

Entertainer Wayne Newton to perform

The slot machines will be ringing and the roulette wheel spinning when Bok Homa Casino opens Monday.

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians has planned a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 11 a.m. for the

27,000-square-foot casino near Sandersville. Las Vegas entertainer Wayne Newton will be on hand. Tribal spokesman Warren Strain said

Newton will perform briefly following the ribbon-cutting.

The ceremony also will feature a visit from Santa Claus, who will parachute onto the casino grounds.

The casino will host live music inside the facility on Choctaw Road until after midnight.

"It's the hospitality industry," Strain said. "Our goal is to offer quality entertainment and a safe environment."

The casino will house 758 slot machines, along with two electronic blackjack consoles and an electronic roulette wheel.

To get to opening day, the Choctaws had to weather countless efforts by local and state officials - including Gov. Haley Barbour - to stop construction. Officials cited legal, health and safety concerns.

But in late July, research by the state attorney general's office concluded that a tribal compact signed in 1992 by then-Gov. Kirk Fordice protects the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians' right to build gaming establishments on tribal lands.

Some opposition still exists, though.

"If it were up to us, it wouldn't be opening," said Cal Callen, spokesman for the Coalition for Family and Community Values. "It is opening. I guess we'll just have to see if the things the Mississippi State (University) study said would happen will happen."

That research argued the Bok Homa Casino could have negative social, economic and environmental consequences for the local community.

There also was local concern about the infrastructure costs Jones County may incur due to the increased traffic in the area.

Strain said the tribe has drilled wells for water service and handles the wastewater in Environmental Protection Agency-approved systems.

The tribe also has widened the road leading to the casino. Repairs to bridges on the road only rated for passenger traffic still are being negotiated with the Jones County Board of

## Bok Homa Casino to open Monday near Sandersville - Hattiesburg American

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