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Spilyay Tymoo

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Discussion begins over temporary casino

By Duran Bobb
Spilyay Tymoo

Tribal leaders said they are hoping to have the temporary highway 26 casino operational by as early as Christmas or at least by Spring 2012, as a "financial shot in the arm" to provide a needed surge in short-term revenues.

Kah-Nee-Ta's expansion into the community of Warm Springs would have several benefits, said Deepak Sehgal, chairman for the Kah-Nee-Ta board of directors, which recommended the move.

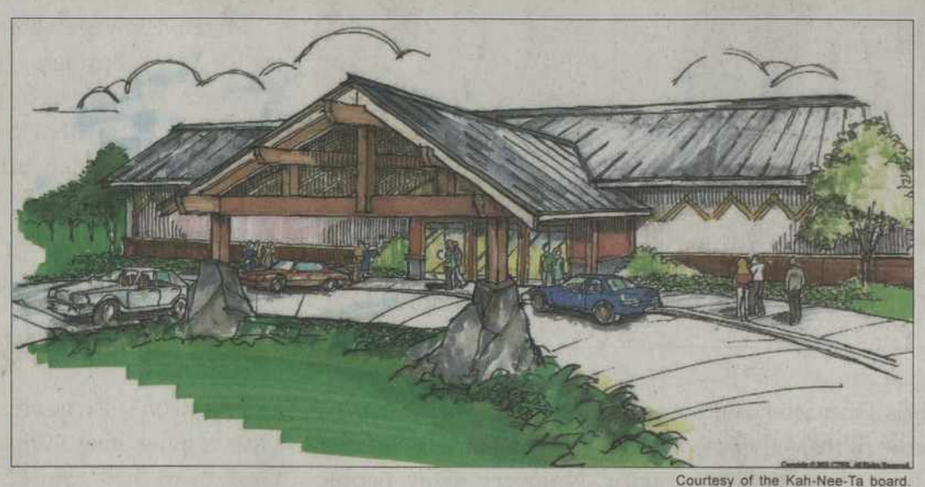
"Right now the casino is making a limited amount of revenue which is not adequate to cover all of the various needs of the Tribes. With the revenue being divided up for tribal dividends and expenses for Cascade Locks, Kah-Nee-Ta is left with a large number of renovation projects going unfunded."

"If we move the casino to the community of Warm Springs, it's projected that we could net about three to four times more than we are now making at Kah-Nee-Ta per year."

Once operational, the Cascade Locks casino would generate profits of more than $140 million annually.

As it stands, the casino at Kah-Nee-Ta draws 60 percent of its business from tribal members. Thirty-eight percent of all customers drive more than one hour to the casino. And presently two percent of casino profits come from visitors out of Portland.

In comparison, the temporary casino would attract 25 percent of its business from tribal members, 75 percent from visitors who drive within one hour of Warm Springs, and 3 percent from Portland residents.



Courtesy of the Kah-Nee-Ta board.

Conceptual drawing of the temporary casino by the Plaza.

The latest counts show that peak traffic counts on highway 26 are as high as 6,500 vehicles per day. "We could easily pull in many of these visitors, especially during the weekend," said Sehgal.

The area being considered for the temporary casino is west of the plaza, which is tribally owned land. An area east of the plaza (99 percent tribally owned) may serve as additional parking for a structure about double the size as the casino at Kah-Nee-Ta.

"Several concepts for the temporary casino have been presented to Tribal Council for consideration", Sehgal said. "However, at this time a decision has not been finalized on the look and feel of the structure."

Plans do, however, call for a solid structure, not a tent, which would cost anywhere from $10 to $12 million to build. The Kah-Nee-Ta board said that they would like to use local engineers and architects.

Location

The land next to the Plaza was chosen for a number of different reasons. First, it is located right on highway 26, which has the highest traffic counts on the reservation. Then, water and sewer are present. There's an electric power station right next door. "All of these reasons makes this the best site to place a temporary casino in the shortest amount of time," Sehgal said.

The temporary casino could be home to as many as 600 slot machines and would provide 200 additional jobs on the reservation. Currently, the casino at Kah-Nee-Ta has 300 slots machines and provides 75 to 100 jobs.

Unemployment on the reservation has been estimated to be as high as 75 percent, and these new jobs close to the community should help the economy, Sehgal said.

"We're hoping to stimulate private businesses in the area as well," Sehgal said. "This temporary casino will provide funding for Cascade Locks, provide money back the tribes, provide funding for renovations at Kah-Nee-Ta, and would serve as a permanent building for future tribal needs."

The work ahead includes informing the tribal members, completing the environmental and cultural clearances, and having the attorneys negotiate minor changes to the compact, and developing the engineering and design of the building so that construction could begin.

The temporary casino would not stand alone, Sehgal said. "It'll be joined at the hip with Kah-Nee-Ta. It'll have its staffing, but will still work on joint marketing with the resort in order to get the best of both operations."

For example, shuttles would transport resort guests to the temporary casino. And casino guests who would like to see special concerts and partake in events would be shuttled to Kah-Nee-Ta. The temporary casino would operate until the permanent Cascade Locks casino opens.

Please see CASINO PLAN on page 9

BIA to take down some older structures

By Dave McMechan
Spilyay Tymoo

Tribal Council last week authorized the removal of several old BIA-owned buildings on the reservation.

In consulting with the chief operations officer and director of tribal Utilities, Council determined that buildings cannot be renovated.

The structures have problems such as asbestos and lead paint, and old wiring and plumbing. Council had the option of accepting title to the buildings from the BIA, but rejected the offer.

Removal of the buildings, by the BIA at the agency's expense, will provide space for new building development, in accordance with the downtown development plan, said Chief Operations Officer Urbana Ross.

The BIA will conduct tests on other buildings that the agency owns, to determine if they are worth keeping.

The tribes will then have the option of taking title to these other buildings, if Council finds them worth owning.

The buildings that are to be removed are mostly around the campus area. There are no residents living in the structures.

Please see OLD BUILDINGS on 9

Fluhr is making most of fire career

By Duran Bobb
Spilyay Tymoo

Lynn Fluhr is a tribal member, wife, the fire chief of Grass Valley, the fire chief of Sherman County, a full-time fire medic in Warm Springs, and a mother of three. She is the daughter of Herb Graybael and Earlynne Squiemphen, the grand-daughter of Earl and Rita.

One night recently, Lynn went through a fire rescue magazine with her middle son, Aaron, 4. She taught him the words hot, bad, fires, ouchies. And about a week later, something frightening happened.

"My husband accidentally dropped a pot holder on the stove burner," Lynn recalls. "Then he turned his back to mix dinner on the kitchen island, so he didn't see the flames that sprang up."

What happened could have been a different, terrible story. The stove sits in one corner of the kitchen, and it would have been easy for the flames to get out of control.

"But Aaron remembered," Lynn said. He used what he learned, pointing to the stove and saying hot, hot, hot, bad, hot."

Watch little Aaron Fluhr. He may take after his mother.

Lynn and her family are the only Indians that live in Sherman County. She is married to Glenn Fluhr. The two met when she worked with Fire and Safety and he was a tribal police officer. Later, they married and moved. She became the Grass Valley fire chief in 2002, at the age of 22. Last May, she was elected Sherman County Fire Chief. She graduated from high school in Madras in 1996, and participated in online college courses.

Fire Chief Lynn Fluhr

At one point in her life, she dreamed of becoming a mechanic. Then one summer when she was 15, she enrolled in the cadet program with Warm Springs Fire and Safety. "I was hooked," she said. "I was raised to always help people."

Connie Carlin of the National Native American Fire Chiefs Association said Lynn may be the only female Native American in the nation serving as fire chief off-rez.

On top of serving as Sherman County Fire Chief, Lynn also serves as full-time fire medic in Warm Springs. Three days a week the commute for Lynn, she estimates, is about 100 miles one-way.

But all of her duties never cut into family time. "They love fire stuff as much as I do," Lynn said. "My oldest son just got voted president of the cadet program at South Sherman Fire and Rescue. This is a big achievement, since he is the youngest out of the group. But he was raised in the fire department."

See FLUHR on page 9

Yvonne Iverson photographs.

Lincoln's Powwow

The Simnasho Community hosted the Thirty-Fourth Annual Lincoln's Birthday Powwow, Feb. 11-13.

From Warm Springs some of the notable contest winners were Mileena Edwards (third in Teen Girls Traditional); Tilda Walsey (third in Ladies Traditional); and Arlita Rhoan (third, Golden Age Women).

For the full results of the Lincoln's Birthday Powwow, please see page 8.

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