

VANDERBILT — Officials in Vanderbilt said Otsego County may soon be home to a casino once again.

Ed Posgate, Vanderbilt Village president, said he recently met with Bay Mills Indian Community officials, who are planning to reopen the former casino on Old 27 North, near the Mobil gas station in Vanderbilt.

“They said ‘we’re closer to opening,’ but no one’s given a date,” Posgate said. “The tribe itself will let me know when they’re going to open because of the position I have with the village.”

Posgate and other residents reported new gravel work and tree-trimming being done on the former casino’s grounds this month.

A short-lived past

The Bay Mills Vanderbilt Casino opened in November of 2010, after the tribe purchased a 45.6-acre parcel of land in August 2010 from Treetops Resort. The land included the old Treetops information center, which Bay Mills used to open the small casino, which housed 36 slot machines.

The casino had a relatively short run following the near-instant questioning of its legality by the Michigan Attorney General's office.

In March 2011, The Bay Mills Casino Vanderbilt Casino was forced to shut its doors as the result of a ruling by federal judge Paul L. Maloney in favor of an injunction filed against the tribe on behalf of the state attorney general.

In April of that same year, the federal district court denied the motion, and Bay Mills appealed to

the federal court of appeals in an effort to overturn the injunction.

That court ruled to keep the casino closed while the issue worked its way through the courts, stating, "If it is not likely that the district court abused its discretion, then the motion to stay should be denied."

The two sides continued in a legal struggle.

In August 2012, the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit ruled in favor of Bay Mills, vacating the injunction against the Vanderbilt casino. That decision, in effect, paved the way for the casino to reopen and raised the hopes of Vanderbilt residents that it would be back in business.

However, the casino didn't reopen and its building remained largely unattended, until now.

Local business impacted

- Doug Slagel, Mill Street Pizza owner, said his business opened several months before the casino closed and he saw an immediate drop in sales once it closed.

He said the former casino did not have many food options, which helped his business.

Mill Street Pizza, 7800 Mill St., often had visitors who he said would stop to ask for directions to the casino and would end up buying a pizza later in the day.

"We're definitely looking forward to a little bit (of) extra business," Slagel said. "The more the merrier."

After the casino's closure, Slagel said he saw about 7 percent drop in sales. That was a common refrain from a number of businesses in Vanderbilt that benefitted from the casino's short time being open.

Bay Mills Indian Community representatives were not available for comment before publication.

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