say they are. But I can't do business with them, because they don't have a Minnesota state-issued ID."

Josefson said he's frustrated because he's losing business, and because he thinks refusing tribal IDs is wrong.

Tribal governments may also run into problems. The new law says tribal IDs must contain security features that make them hard to duplicate or tamper with, but many tribal IDs may not meet those vague standards.

Beltrami County Attorney Tim Faver said the security situation is confusing. He said state agencies are working with tribes to establish clear criteria for secure IDs, but until there's some uniformity, there will continue to be problems.

"It is really not fair in my mind that a clerk in a convenience store or, quite frankly, a city or county government, to be making the determination in a given case as to what ID card meets the requirements of the statute," Faver said. "I think those are standards that need to be further defined and set by the state." American Indian tribes in Minnesota would like to see full recognition of tribal IDs everywhere.

Indian tribe watches its history erode

EDISTO ISLAND, S.C. (AP)—The Spanish Mount shell midden is all but gone. The Edistow tribe that built it, lost. All except for Indian Mary.

Heidi Varner, of the Wassamasaw Tribe of Varnertown Indians, thought about that as she looked over the eroding, oyster shell-riddled bank of Fishing Creek on Edisto Island recently. She and other younger members have been struggling to re-establish the heritage of the Berkeley County tribe whose people for generations wouldn't acknowledge it.

"We have our history here," Varner said.

In records from the 1800s, "Indian Mary," who married into a Varnertown family, identified herself as an Edistow. That makes the inland Wassamasaw people possibly the last living link to the coastal tribe

thought to have been wiped out two centuries ago.

Varner and former tribal chief Chris Weik were at Edisto Beach State Park talking with visitors and cultural educators for the park and other natural and cultural sites along the coast. The presentation was part of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources' public event series.

Edisto is named for the tribe that once lived there. Like other native Lowcountry names, it is a strand in the weave of the place. The weavers are little more than mysteries.

"We know a lot about Native Americans in general, but we know very little about Native Americans in the Lowcountry.

Anything they can share is valuable," said Thomas Thornton of Charleston Parks and Recreation.

A shell midden is a pile of

discarded oyster and clam shells, the leftovers of feasts from as long as 4,000 years ago. Middens and shell rings can be found up and down the South Carolina coast. They are among the few visible remnants of the pre-Colonial tribes there who tended to roam and built villages with materials that rotted away.

The middens and rings were long thought to be trash dumps. Recent excavations suggest at least some of the rings were layered and structured in other words, built with a purpose.

The Spanish Mount midden is in the Edisto park along the creek behind Edisto Beach. It was mentioned in a 1630s journal as being as tall as a tower, tall enough to be seen from the sea over the scrub dunes that constituted the beach then. Excavations suggest that it, too, might have been built as a ring and collapsed under its own

weight.

Today, most of the midden's shells have fallen from the bluff into the creek. The rest jut like a fractured tooth from the bank mud. The remnants are a sought-after cultural site on the island; park staff have stabilized the bank with riprap and built a wooden walkway down from the bluff to view it.

It's a pointed juxtaposition the shards of an American-Indian structure so singular that a Colonial explorer was struck by it, built by a tribe lost to colonial history, with the descendants of both groping to restore that link. Weik, who was taught native pottery by his mother, laid out a challenge like that for the people in Varnertown.

"You know bits and pieces. They know bits and pieces. We can put those pieces together and be a tribe again."

Tribes receive \$6 million to battle drug abuse

WASHINGTON (AP)—Montana and Wyoming tribes will receive almost \$6 million in government grants over the next three years to battle substance abuse, Montana's congressional delegation said Thursday.

The Montana-Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council will use the money to help American Indians who need substance abuse treatment but can't afford it. Priority will be given to those suffering from methamphet-

amine addiction, which has been a rampant problem in Indian country.

Montana's two Democratic senators, Max Baucus and Jon Tester, and Republican Rep. Denny Rehberg praised the

grants and council's programs.

"Tackling substance abuse problems with programs like this will lead to better opportunities for jobs, education, housing and law enforcement in Indian Country," Tester said.

Lessons of the past abound at Trail of Tears powwow

HOPKINSVILLE, Ky. (AP)—Colors swirled as voices melded into the drum beat and dancers zigzagged around the circle.

Outside the circle, Lorinda Proctor of Clarksville, Tenn., a spectator instead of a competitor this year, watched at the Trail of Tears Intertribal Powwow.

"It's so family-oriented and makes you feel like you're so connected when you come," Proctor said of the powwow.

Her father is an American Indian, and Proctor began going to powwows about 12 years ago as a way to become closer to her heritage. In past years, she has participated in the dancing competitions.

"Coming to these powwows kind of gives you back that heritage," she said. "I don't think there are enough events like this."

Powwow Chairman Roger Richey said that connection is why the powwow and the Trail of Tears Park are so important.

"This is holy ground for them," he said, referring to the two Cherokee chiefs who are buried at the park in Hopkinsville, as well as the thousands of other people who died on the forced march to Oklahoma beginning in 1838. "This is their celebration, and we're happy we can give that back to the Cherokee Nation."

Attendance was down this year compared with previous years, hitting between 4,000 and 5,000, Richey said. Attendance has dwindled since a 2003 crowd of about 15,000.

"We didn't have a whole lot of dancers, didn't have a whole lot of people, but we did have an outstanding powwow," he

said.

Next year, Richey hopes to fix that with a bigger powwow that should draw more people. He hopes to bring in some different events, including the Aztec fire dancers, an exhibition group that performed at past powwows.

Christopher Baker, 11, of Hopkinsville and his three cohorts, 10-year-olds Dexter Schuzer and Lance Baker and 8-year-old John Schuzer, seemed pretty excited, if slightly embarrassed, about joining the dance at the powwow, even if they were there because of school.

"We're studying about Native Americans in social studies, and our teacher wanted us to come over the weekend and come back and tell him all about it," Christopher said. "We're learn-

ing about the same thing in arts and humanities."

The boys are all in fifth grade at Belmont Elementary where teacher Chris Bentzel gave the extra credit assignment of going to the powwow.

"I like the powwow costumes," John said.

Throughout the day, spectators like the boys were invited to join the dance in between competitions, and the blue-jean-clad of all ages danced right along with those in feathers and buckskin.

Danny Chappell of Oak Grove brought his daughter, 2-year-old Dayna, to introduce her to their Cherokee background.

"It's always important to bring her out here and let her enjoy it," he said. "To let her see what our relatives did in the past."

Navajo Nation considering upgrading landing strips

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. (AP) — The Navajo Nation is considering upgrades to seven air strips on the reservation.

The tribe wants the strips at Crownpoint, Shiprock, Oljato, Tuba City, Chinle, Kayenta and Ganado to become airports, said the spokesman for the Navajo Department of Transportation, Rutherford Ashley.

"The reservation is a vast place, and airports would make all these areas a little bit more accessible," he said. "We could start a shuttle service open to the public to fly from Tuba City to Crownpoint, and the airports would generate funds that would benefit the tribe."

An airport at Window Rock, the capital of the Navajo Nation, is the only air strip on the reservation with a terminal, hangar and navigation systems, Ashley said.

In Shiprock, for example, the air strip is powered by a generator and has no running water, said Wilfred Brown, airport pro-

gram supervisor for the Navajo transportation agency.

On average, five planes land in Shiprock each week, Brown said. Most flights are emergency medical evacuations.

"There are no runway lights, water or sewer," he said. "There are no buildings except for a shelter where patients wait for emergency flights."

The department plans a meeting Wednesday in Window Rock to discuss air travel on the reservation.

Ashley said the transportation agency hopes to use grants from the state and the Federal Aviation Administration to eventually improve the strip and build a terminal.

"People don't know there's a landing strip out there," Ashley said. "This could be the beginning of a better quality of life, better access to health care, more tourism and private businesses. This is going to generate revenue."

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