

\$60 million expansion under way at casino resort in Kinder - Alexandria Town Talk

Written by Administrator

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KINDER -- The economic downturn may have changed the concept of the Coushatta Casino Resort expansion, but it couldn't slow it down.

The Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana broke ground on a seven-story lodging tower Wednesday at its casino in Allen Parish.

It may not be quite as luxurious as the one originally planned, but the project is moving ahead and filling a need at the resort near Kinder in Allen Parish. The tower is the centerpiece of a \$60 million expansion. It will include

401 new rooms, bringing the total number of rooms at the resort to more than 950.

"It's very exciting on many levels," said David Sickey, vice chairman of the tribe. "It's exciting for the tribe, for the community, for the region, for our employees."

"It's been a long time coming," said tribal Chairman Kevin Sickey. "We've been needing these rooms for a long time."

The casino resort recently marked its 16th anniversary.

In that time, it has grown from a casino to an operation that employs nearly 2,400 people and includes lodging, entertainment and a golf course.

"Gaming in Southwest Louisiana has been relatively steady," said resort General Manager Conrad Granito. "We had a very strong 2010. We've just been holding our own pretty good, despite the economy."

Even with good performance, the council was leery of following through on plans made years earlier -- when economic times were much better -- which called for a more luxurious setting and more amenities.

Instead, the design was changed to a more modest one that tribal leaders think will still conform to their vision of a resort-quality facility.

"The general consensus among the council and our planning team was we should move forward in a conservative way," David Sickey said.

"They challenged us to build a better mousetrap," said Greg Hnedak, a partner with Hnedak Bobo Group, whose subsidiary Dreamcatcher Hotels designed the new tower.

The tribe has discussed adding a large number of rooms for years.

The vast majority of the resort's gaming customers come from Texas, and sometimes they have to drive home after visiting the casino because the property's rooms are booked.

"The most significant hurdle we've had in 16 years of operation has been hotel space," David Sickey said. "We simply have not had enough space to accommodate our overnight gamers."

"Our biggest challenge, even with our hotels and the surrounding ones, has been having enough rooms," Granito said. "A lot of our patrons want to stay on the property, and there have been many, many times when the hotels are full."

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