

Red Cliff band bets on new casino

BAYFIELD, Wis. (AP) — Forget Las Vegas glitz.

The new Legendary Waters Resort & Casino three miles north of Bayfield is designed to fit into the scenic South Shore, not to stand out like a neon sign.

Picturesque, the expansive two- to three-story \$23.5 million complex sits on the shore of Lake Superior on the Red Cliff Indian Reservation with a view of the Apostle Islands. Built with an earth-friendly approach and designed to be welcoming, it opened quietly before its grand opening.

It replaced the Red Cliff band's former casino, Isle Vista Casino, a small, dated, sorry-looking casino directly across Wisconsin Highway 13. The old casino closed Aug. 3, with its fate yet to be decided; the new 78,000-square-foot complex opened Aug. 9.

"There's no comparison," said Jim Bard, who manages the new casino's gift shop and 47-slip marina.

"This is state of the art, top of the line," said Bard, a Red Cliff band member who recently returned to the area. "This is a growing business. We want to make things as nice for our customers as possible."

With a modern North Woods motif many tourists hanker for, Legendary Waters is poised to be a boon for the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, which owns and operates it.

With the switch to the new casino-resort, its staff has been boosted from 95 to 217 employees, with 80 percent of them band members, said Jeff Gordon, Legendary Waters' general manager.

Attendance is up. Revenues are up. And occupancy of the hotel's nearly 50 rooms has been at least 70 percent full since it opened, thanks to an increasing number of tour groups, he said. The rooms, all with lake views, are going for \$79 or \$99 per night; premier

suites are \$179 a night.

The casino is open from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m., but eventually it will go to 24 hours. And that means hiring even more employees.

While there is no per capita payment to band members out of the casino profits, its success means jobs and needed economic development on the reservation, including a new health clinic, Gordon said.

The economic impact of the new casino and resort is expected to extend to the surrounding communities. That's because Legendary Waters is a destination resort with amenities that go beyond gambling to include dining, lodging, a marina for seasonal and transient boaters, pool and showers and lockers for campers, kayakers snowmobilers and boaters. It also offers shuttle services to and from Bayfield and surrounding communities.

"This is a legitimate destina-

tion resort where a family or group of people can take a one- or two-hour drive and really enjoy themselves," Gordon said. "It truly is a resort."

To get there, visitors have to travel through neighboring communities. And they're going to be stopping somewhere for lunch, rest stops and to get gas, noted Rachael Lamkin, the casino and resort's marketing manager.

Cari Obst, executive director of the Bayfield Chamber of Commerce, agreed. It will bring more people to the area, give Bayfield more exposure and provide another activity for people, she said.

"It is absolutely beautiful on a beautiful piece of land," she said. "They have built something so appealing that it will have a major economic impact."

Moreover, it will be open year-round, continuing to draw people after the traditional tourist season ends, she said.

Sentence reduced in '75 slaying

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Denver man convicted of first-degree murder for his role in the 1975 shooting death of an American Indian Movement activist has had his federal prison sentence reduced from life to 20 years.

In February 2004, a federal jury in Rapid City, S.D., convicted Arlo Looking Cloud in the slaying of fellow AIM activist Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, a 30-year-old member of the Mi'kmaq tribe of Nova Scotia.

Bill alters criteria for Navajo Nation justices

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — A Navajo Nation legislator is pushing to raise the qualifications for tribal Supreme Court justices, prompting concern that tribal sovereignty would diminish and applicants would be less focused on Navajo law if the proposal is approved.

Russell Begaye has sponsored legislation to require justices on the country's largest American Indian reservation to have a law degree and be licensed by the state bar association. Tribal law now calls for a bachelor's degree and membership in the Navajo Nation Bar Association.

Begaye said the changes would produce more well-rounded justices and position the Navajo Nation to adopt a federal law that gives tribes increased sentencing authority if it chooses. A Tribal Council committee he serves on approved the bill Monday.

"The argument for not increasing the qualification is very weak," he said. "I think it's time that we raise the bar for these critical positions on our nation."

The tribe's Judicial Branch has criticized the proposal, saying it has successfully created a unique tribal court system that increasingly relies on traditions and customs, and a nonadversarial way of solving disputes. To mandate state bar licenses would turn the focus from being well versed in Navajo language and culture to expertise in external laws, said Chief Justice Herb Yazzie.

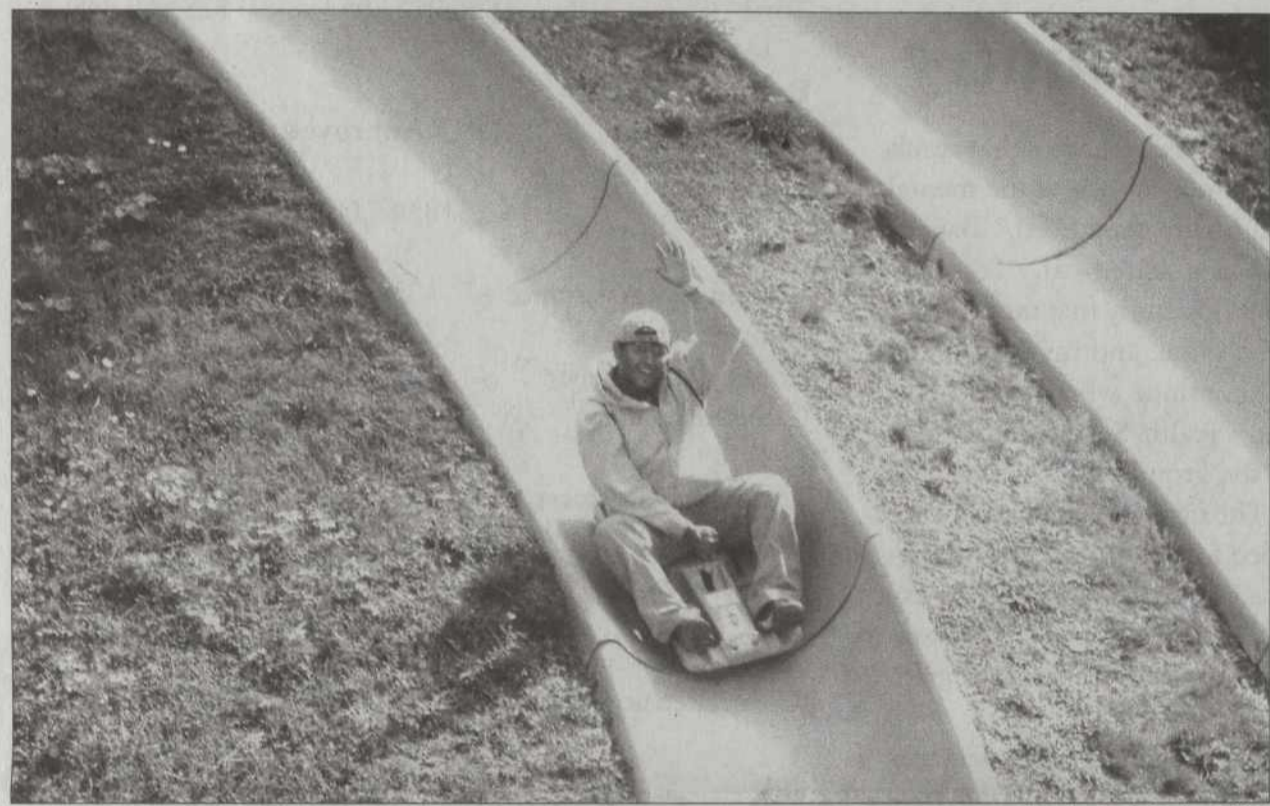
"We oversee a living tribal justice system reflecting the importance of our tribal community, not a borrowed state or federal system in which our culture is merely anthropological speculation," Yazzie said.

Officials in the Judicial Branch want the proposal delayed to give the tribal bar association a chance to survey its members and find out how many would meet the qualifications. They've also suggested it be amended to require that only two justices on the three-person panel meet the qualifications and to allow two years to obtain state bar membership.

The proposal doesn't apply to the tribe's District Court judges.

Begaye used the federal Tribal Law and Order Act signed into law last year to support the proposed qualifications. Under the federal law, the sentencing authority for tribes increased from one year to three years for a single crime. But sending people to jail for longer periods means that tribes first must provide public defenders, establish or update criminal codes and have law-trained judges.

Yazzie questioned the reliance on the federal law, saying the drafters of that law abandoned a state-bar licensure requirement for tribal judges in recognition of tribal bar memberships. The Supreme Court justices also do not sentence convicted offenders. Rather, they hear appeals from the district court and issue final decisions in cases.



Wyle Yazzie rides the Ski Bowl slide at the recent Native American Day celebration.

Wyoming tribe uses tradition to combat suicides

CASPER, Wyo. (AP) — It began inside a jail cell, where a young man hanged himself.

What followed was a cascade of death that threatened to engulf the Wind River Indian Reservation.

During August and September of 1985, nine young people killed themselves. Most were Northern Arapahos.

Four of the victims were between the ages of 14 and 19, and five between 23 and 26.

Three additional victims, between the ages of 18 and 23, had ties to the reservation and to some of the other victims.

Eighty-eight verified suicide attempts or threats also were recorded, the majority by young people 13 to 19 years old.

Mental health experts from around the nation tried to intervene.

"But it wasn't doing any good," Nelson White Sr., an Arapaho elder, recalled.

National media descended on the scene, an intrusion many people resented as insensitive and bent on sensationalism. One television crew tried to crash a victim's funeral. Eventually, tribal leaders barred the press from Indian land.

Alcohol was a direct contributing factor in four of the deaths. But in the absence of concrete answers, larger causes remained matters of conjecture.

At the height of the episode, an Arapaho elder remembered that certain ceremonies had been performed during an epi-

demio many years earlier.

Prayers were said, and offerings made to the four directions and to the Creator, to purify and restore harmony in a manner consistent with traditional beliefs.

Elders Nelson White Sr. and Crawford White said that's when the deaths stopped.

Their account is corroborated by a scientific review of the incident.

In a journal article, Margene Tower of the Indian Health Service referred to a "traditional medicine" ceremony that happened at the height of the epidemic.

"This ceremony was held following the ninth suicide," she wrote. "It was an important cultural and spiritual event that aided in the resolution of grief and increased cohesiveness in the community. No further deaths occurred after this ceremony was held."

She noted that while suicide attempts remained abnormally high for two months after the ninth deaths, these soon subsided as well.

It was the power of community and a people's prayer that broke the deadly cycle, Nelson White Sr. said: "We belong to the Creator."

What happened among the Northern Arapahos in 1985 has not been forgotten.

Efforts to forestall suicides today incorporate ceremonies conducted in the Arapaho language, talking circles, sweat lodges, and involvement of elders, all woven together in a

"The whole tribe's a family. One way or another, we're related."

kind of community safety net.

Trained suicide interveners watch for early signs of trouble. Both the Northern Arapahos and the Eastern Shoshones with whom they share the Wind River reservation have suicide prevention programs.

These efforts have been largely successful.

In 2009, an 18-year-old woman shot herself to death in Arapahoe, according to records of the Fremont County coroner. Before that, a young person had not died by suicide since 2003, when a 10-year-old Fort Washakie boy killed himself.

Between 2000 and 2010, 116 people in Fremont County killed themselves. Twenty-seven, or 23 percent, were American Indian.

Chaos erupted. A 15-year-old boy threatened to harm himself with a knife; screaming and confusion ensued. The cops wanted to jolt the boy with a Taser gun; nobody wanted him to run.

Into this tumult stepped Telano Groesbeck, only a couple of weeks out of suicide prevention training.

"I was scared," he said. "My heart was pumping." Would he say the wrong thing and make matters worse?

Groesbeck began searching

for some thread that would establish a connection. And among the Northern Arapaho, there's always a connection.

"The whole tribe's a family," Crawford White said. "One way or another, we're related."

On this occasion, Groesbeck knew the teenager's dad, which established some common ground. Slowly, a potentially lethal situation was defused.

The Northern Arapaho tribe provides within its structure a support network for early intervention.

A distraught young person confides in a friend, who alerts an aunt, who tells Groesbeck, who invites the young person to a talking circle or a youth sweat lodge.

Groesbeck said depression and suicidal thoughts often are intertwined with drugs and alcohol abuse.

In a sense, such behaviors are a slow motion form of self-destruction: "They're killing themselves doing it," he said.

The roots of destructive behavior can be complex, but Groesbeck said the pernicious impact of bullying is sometimes missed. A child bullied at school might also be bullied in reservation housing by the same tormentors, and so abuse can be unrelenting.

"The answer's always within the kid," he said. "You have to listen."

Suicide prevention efforts often are high-profile. Harmony Spoonhunter, director of Eastern Shoshone Tribal Health, noted that a suicide prevention

powwow was held in June.

Powwows are major community events. They can be used as an opportunity to share information and galvanize community action.

Suicide prevention programs in schools also are common, and both tribes actively seek to train people in suicide prevention.

George Leonard, suicide prevention coordinator for the Northern Arapahos, likened the stirring of suicidal thoughts to a wild river. The goal is to rescue a young person at risk before he or she reaches the falls.

Talking circles and sweat lodges provide young people with opportunities to learn more about their language, their culture and traditional spirituality, and therefore themselves, he said.

"These kids have it in here," Leonard said, tapping his heart.

At age 14, Daisy Norse was depressed and suicidal.

That was two years ago. Today, the Wyoming Indian High School student is making plans for her future. She credits the change to medication and participation in the Tribal Youth Program, which offers sweat lodges for young American Indians.

At first, Daisy wasn't impressed with the sweat lodges. "I really didn't want to go in," she said. "It felt like boring to me. It just didn't seem that cool at the time."

But after a while, the traditional practice began to resonate. "I found that way I could pray

to the Creator about my problems," she said.

And not just prayers about her problems, but also more expansive prayers for her relatives, cancer victims, starving children, blessings for people facing all manner of difficult circumstances.

With the help of modern medication and traditional practice, Daisy found her way through the darkness.

Suicide prevention efforts on the Wind River reservation have not gone unnoticed.

A year ago, Northern Arapaho elders were called upon to help stop a suicide outbreak claiming the lives of young people on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota.

"The way it was done, it was low key. There was no press, no news," Crawford White said. "It was kept quiet."

At a powwow later in Denver, a tearful Lakota man thanked the Northern Arapahos for their help.

Even more recently, people at the Crow Creek reservation of South Dakota contacted Arapaho elders to help them break another cycle of suicides.

Nelson White Sr. said news media often pounce on the negative, but there are many young people who have walked away from the darkness, hold jobs and have finished school.

Traditional ceremonies, community, spiritual wellness—it's all tied together. "We're a family. We take care of each other," Crawford White said.