

Gambling begins at Jefferson's \$40 million casino

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 15 July 2015 16:28 -



Blackjack dealer Rusty Ruffcorn at the new \$40 million Wild Rose Casino & Resort in Jefferson. (Photo: Special to the Des Moines Register)

Cards are being dealt for blackjack and slot machines are chiming at the new \$40 million Wild Rose Casino & Resort in Jefferson.

The facility began allowing gamblers to play at the Greene County establishment at 3 p.m. Monday in what was described as a "soft opening."

An official opening won't be held until Aug. 1 and the grand opening is scheduled Aug. 7-9, said Jamie Buelt, a Wild Rose spokeswoman.

"The casino is ready to go and it is open for people to come in and play a game. They can have a soft drink or a cocktail, but the restaurant is still under construction, as is the events center," Buelt said. About 550 people visited the facility the first day.

Construction is also still underway on the adjacent 73-room Cobblestone Hotel & Suites, a \$5 million facility that is separately owned.

Greene County Supervisor Guy Richardson, a supporter of the casino project, said the gambling complex will provide an economic boost to the county, which has about 9,200 people.

"I am very happy. This is a beautiful facility and it is certainly first class. I think this is something

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Greene County can be very proud of," Richardson said.

The casino, located about 65 miles northwest of Des Moines, is at the intersection of U.S. Highway 30 and Iowa Highway 4.

Wild Rose Jefferson [received a gaming license](#) from the Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission on June 12, 2014. The casino-events center project will add more than 250 jobs to the region with an estimated annual payroll of \$7 million, according to company officials. The project includes an 18,000-square-foot casino with 536 slot machines and 14 casino tables with a variety of games.

Hours for the casino during the soft opening are 8 a.m. to midnight. Expanded hours will start on July 31 with the facility open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. and on weekends for 24 hours daily.

Greene County voters overwhelmingly endorsed the casino project in a countywide referendum by a margin of 75 percent to 25 percent in August 2013. Still, some residents organized in opposition with a group called "Vote No Greene County." They pointed to family and financial distresses they said result from gambling addictions.

Chuck Offenburger, a former Des Moines Register columnist who resides in rural Greene County, said Tuesday that many local residents are excited about the casino project.

"This is a real turn-around time for Jefferson and Greene County. This is a county where the population has not grown in 115 years," Offenburger said. "While the ag business is terrific around here, we have lacked for facilities to encourage tourism. Specifically, we have lacked a nice hotel and conference center. With the Wild Rose Casino & Resort, we are getting all of that in one project."

Iowa now has 22 casinos, including 19 state-regulated gambling facilities and three tribal gambling operations.

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Two consultants hired by state regulators last year warned that new casinos proposed in Jefferson and Cedar Rapids would generate most of their revenue by cannibalizing the market share of existing Iowa casinos. The Cedar Rapids' casino plans were rejected, but the state commission voted 3-2 to grant a gambling license for the Jefferson project.

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