

Hoosier Park getting ready to open casino

Anderson – Owners say more than 500 new employees will be needed to operate the soon-to-open casino side of Hoosier Park Racing & Casino – exciting news for East Central Indiana citizens more accustomed to job losses from the faltering auto industry.

„It is a better opportunity for me,“ said Patricia Moore, a 2-month employee who on Tuesday was among the Hoosier staff dishing up crab cakes, bread pudding and dozens of other selections during a media hard-hat tour of the casino, set to open June 2 pending regulatory approval.

The venue is the first in the state to link horse racing with a casino. Unlike casinos in northwest and southern Indiana, however, Hoosier will offer gamblers only slot and other machines, but no blackjack tables, craps tables, roulette wheels and other games of chance which depend on dealers and house attendants.

„I’m not a gambler, but the casino and the race track are exciting to me,“ said Moore, who had been working a food-service job at Anderson University. „I am learning new things, things I had not known before.“

Anderson Mayor Kris Ockomon called the impending opening a boost, a shot in the arm for an East Central Indiana economy hit hard by losses of manufacturing jobs.

„I’m not a gambler, but I’ve been known to put a few quarters into slot machines,“ said Ockomon with a laugh.

Indiana House District 37 representative Scott Resler hopes the USD 100 million expansion kick-starts the economy, and he had no reservations about a Centaur-run casino opening in

Madison County.

„The track has been here nearly 15 years with no problems, no issues, no crime or traffic problems,“ Resler said. „We knew the track’s history so well, that we had no fear.“

A former Blackford County Sheriff, Paul Whitesell is the Indiana Gaming Commission supervisor at the casino.

„We’ll have agents here 24/7; we have to be here for them to operate,“ said Whitesell, glad for a chance to return to East Central Indiana from a similar job at the Belle Terra Casino along the Ohio River in Rising Sun.

The state received a USD 250 million licensing fee, said Centaur’s Jim Brown, general manager of gaming. The state will get 30 percent of revenues, expected to be USD 400 million for the first five years. He expected the 172,000-square-foot gaming-racing-dining site would also contribute an extra USD 200 million to regional horse-racing industry – and he said Anderson and Madison County should see an extra USD 40 million, also over the next five years.

„This is not a warehouse for slot machines; this is part of a multi-interest area for gaming, racing and dining,“ Brown told the media and officials.

Brown described Centaur (formerly Pegasus Group) as a privately-owned corporation which bought stock from initial developer Churchill Downs in 1994, and became the sole owner in 2007 of Hoosier Park and a sister track in Shelbyville.

Tristan Yunker, 22, employed for a month, was setting up the flashy slot and other machines on Tuesday.

„This is huge for the local economy,“ said Yunker, 22, an Anderson man working tech jobs for the past few years, who now will be part of the staff keeping the machines running. „It’s big for tourism, and should let people know this part of the

state exists.”

The expansion helps ease the pain from recent automotive manufacturing job losses in the region, said District 25 State Sen. Timothy Lanane, and will add diversity to the job market.