

## Manager: Manistee's 'casino of the year' model could be replicated for proposed Fruitport location

Written by Administrator

Monday, 27 October 2014 10:49 -

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MANISTEE, MI – The award-winning formula of Little River Band of Ottawa Indian's casino in Manistee could be replicated in Fruitport Township, the casino manager said last week.

Little River Casino Resort was named ["casino of the year"](#) at the 2014 International Entertainment Buyers Association meeting late September in Nashville, Tenn.

The Little River Casino Resort is a wholly-owned enterprise of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians. The tribe has long proposed to build a second casino in Fruitport Township, and is in the years-long process of seeking state and federal approval for the project.

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"We've already done it up here in Manistee," said Wendell Long, general manager of the Little River Casino Resort. He said the group's award-winning formula could "absolutely" be replicated in Fruitport Township.

"We can do it," he said. "We want to be part of the synergy that makes Muskegon even better."

Wendell said 1,611 casinos in North America were eligible for the award, which focused on a casino's entertainment and overall experience. Six nominees included the Turning Stone casino of Verona, New York and Isleta Resort & Casino of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

"It's one of those things that are secret until they announce it," Wendell said. "They do send people (to review the casino) but we don't know who."

Wendell didn't mask his excitement as he took the podium to accept the award, yelling out "Woohoo!" and pumping his arms into the air.

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"No one in the Midwest has ever won it before," Wendell said.

During the ceremony, other venues and individuals were recognized for their achievements, including Little River's entertainment buyer, Kell Houston. Presenters included the Oak Ridge Boys, T.G. Sheppard and Vince Gill.

The casino's booked headline acts -- bands that play in its bars, live entertainment each week, general atmosphere, and events, like its hosting of the Rolling Thunder motorcycle group -- were all judged by the entertainment buyers' association.

"We're not just about gambling," Wendell said.

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