

Spirit Mountain Casino details upcoming changes

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Spirit Mountain Casino Interim General Manager Roy Rhode outlined upcoming changes at the casino during the Feb. 10 General Council meeting held at the Monarch Hotel & Conference Center in Clackamas.

At the Feb. 25 board meeting, a new porte-cochere — a porch large enough for a vehicle to drive through — will be considered for the Legends entrance on the northwest side of the casino.

In mid-May, the grand opening of the new Cedar Plank Buffet will occur. The new buffet will seat 450 customers.

Starting in mid-May, the old buffet area will be remodeled into a sports bar.

Beginning in June, the new Playworld building will be remodeled to accommodate the arcade, and in July and August the remodel of the old buffet area will be completed and house an expanded deli.

In October, remodeling of the Summit View area is scheduled.

Rhode said the grand opening of the new south expansion will be held in mid-May. The south expansion



Photo by Dean Rhodes

Spirit Mountain Casino Interim General Manager Roy Rhode briefed Tribal members, staff and Tribal Council about upcoming improvements to the casino during the Feb. 10 General Council meeting held in Clackamas.

sion will house the events center and concert area/bingo hall.

The bingo hall will encompass 17,600 square feet and hold up to 1,800 for concerts.

Rhode announced scheduled concerts at Spirit Mountain, including comedian Dana Carvey

and rock band Blues Traveler in May, Crosby, Stills & Nash in June, Clint Black in July, Wynonna Judd in August and comedian Dennis Miller in September.

Rhode said the south expansion supports the vision of turning Spirit Mountain into a "premiere

entertainment destination." It also provides more gambling competition for the state Lottery and other casinos and will protect Spirit Mountain's market share.

He added it should improve guest services and attract new and retain old guests.

In other casino news, Rhode said a replica statue of the one cast for the Veterans Memorial will be placed in the courtyard between Spirit Mountain Lodge and the south expansion, adding a Tribal cultural element to the casino property.

Rhode added that the casino currently employs 1,576 people, including 143 Tribal members. Of Tribal members, 30.8 percent are in professional and/or leadership positions.

In other action during the Feb. 10 General Council meeting:

◆ It was announced that the next General Council meeting will be 11 a.m. Sunday, March 2, at the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde.

◆ Michael James, Tribal Elder Ruby Bigoni and Bob Nagel won the \$50 door prizes and Philomena Hoehnke won the \$100 door prize. ■

Projects would affect casino dividends

MEETING continued
from front page

ful, would reduce Spirit Mountain Casino's dividend to the Tribe by 34.6 percent to as much as 47.7 percent.

Martin said that if the unlikely perfect storm of all three projects becoming reality occurred, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde would see a "severely significant" reduction to its casino revenue and the ensuing Tribal dividend.

Martin's presentation, "Why We Oppose Off-Reservation Gaming," was the centerpiece of the Feb. 10 General Council meeting held at the Monarch Hotel & Conference Center in Clackamas. More than 100 Tribal members and staff attended the 4.5-hour meeting.

Although Martin's presentation painted a potentially bleak economic picture, it also stressed that the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde are not battling other Tribes, such as the Cowlitz and Warm Springs, but are instead opposed to gambling policy changes that would be bad for Oregon, the Northwest and nation.

"Oregon has the most gambling options of any state," Martin said. "It's just the right amount ... a delicate balance."

Martin said several facts back the Grand Ronde Tribe's opposition to the two Tribal casino proposals.

First, the Cowlitz and Warm Springs are both proposing to build their casinos on land that has ancestral and historic ties to the 27 Tribes and bands that became the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

In Washington, the Cowlitz's

What can you do?

Attend upcoming public meetings on the Cascade Locks casino draft environmental impact statement.

Meetings are set for:

- ◆ 6 p.m. March 3 at Kah-Nee-Ta High Desert Resort & Casino in Warm Springs.
- ◆ 6 p.m. March 10 at the Gorge Pavilion, 355 Wa-Na-Pah St., Cascade Locks.
- ◆ 6 p.m. March 12 at Rock Creek Center, 710 S.W. Rock Creek Drive, Stevenson, Wash.
- ◆ 6 p.m. March 13 at Double-Tree Lloyd Center, 1000 N.E. Multnomah, Portland.
- ◆ 6 p.m. March 17 at Hood River Middle School, 1602 May St., Hood River.

All meetings are scheduled to end by 8:30 p.m.

Also, Tribal members can contact members of Congress, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Gov. Ted Kulongoski and local elected officials and urge them to support the "One Tribe, One Casino, On Reservation Lands" policy.

Tribal members also can write a letter to the editor to express their opposition to the possible expansion of off-reservation casinos in Oregon.

Contact information can be found at www.grandronde.org or www.nogorgecasino.com.

territory never included La Center and was farther north near present-day Toledo and Vader. The Warm Springs Tribe, which already has a casino on its reservation in central Oregon, wants to build in Cascade Locks, which is part of the Walala's ancestral homelands and is described in the 1855 Willamette Valley Treaty, which included the Walala and Clackamas.

"It's important for people to understand our historical ties to the areas," Martin said.

The Tribe also opposes Gov. Ted Kulongoski's policy change that would allow off-reservation casinos, particularly one in the environmentally sensitive Columbia River Gorge.

"This is a race to get closest

to Portland," Martin said about the Cowlitz and Warm Springs efforts. "The closer you are to a population center, the more money there is. Portland is the largest untapped gaming market in the Northwest."

Martin said that abandoning the current policy — one Tribe/one casino on reservation land — and adopting one where Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes can build off-reservation casinos would be changing horses in midstream. It would be fundamentally unfair to Tribes, such as the Grand Ronde and Siletz, which have made substantial investments in their on-reservation casinos.

"It's a slippery slope," Martin

said. "How do you make it equitable if you let other Tribes move? The Grand Ronde are fighting a bad gaming policy, as well as trying to help our friends in Warm Springs with an on-reservation option."

Martin said the Grand Ronde Tribe proposed to the Warm Springs Tribe that they build a new casino on Highway 26 on reservation land and tap into the growing central Oregon market of Bend, Madras and Redmond. The Grand Ronde Tribe offered to manage construction, provide start-up management and finance the casino in an effort to end the off-reservation battle. The Warm Springs declined the offer.

"They're going for the grand slam," he said about the Cascade Locks casino proposal.

Martin called the private initiative to build a casino in Wood Village, an eastern suburb of Portland, "the big one." The two owners have added "sweeteners," such as taking a cut of proceeds and giving them to local municipalities and the state to fund education and uninsured children's health care, in hopes of gaining Oregon voter approval in November.

Currently, the Oregon Constitution forbids private casinos and voters would have to OK an amendment before the project can move forward.

"It's the most immediate threat," Martin said. "If the November initiative passed, it could be up and running in 18 months (summer 2010)." The Wood Village casino, alone, could cut Spirit Mountain's dividend to the Tribe by an estimated 43 percent, he said.

See MEETING
continued on page 5