

Written by Administrator
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BATTLE CREEK — Demand from FireKeepers Casino customers helped tribal owners make the decision to expand the gambling venue just east of Battle Creek.

About 18 months after opening the casino,

[leaders of the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi announced plans this morning for an eight-story, 242-room hotel](#) .

“The casino guests were always anticipating that there was going to be a hotel,” said Homer A. Mandoka, tribal council chairman of the Nottawaseppi Huron Band. “We received a lot of comments wanting us to take this step. We did a lot of market analysis and based on that. That supports the resort-style hotel.”

Construction of the nearly 292,000-square-foot hotel will start in spring and be completed in time for a summer 2012 opening.

The estimated cost of the facility, in Emmett Township, was not disclosed. Mandoka said costs will be determined as the project's construction manager furthers his work.

The development, which also includes an event center and expanded bingo hall, will mean another 400 jobs in ongoing casino operations. That is in addition to the current 1,500 jobs at the facility

Approximately 125 people will be employed in construction, Mandoka said.

Battle Creek Mayor Susan Baldwin, who was one of about 60 dignitaries to join tribal elders at the announcement inside the casino, said, “I think it's very exciting that a local group is having such success, so that they can look at the future like this.”

“Employment is a wonderful thing,” Baldwin said. “That's a lot of folks who can be taking care of their families and themselves (and) of course, we like to see the construction jobs.”

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The hotel is to be added onto the southwest corner of the property, Mandoka said.

Kentwood-based Skillman Corp., which helped oversee the casino development, will be the owner's representative in the development of the hotel. Clark Construction, of Lansing, will be construction manager.

Full House Resorts Inc., the Las Vegas-based company that manages the casino, has been hired to provide consulting services for the project. And architectural work will be done by Thalden-Boyd-Emery Architects, a St. Louis-based firm that is owned and operated by Native Americans and has worked on 120 casino projects with 66 Native American tribes, according to information provided by FireKeepers.

"Our goal is to keep spending locally and give to our community partners," Mandoka said.

Mandoka estimated the tribe's community partners have already received in excess of \$150 million as a result of the construction of the \$300 million gaming center. Revenue sharing agreements with surrounding municipalities have resulted in the casino paying approximately \$6.6 million to them since its opening on Aug. 5, 2009. Through its compact with the state of Michigan, the state has received \$13.6 million.

"The big thing is tribal gaming money is kept in Michigan," he said. "It's not outsources to another region in the country. They (casino patrons) can enjoy the same entertainment and value by staying in Michigan."

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