

Seneca Gaming would operate Broome County casino

Written by Administrator
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Jon Harris, Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin; 6:39 p.m. EDT May 22, 2014



Lam Vongsakoun, left, talks to job-seekers about opportunities in casino and gambling areas at a recent job fair held by Traditions at the Glen. Vongsakoun is the director of food and beverage at Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel in Niagara Falls. (Photo: Jon Harris/Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin FILE PHOTO)

TOWN OF UNION – The Seneca Gaming Corp., which runs three casinos in western New York on behalf of the Seneca Nation of Indians, would operate the proposed \$150 million Traditions Resort & Casino if the team is awarded a license this fall.

“The Traditions Resort & Casino project is a historical opportunity for the Southern Tier,” Bill Walsh said during a conference call with reporters Thursday afternoon. “This is the right project at the right time and now we have the right partner.”

Walsh said Seneca Gaming Corp. would run the gaming floor and all associated amenities, including valet parking, restaurants and retail. When asked whether Seneca Gaming would [invest](#) in the project, Walsh said the corporation was hired as an operator and is not financing the planned casino. “At this time now, we’re not ready to disclose the financiers that we have in the project,” Walsh said.

The Traditions team traveled throughout North America and interviewed more than a dozen operators. Traditions decided on Seneca Gaming because the corporation understands the importance of revitalizing and partnering with the community, Walsh said.

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The Walsh family, owners of Traditions at the Glen in the Town of Union, plan to construct a \$150 million destination called Traditions Resort & Casino, with 1,200 slot machines and 50 gambling tables. The project would also include adding about 160 rooms to the existing hotel, which now has 41 rooms.

In the Eastern Southern Tier region, Traditions is competing against Tioga Downs, in Nichols, and Rochester-based Wilmorite for a casino license. [Applications](#) are due to the state by 4 p.m. June 30, with selections expected this fall.

Neither Tioga Downs nor Wilmorite believe the [hiring](#) of Seneca Gaming gives Traditions an advantage in the region.

“We strongly feel, regardless of who their partner is, that our proposal is superior to anything that would be in our region,” said Juris Basens, vice president of gaming operations at Wilmorite.

Wilmorite plans to build a a \$350 million destination called Wilmot Casino & Resort in Tyre, about 90 miles northwest of Binghamton, with 2,000 slot machines, 100 gambling tables and a 200-room hotel.

While Basens has managed several casinos in the past, Wilmorite currently does not operate any gaming facilities.

“Down the road, we may or may not bring on an operating partner,” Basens said.

Jeff Gural, owner of Tioga Downs, has already had experience with a gaming operator.

In 2007, Nevada Gold & Casinos Inc. relinquished its ownership interest in American Racing and Entertainment. As part of the transaction, Nevada Gold terminated its management agreements with Tioga Downs and Vernon Downs Casino & Hotel.

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Now Tioga Downs — an existing racino that opened in summer 2006 — is planning a minimum \$90 million expansion project, including a nearly 140-room hotel.

The partnership with Seneca Gaming, Gural said, does not give Traditions an edge over Tioga Downs' expansion plans.

“In truth, I don't care who manages it,” Gural said. “In reality, there aren't enough [customers](#) for both of us to succeed.”

The Seneca Gaming Corp. operates the Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel, in Niagara Falls, Seneca Allegany Casino & Hotel, in Salamanca, and Seneca Buffalo Creek Casino, in Buffalo.

Cathy Walker, Seneca Gaming president and [CEO](#), said the corporation is involved in the Traditions project because it has the potential to revitalize the Southern Tier. Walker said Seneca Gaming has been talking to the Traditions team for a number of months.

“The reason that we are partnered with Traditions is because of the vision of the Walsh family,” Walker said.

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