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Gambling Man

Posted: Monday, April 2, 2007

According to the Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor, Jackpot, Nev., offers "fun-filled" gambling and entertainment at a handful of casinos in the small town, which is just across the Nevada/Idaho border.

Patrick Howard, co-managing member of Triad Resorts, is about to add to the fun.

The Spanish Bit Resort & Casino would add to the town 600 rooms, a 90,000 square-foot, full-scale casino with restaurants, spa and retail; a 40,000-square-foot indoor water park; and a 126,000-square-foot events facility with seating for 5,000.

Howard said they plan to finish the project in September 2008.

Cactus Pete's Resort Casino in Jackpot wouldn't say how the arrival of a new casino would impact their business.

Cactus Pete's spokeswoman Kris Ann Brown read a statement from their corporate owner, Ameristar Casinos.

"At this point we've not seen any details on the project other than when it was first announced publicly in 2005," she said.

"We're not in a position to make any other sort of comment," Brown said.

Howard and his business partner, Jerry Ward, have been working on the development for two years and have yet to break ground. But just getting this far has not been easy, Howard said.

"The troubles we've had have been largely delay tactics," he said.

"We've been flat-out lied to."

Howard said they have had to rely on Nevada law and appeals to the district attorney's office in Elko County, where Jackpot is located, to move forward. He blames local officials loyal to the existing casinos.

"Our applications and request go unanswered until we bring the state into the picture," Howard said.

To keep the development moving along, Ward has been living in Jackpot for the last two years.

"That has made all the difference in the world," Howard said. "Others haven't been able to do that. They've been stalled, which has ultimately led them to put their money to other uses. We've had to persevere on this. I'm sure there will be other delay tactics on the way. We can't be denied our constitutional rights to develop property."

Howard said they bought the land 18 months ago and got it rezoned for development. They're waiting for a final set of permits from the county before they break ground.

"I can tell you for a fact that the town is run by the county commissioners," Howard said. "The town of Jackpot does have an advisory board. Employees from a local casino establishment serve on the board."

Despite all the difficulties they've faced, Howard said he sees an enormous opportunity in Jackpot.

"Jackpot is the only town in Nevada centered on gaming that hasn't had a new development in nearly 20 years," Howard said. "It's not because Jackpot isn't a good market. It's a great market. The reason is because of the stranglehold local establishments have had on the county.

"They've had a good ride for a long time. People in Jackpot have suffered along with that ride. That's just unacceptable here in America."

In the meantime, the population of southern Idaho – Jackpot's target market – has exploded.

Howard wants their resort to be about more than gambling.

The water park will be a draw for families, and the indoor event center will be Jackpot's first, he said.

"There's a whole lot of other things to do in this region other than gambling," Howard said.

Howard also said they have plans to go beyond their own project.

"We've uncovered that there are issues with water and sewer," he said. "Those affect every single person that lives in that community.

Housing needs are also considerable."

Howard said they are working on developing an economic plan for the community, which they will unveil in the next 60 days.

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