

Jamul Indian Village moves along on casino

Written by Administrator

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JAMUL □ The Jamul Indian Village continues to roll ahead with a plan to build a \$360 million Hollywood-style casino on its Jamul reservation off state Route 94, despite myriad lawsuits that aim to halt construction.

On a rainy Dec. 16 afternoon, tribal officials met with Penn National Gaming Inc., which owns and operates casinos and racetracks throughout the United States and in Canada. The tribe hired Penn in April 2013 to oversee the building and operation of a casino on Jamul Indian Village land.

As precipitation poured into a gaping hole where more than 450,000 tons of rock and soil were removed from the construction site on the tribe's land, both groups reiterated the plan for a casino opening in mid-2016. The gaming facility is expected to have upward of 1,700 slot machines, 50 live game tables and several restaurants and lounges — on more than 200,000 square feet of land.

Construction of the foundation has started for the three-story casino and its eight-story parking structure, which will offer more than 1,800 spaces for cars.

Jay Snowden, chief operating officer for Penn, based in Wyomissing, Pa., said the tribe and Penn have spent \$15 million for traffic safety and improvements to state Route 94 and nearby roads.

Jamul Indian Village Chairman Raymond Hunter, tribal Executive Council members Richard Tellow, Erica Pinto, Carlene Chamberlain and Robert Mesa, along with several officials from the Penn group, announced the completion of the excavation phase of the project, begun in February.

"It's been a long 10 months," Snowden said of his group's first California venture.

Hunter said the tribe is looking forward to becoming economically self-sufficient and creating

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career opportunities for tribal members. Chamberlain said she hopes the tribe will be able to generate money to help its most vulnerable members, including seniors and those with alcohol and drug dependency issues.

Many in the community have been opposing the building of the casino since the 1990s, when talk first surfaced about it.

A group established in the late 1980s, the Jamul Action Committee, has been the most vocal. It says a casino would overwhelm rural Jamul, and its single, two-lane highway. Further, the group says traffic issues tied to a casino are insurmountable, given the scale of the project and the narrow, winding highway and its feeder roads, including Steele Canyon, Lyons Valley and Honey Springs roads.

In February, the committee held a community meeting on the casino. More than 700 people attended, including county Supervisor Dianne Jacob, a longtime critic of the casino.

In mid-December, the Jamul Indian Village Tribal Council sent a letter to 7,000 community residents. The letter explains the latest news about the casino and says about 2,500 jobs will be available to the community. Of those, 1,500 are construction-based jobs; the others will be to manage, run and work inside the casino.

The letter reiterates the tribe's stance that the Jamul Indian Village is one of 14 original tribes in San Diego County to sign a tribal state compact in 1999 with then-Gov. Gray Davis and the state. Among other things, the compact allows Kumeyaay bands to open gaming facilities.

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