

Casino gets official green light

Supporters of a casino for Swift Current received the news they had eagerly hoped for, delivered by the premier earlier this week.

The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) has been granted approval for the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority (SIGA) to build and operate the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council's (FHQTC) casino in the city.

Plans for the \$22.7 million project include a casino with 235 slot machines and nine gaming tables, a 200 room hotel, a 700 seat performing arts centre and a 500 seat banquet and meeting hall.

"We anticipate this development will have a significant draw from not only the southwest region of our province but drawing in interest and tourism and significant economic development from our neighbors in Alberta and in the northern United States of America," said Lorne Calvert, who made the announcement Wednesday at the FSIN's fall session of its Legislative Assembly held in the Stockade.

SIGA and the FHQTC say construction will result in 236 jobs. When the project is complete, nearly 250 full and part time jobs will be created.

"We've worked very hard with File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council over the last couple of years, forming an excellent working relationship. The impact, not only on Swift Current but also southwest Saskatchewan, socially, culturally and economically will be enormous," said Mayor Sandy Larson.

FHQTC Tribal chairman Dean Bellegarde said the project marks the beginning of a continuing relationship that will benefit the area and First Nations people.

"The City of Swift Current has opened their arms and their people to the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council to come in and take a look at how we can develop

our communities and this is an opportunity that's just not going to stop. We can take a look at other areas that we can both work on," Bellegarde said.

Swift Current Allied Arts Council president Paul Rezanoff was delighted with the news of the performing arts centre.

Currently, the Council's Stars for Saskatchewan Series concerts are staged at the high school's Cafetorium, a site that was designed to be a combination cafeteria and auditorium.

"It's a great announcement as far as we're concerned. From the cultural side, it's been something that's been long overdue. It's a problem we've been trying to deal with for the last 35 years. We're in our 36th year of operation and we definitely needed an enhanced facility," Rezanoff said.

FHQTC plans to break ground at the site of the facility, which will be located near the Swift Current Mall, early next year with construction expected to be complete in the spring of 2006.

Calvert said the recent approval for a casino near Saskatoon and the one here marks the end of casino expansion in Saskatchewan.

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