

Tucson Citizen

Tohono O'odham plan Glendale-area casino-resort

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The Tohono O'odham Nation has begun an effort to build a casino and upscale hotel near Glendale that could bring \$300 million to the state's economy, Chairman Ned Norris said. "We're elated. We're extremely excited. We're ready," Norris said Thursday.

The project would create 6,000 skilled construction jobs and "more than" 3,000 permanent jobs for hotel and casino employees, he said.

The 600-room hotel and casino would have 150,000 square feet of gaming space, including a 1,000-seat bingo hall and 25 poker tables.

Norris said that after "many" meetings with Glendale, Peoria and Maricopa County officials and with Gov. Jan Brewer's staff, the Indian nation has begun the application process to the U.S. Interior Department that would put the site into trust so that construction could begin.

The resort would have a 3-acre atrium with waterfalls and a botanical garden. Parking would be provided for 4,000 vehicles. Eight food and beverage "options," two bars and a nightclub are part of the package.

The Tohono O'odham Nation's most ambitious economic development project must get federal approval as trust land before ground can be broken on the 1.2 million square-foot facility, Norris said.

It would be the largest resort in Arizona and four times the size of the O'odham casino-hotel complex near Tucson. It would draw an estimated 1.2 million visits a year.

The nation purchased the 135-acre Maricopa County parcel in 2003. It was part of the land acquisition granted by Congress to replace Tohono O'odham land in the San Lucy District near Gila Bend lost in the 1970s when a federal government-built dam flooded nearly 10,000 acres.

Norris said he hoped construction could begin in a year. The project would take an estimated 32 to 44 months to complete.

He said the new casino-resort, near Glendale's "amazingly successful" entertainment district, would take the area "to the next level."

The area west of Phoenix offers Phoenix Coyotes hockey, Arizona Cardinals football and soon will be the home of baseball spring training for the Chicago White Sox and L.A. Dodgers.



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