

Casino Supporters United

Guessing on whether or not a majority of Swift Current residents would say 'yay' or 'nay' in a plebiscite on supporting the construction of a possible casino is like trying to pick what number the ball will land on the ol' roulette wheel.

Regardless, casinos have made a lot of money for the government in the past six years.

The four Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority casinos in Saskatchewan have progressively grown bigger since their inception in 1996. Tom Semaginas, Director of Public Relations for SIGA, says they have given back around \$96.5 million to the provincial government.

"25 per cent of that total is given back to the communities in and around the communities who have casinos. Since 1996, \$23.5 million have been given back to the communities," said Semaginas.

The steady climb has almost doubled since 1996, and 2003 figures have been released at \$29.4 million.

Based on last year's numbers Prince Albert generated the most revenue at \$13 million, Yorkton and Gold Eagle in North Battleford follow up with about \$5.5 million in profits and Bear Claw at White Bear First Nation pulls in about \$1 million profit.

Semaginas says if Swift Current decides to build a casino, its location alone will bring in a lot of revenue from outside sources like the U.S. and Alberta.

"The market is there; it will probably be about the size of Yorkton's in regards to profits, but later on it could challenge P.A.," said Semaginas.

Swift Current would have a projected \$1.2 million back to the community.

The 25 per cent is directed to the Community Development Corporations within the community. It's decided then how the money will be spent.

"Prince Albert's CDC just helped out their hospital with equipment costs with their casino profits," said Semaginas.

Semaginas adds there will be a projected \$33 million budgeted in expenditures, all of which will be spent in Swift Current.

"Everything from the construction phase to drycleaning costs will be spent in Swift Current. There is opportunity for major economic spin-offs."

The rest of the profits are divided up between the provincial government and the First Nations Trust. 37.5 per cent for each and both distribute it where they see fit.

Karen Bonesky, Manager of the Entrepreneurial Centre feels the Swift Current community has already taken a stand on the gaming industry.

"This is a caring community and it's very generous when it comes to support. If you look at the gaming in the city already and we have one of the highest usages of VLT's in the city," said Bonesky.

We have great community support. You can go to a Broncos game and you can get a 50/50 ticket, and right now we have the home lottery tickets. They see it as giving back to the community and I feel the community has already embraced gaming," said Bonesky, who also owns her own business in Swift Current.

Bonesky says when Swift Current brought down the budget plans, it shows they are focused on positioning for a proper infrastructure for the community.

"We talk about keeping our youth and bringing them back in order to do what we need to develop our business sector," said Bonesky.

We can't do this by ourselves. We need to look at outside investors to come in and help out our community."

Some other members of the business community can't agree more.

Kim Houghtaling, President of the Art Gallery, says he is excited about the possible casino.

"The casinos have constantly given back to the communities and to have a

performing arts centre will only boost the economics of the city,” said Houghtaling.

The ground work has been set the FHQ group is ready to spend \$15 million that will create 247 jobs and Bonesky says she doesn’t understand why Swift Current could possibly let this opportunity slip through their fingertips.

“We want the city to see growth, and we have the opportunity to have an arts centre as part of the venue. We have an investor and our actions speak for themselves, ‘are we open for business?’” said Bonesky.

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