



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

If you can't beat it, profit from it

Sunday, June 24, 2007

One casino will be opening this summer in New Buffalo.

Another casino could be built near Battle Creek, after the Huron band won federal approval for it.

Yet another could open near Wayland, now that the feds have given their approval to the Gun Lake band.

Casino opponents -- either out of opposition to gambling or because they don't want downtown Grand Rapids to be challenged as West Michigan's chief entertainment venue -- are frustrated in their attempts to halt them.

We say if you can't beat them, at least find a way to make some money off them.

We have said that the Gun Lake band, which wants to build a casino in Wayland, has as much of a right to have one as other Native American bands and tribes that have already constructed casinos and are profiting from them.

The anti-casino group 23 is Enough argues that Michigan is glutted with tribal casinos, in addition to non-tribal casinos in Detroit, and doesn't need any more.

We have said the market will decide when there are too many casinos. If the day comes when there are so many casinos that they're no longer profitable, then people will stop seeking to build them.

The opening of the Four Winds Casino Resort by the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians in New Buffalo in August will make it the first of three anticipated casinos within 100 miles of each other in southwestern Michigan.

Some will lament this fact.

We believe the Kalamazoo area can take advantage of what could be a tourism opportunity instead.

But we won't go so far as to urge a Kalamazoo version of a plan by Grand Rapids businessman Pete Secchia. Secchia, who was a member of 23 is Enough and fought against the Gun Lake band's casino plans, apparently has decided 23 isn't enough. He is now working to get a casino in downtown Grand Rapids.

Is downtown Kalamazoo suitable for a casino? Probably not. This city's entertainment tends to be more family-oriented.

But if there is a cluster of tribal casinos in southwestern Michigan, with Kalamazoo conveniently central to them, perhaps the hospitality industry here can find a way to market itself to casino-goers: Want to visit a different casino every day? Stay in Kalamazoo. Make it a base of operations. Want to enjoy some other non-casino entertainment and good restaurants during a visit to southwestern Michigan casinos? Stay in Kalamazoo. Make it a destination.

Casinos may offer economic opportunity to the bands that build them.

But they could also offer some economic benefit to the entire area.

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