

By JACK ELLIOTT JR.

JACKSON, Miss.

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians will move some slot machines and blackjack tables out of the Golden Moon Casino in Philadelphia to make way for a theater for entertainment and musical acts.

Tribal spokesman Warren Strain says the

tribe had been looking ways to upgrade its venue for performers at the nearby Choctaw-operated Silver Star casino, where acts such as the Four Tops, Bonnie Raitt, Jay Leno, B.B. King and others have performed in a cramped meeting room that seats about 2,200.

Strain says the Golden Moon could accommodate 4,500 to 5,000 people once the work is completed.

Both facilities will continue to operate as casinos.

"We're looking at 4,500 to 5,000 seat capacity at the Golden Moon," Strain said. "And the room is so large and the ceiling so high, we would expected to draw all different types of acts -- bigger names and better acts, and more options to the area."

Strain said the tribe intends to leave some table games and slot machines in the Golden Moon but much of the 80,000 square feet of floor space will be reconfigured for the entertainment center. Cost of the conversion was not disclosed.

"We expect it to be the largest gaming-associated events center in Mississippi and, maybe, in the Southeast," Strain said.

The Golden Moon opened in 2002. In January 2009, the tribe shut down the casino and its associated hotel on weekdays, saying it was a drain on gambling revenues and that it had never lived up to expectations for attracting crowds. It has been opened on weekends to accommodate the overflow of casino patrons from the more profitable Silver Star.

Strain said plans are to open the entertainment center by Jan. 1.

He said slot machines and table games would be moved to the Silver Star. Those not used at the Silver Star would be moved to the Bok Homa Casino under construction in Sandersville in Jones County. He said the Bok Homa Casino is scheduled to open in late December.

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