

Written by Administrator  
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GROVE, Okla. — The \$23 million casino that the Cherokee Nation is building near Grove should be open next winter.

The 39,000-square-foot casino at Highway 59 and East 250 Road is expected in operation in late December or January with more than 400 electronic games, table games and a private high-limit poker room. It also will have a restaurant, bar, live music venue and a dance floor.

"We had been looking at the market for a long time and trying to find the best spot," said Mark Fulton, the chief operating officer of Cherokee Nation Entertainment, on Tuesday.

The casino, which is projected to have more than 400,000 visitors a year, will be built near the Shangri-La Golf Club, marina and resort at Monkey Island, a peninsula on the northern shore of Grand Lake.

Oklahoma is one of the top states in the nation in gambling at American Indian casinos. Oklahoma gambling revenue at Indian casinos grew by 4.8 percent to about \$4 billion in 2014, more than triple the growth rate for nationwide Indian gambling excluding Oklahoma, according to the most recent Casino City's Indian Gaming Industry Report.

Cherokee Nation Entertainment operates Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tulsa and eight Cherokee casinos. In February 2015, the Cherokee Nation opened a new casino in South Coffeyville and renovated the lobby of the Tulsa casino in mid-2015.

Fulton said the casino will concentrate on the area around Grove and Grand Lake.

The Grove casino is scheduled to open shortly before a new state casino will open in Pittsburg, Kansas. That casino, the \$70.2 million Kansas Crossing Casino and Hotel, is expected to have 625 slot machines and 16 gaming tables, and attract an estimated 500,000 visitors a year.

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Representatives for Kansas Crossing and the Quapaw tribe's Downstream Casino Resort in Oklahoma said they don't expect much competition from the Grove casino.

"We would expect little to no competition to our business model from another casino in Grove," said Jonathan Swain of Bellevue, Iowa, one of the investors in Kansas Crossing, in an email to the Globe.

Sean Harrison, a spokesman for Downstream, said in an email to the Globe that the casino "will dilute the market a little more" but won't be comparable to Downstream.

"We don't anticipate it affecting us much, if at all," Harrison wrote.

Downstream, which opened in 2008, has 2,000 slots, 36 table games and 14 poker tables. About 1,100 people work there, and the casino has about 1.2 million visitors a year.

### Job creation

The Cherokee casino is expected to bring 175 jobs to the Grove area, according to a news release from the Cherokee Nation. "It will provide some quality jobs hopefully and increase traffic through the community," said Bill Keefer, the Grove city manager.

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