



## Dorr Township residents excited at prospect of casino

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By Shandra Martinez

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ALLEGAN COUNTY -- With the exuberance of lottery winners, residents in a swath from downtown Wayland to Dorr Township welcomed news that a court decision likely clears the way for an Indian casino to be built in their backyard.

"Bring it on. I've got money burning in my pocket," said Rhonda Thompson, who heard the news while buying an energy drink at the Fast Stop gas station and convenience store in Wayland Township.

The proposed casino long has been a hot topic among patrons at the store, which sits about a half-mile from where the Gun Lake Tribe's casino would be located, in the former Ampro facility just off U.S. 131's Bradley exit.

"I think people are getting impatient," said Debra Tyler, cashier at the Fast Stop.

She remembers an older couple who drove down from a northern Michigan community expecting to see a casino being built, but found nothing.

Three miles away, Tuesday's news was starting to circulate in downtown Wayland.

"I think it will give us a lot of jobs. A lot of the problems around here are because there are no jobs," said Jasimine Cornell, 20, who took a break from kneading dough at her father's restaurant, Giuseppe's Pizza.

People who once had higher-paying jobs now apply for work at her family's restaurant because they can't find other employment, she said.

The casino's economic benefits are expected to extend to Dorr Township, two exits north on U.S. 131.

"We think it will be great for the area. They'll probably steal some of my employees, and it will still be great," said pharmacist John Tillotson, who owns the Dorr Community Pharmacy on 142nd Avenue.

Across the main drag, the tribal development office of MBPI, Inc. takes up about half of a retail strip mall. The organization is the economic development corporation for the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians, the tribe behind the proposed casino.

Tuesday, their office phone was ringing with calls of congratulations from local groups. On the counter sat a recently delivered plant from the Wayland Chamber of Commerce, with a note saying, "Thanks for sticking with it."

"We've been trying to be the clearinghouse for the good news," said John Shagonaby, MBPI's chief executive officer.

The promise of 1,800 jobs and tax revenue for the area has generated a lot of support for the project.

Despite an opposition group saying it would appeal the decision, Shagonaby was optimistic MBPI would announce a schedule for the casino's opening in the near future.

### Some mixed feelings

Down the street, Joanna Huisken played with her young daughter at the township park that sits across the

road from a farm with silos and red barns. Huisken said she has mixed emotions about the casino. Biblically, gambling is wrong, she believes. But the area needs jobs.

She remembers how her former community of Grandville looked before the RiverTown Crossings mall, and she worries development will change her new community's rural landscape: a blend of farms, older homes and small businesses.

"I love the small-town atmosphere," Huisken said.

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