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Finishing construction, opening soon

By Dave McMechan
Spilyay Tymo

Work crews last week moved the gaming machines from Kah-Nee-Ta to the new casino. The furniture for the new building is arriving this week.

The opening dedication ceremonies, for tribal members and their guests, is fast-approaching: The dedication is set for Saturday, Feb. 4, from 1-6 p.m. The general public is invited after six.

The grand opening is Friday and Saturday, Feb. 24-25. The new Indian Head Casino is 40,000 square feet in size, and will house 500 slot machines, a restaurant, gift shop, snack bar, and offices.

The casino is about twice the size of the previous Indian Head Casino at Kah-Nee-Ta, which opened in 1996.

At the Highway 26 location, the casino will draw more visitors from Madras, Redmond and Bend. Meanwhile, an average of 8,000 cars, many traveling between Portland and Bend, drive by the location each day.

Many new jobs

The architecture of the new casino is inspired by images of Celilo Falls fishing scaffolds. Construction began nine months ago, in May of 2011.

"Right now, we're one day ahead



Casino and construction employees are on scene during the final building phase.

Dave McMechan/Spilyay

of schedule," Ken Billingsley, casino general manager said.

Teamwork has been the key to a

smooth transition from Kah-Nee-Ta to the Highway 26 casino, Billingsley said. "When we work together and

communicate, and everyone does their job, then things get done very smoothly," he said.

To Vendors

Tribal member vendors with an interest in either selling or consigning jewelry, crafts or art to the Cedar Basket Gift Shop are encouraged to set up an appointment for Friday, Jan. 20.

If you have an interest, please call Janell Smith at 541-325-1472 for more information, or to schedule an appointment.

The new Indian Head Casino will be a 24-hour operation, employing 240 people. One-hundred-and-forty of the jobs are new, while the others are transfers from Kah-Nee-Ta, said Margie Tuckta, director of gaming Human Resources.

Her department received about 400 applications for the new jobs, she said. Probably the hardest to fill has been the chef for the casino restaurant. This job is expected to be filled soon, Tuckta said.

Meanwhile, no decisions has yet been made on the future use of the area at Kah-Nee-Ta that housed the casino since 1996.

Council again rejects Biomass

A deeply divided debate ended ten years of research, planning and negotiations for the Biomass project.

The tribes' ten member Council appeared to be evenly split over the merits of the project, which was a week away from formal closing of the essential business transaction.

Council Vice-Chairman Ron Suppah earlier this month chaired a special meeting called by six members under the authority of the Constitution and By-laws.

A majority of the Council then voted to not approve and move forward with a 37-megawatt Biomass Energy Project on the reservation.

One reason why five members voted against it was because there was no way to require tribal member employment at the project. The developer had agreed instead to provide tribal member scholarships until member employment was at 60 percent of total payroll.

The Biomass project was originally proposed as a forest health initiative to

Jobs for tribal members, annual payments and fuel procurement were among central issues.

reduce fire fuels.

Particularly since 1996, there have been 15 catastrophic wild fires that have burned several hundred thousand-acres of the tribes' forest lands, destroying homes and threatening community safety.

The Biomass Project as proposed would have enabled the tribes to treat forested areas to remove heavy accumulations of residual forest matter and ladder fuels, which would have begun to address tribal leaders concerns over the number of wild fires that have come off federal forest lands and on to the reservation.

There is also a growing need to treat thousands of acres of dead and dying forest areas infected by disease and harmful insect infestation. A dev-

astating attack from mountain pine beetles has killed thousands of acres of trees in conditional use zones that are adjacent to federal forestlands to the west and south of the reservation.

The Biomass Energy Project development had evolved over a ten year period.

The project ran into a wide range of development challenges associated with the national economy, investment, production, and renewable energy tax credits related financing and vital business partnerships.

The effort produced a partnership and \$150 million financing agreement to build the Warm Springs' facility.

Council concerns

The commercial terms, environmental and economic elements of the proposed transaction with Oregon Bio Energy failed to win approval of a quorum the Tribal Council after several reviews.

Please see BIOMASS on page 4

Telecom hosting Jan. grand opening

The Warm Springs Telecom will hold a ribbon cutting ceremony at the new tribal telecom central office and customer service center on Friday, Jan. 27.

The ceremony will begin at 11:30 a.m., followed by an afternoon of activities and food for the community to celebrate the newest tribal telecom company in the United States. The Warm Springs Telecom office is located at 4202 Holliday Street, at the Warm Springs industrial park.

After more than five years of planning, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs is now the ninth tribal telecom company in the country.

Like many tribes across the U.S., members of the Warm Springs tribal nation have been underserved by the telecom companies serving the community. Rather than waiting for improvements, the Confederated Tribes decided to take control of their telecom future and build their own company.

Warm Springs Telecom will offer basic land-line wired telephone service and broadband, high-speed Internet access.

"Telecommunications is a critical infrastructure that we can't continue to live without," says Telecom board chairman Sylvester 'Sal' Sahme.

"Education, jobs, healthcare and economic development all rely on having sophisticated telecommunications. We can't afford to lag fur-

ther behind other Americans.

"We needed to do this and build out this new company to serve our people and bring us into future," Sahme said. "This is an exciting day for our tribes."

Warm Springs Telecom Operations Manager Jose Matanane, formerly the general manager for tribally owned Fort Mojave Telecom, commented recently:

"When I started at Ft. Mojave, we had many of the same problems as Warm Springs now has, including very high unemployment. Not only did the tribal telco create jobs, but it created opportunities for tribal members and businesses to use the network to expand their personal businesses and the tribe to do further economic development. The unemployment rate has gone down at Ft. Mojave as the phone company built out its network."

Tribal Lifeline

The Warm Springs Telecom will build a state-of-the-art fiber and fixed wireless network and eventually serve everyone on the reservation with telephone and Broadband.

As it also has received its federal Eligible Telecommunications Carrier certification (ETC), the company will also be able to offer Tribal Lifeline services, enabling eligible tribal members to receive telephone services for \$1/month.

Please see TELECOM on page 3

Survey asks about Chieftainship

A survey was mailed out last week to Wasco descendants in the Agency District.

The survey asks whether the question of Wasco Chieftainship succession should be put to a vote.

If the responder answers that the

matter should not be put to a vote, then the survey asks for a suggestion as to how to proceed.

A total of 1,244 survey forms were mailed out. Please return the completed form to the ballot drop box at the administration building.

Miss Warm Springs Pageant next week

The Miss Warm Springs Pageant is next Thursday evening, Jan. 19, at five o'clock at the Agency Longhouse. Following the competition, Miss Warm Springs 2011 Tamera Moody will present the crown to the new Miss Warm Springs.

The contestants are judged on a variety of categories: There is a question and answer session, regarding the contestants' knowledge of the reservation and the contestant's tribe, traditional foods, ceremonies, clothing, crafts and social activities, and tribal history. Other judging categories are the candidates' poise and personality, beauty and appearance.

Miss Warm Springs represents the tribes at many events in Indian Country during the year.



Beadwork for the 2012 crown and banner are by Sandra Danzuka.

Tyonna Iverson/Spilyay