

Casino Spin-Offs Raise Hope

For non-profit organizations, Sept. 26 was an opportunity to find out how beneficial a casino would be to their survival.

Many interested people gathered to listen to casino representatives from the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council and Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Association. They explained the contributions the Community Development Corporations have on non-profit organizations in communities that have casinos, to those from Swift Current.

For every community that has a casino, 25% of the profits goes back into the CDCs. That money is allocated accordingly. If Swift Current does go ahead with a proposed casino, File Hills and SIGA reps are projecting \$1 million going back into the CDC's fund for Swift Current and surrounding areas.

Karen Bonesky, manager of Swift Current's Entrepreneurial Centre who organized the luncheon wanted the organizations to gain knowledge of the impact a casino may have on their organizations.

"Everyone who attended this meeting today (Friday) represents a non-profit organization. These are all organizations that provide service to the community and provide for this community. All of them struggle to reach their funding needs, so I wanted them to have the opportunity to learn more about the CDC and how it works, and give them new opportunities for their organization," said Bonesky.

Lynn Johnston, Chief Executive Officer for the Dr. Noble Irwin Regional Healthcare Foundation, was one of many who listened to the presentation and was very excited at the possibility of receiving funding for their foundation.

"I am aware in other areas that the CDC has been helpful to the foundations, so

obviously the support would be good for the community and we would of course be delighted to have the support for buying equipment in our community," said Johnston.

Johnston had no opinion in regards to the casino itself, but she feels because the CDC's funding is regional it would greatly benefit the Foundation because of the large amounts of money they need to raise for equipment needed for the region.

We have 17 facilities to support, things to help keep staff around these would be things we would be looking at. The support of the CDCs has been ongoing and it's helped healthcare foundations in the past and I think it would be an ongoing thing with us," said Johnston.

File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Chairman, Ron Crowe, was very pleased with the outcome of the luncheon and he stresses they were not here to discuss the pros and cons of the proposed casino.

"We have had positive feedback and negative feedback from the business community, we are not here to banter and argue what's good and bad about a casino, we were here to make sure we got the message across about the Community Development Corporations," said Crowe.

"I think it was important for the community to know, specifically the service organizations, to know the kind of relationship that can exist under the current framework agreement and how the Community Development Corporations can really serve the community and service clubs and charitable activities in the event the community says yes."

Crowe adds that it's important for the people of Swift Current to have the knowledge set out on the table so they can decide what to do.

Betty McDougall, Executive Director for Swift Current's Big Brothers and Big Sisters, felt the information provided was

good because she has had information about other BBBS organizations in other cities, like Yorkton, who have a casino. She says it's really helped those BBBS chapters.

"Yorkton is the same size as Swift Current, but that agency is able to do a whole lot more for their families because they can access the funding, so for an organization like Big Brothers and Big Sisters we could see it being a great benefit to organizations such as ours," said McDougall.

Kim Houghtaling, the curator for the Art Gallery, feels the casino would be a great benefit to Swift Current, because of the CDCs, and he says the art gallery in Yorkton is doing very well for themselves because of the funding they receive.

"It's making leaps and bounds because of the amounts they are able to get through funding. This casino issue believe it or not is a private sector business; it's very positive, it's part of the entertainment industry and it draws a lot of people. So, even in terms of tourism it will have a positive spin-off," said Houghtaling.

Houghtaling, whose gallery does receive funding from Saskatchewan

Lotteries says areas of their operation is funded publicly for programs and events that have to be supported through other means.

"It's supported through either a feed system or sponsorship, so I am really looking forward to having a major sponsor that is clearly interested in sponsoring culture, leisure and recreation."

Irene Enns, the regional director of Sask. Abilities Council, feels that in areas such as non-profit organizations increasing employment opportunities and the spin-off effects are where it would benefit Swift Current residents the most.

"I think it's important we establish strong partnerships with Tribal Council, so that we can influence the development and establishment of a working relationship," said Enns.

However, Enns feels there could be a downside with the result of having a casino.

"For some people it may lead to addictions and social problems, but I think like most issues this is not a black and white issue and so we can deal with that."

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