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Cha-ching?

Casino proponent talks to business leaders; highlights potential for jobs and tourism

March 3, 2010

By ANGELA BURCH Messenger staff writer

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A proposed casino in Fort Dodge could bring more jobs, more tourism and ultimately more money to town.

Carrie Tedore, director of public relations for Diamond Jo Casino/Peninsula Gaming, spoke to local business leaders about the economic impact of bringing a casino to Fort Dodge.

"I think it's a really exciting time for Fort Dodge," Tedore told more than 70 people at the Fort Dodge Area Chamber of Commerce's quarterly Good Morning Fort Dodge breakfast Tuesday. "An innovation group did a study and they reported a casino would attract about 800,000 visitors a year. That means more overnight stays in hotels, more people buying gas, more people eating at restaurants."

The proposed casino is projected to cost about \$55 million and eventually employ about 350 people. If a license is awarded, the Fort Dodge casino will be a 24,000-square-foot building with nearly 800 gaming positions, three restaurants, a 60-room hotel, a 4,500-square-foot event center, 1,000 parking spaces, and a 27,000-square-foot multipurpose arena. The casino would be built on an undeveloped 80-acre site near the junction of U.S. Highways 169 and 20. The plan is for Fort Dodge to annex the site.

If casino backers are granted a license by the Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission on May 13, Tedore said construction will begin immediately.

Tedore said organizers anticipate using 200 local construction workers in the building process. She emphasized that the organization is active with Buy Iowa First, which buys and promotes locally.

"Diamond Jo Casino comes in time and time again (using) above 98 percent of products purchased locally, and that does wonders for the economic(s) of the state," she said, and added Diamond Jo spent roughly \$79 million with Iowa businesses last year.

Casey Johnson, owner of Fort Dodge Ford Lincoln Mercury Toyota, asked Tedore about specifications of the proposed event center.

"A plan to have a multiuse facility," she said. "We are looking for a place that can handle equestrian events and concerts alike ... We talked to 400 Webster County residents in a survey and the top two reasons people support gaming is jobs and its impact on the economy and entertainment."



Fort Dodge, IA



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Fact Box

A press conference to unveil plans for the proposed Diamond Jo Casino will be held at 1:30 p.m. today at the Best Western Starlite Village Inn and Suites. Turn to Thursday's Messenger for a full report.

The Heart of Iowa Foundation is the nonprofit foundation that would receive distributions from the Diamond Jo Casino in Fort Dodge. Tedore said the foundation would then distribute a portion of the estimated \$1.75 million to every city in Webster County and for grants awarded to local nonprofit organizations.

Dennis Baugh, executive director of Youth Shelter Care, asked Tedore what else nonprofits stand to gain with the casino.

"We do expect our employees to be very active in the community," she said.

Tedore said casino executives serve on boards and employees are given incentives to volunteer time to nonprofit organizations. She said Diamond Jo also helps local organizations, including hospitals, with fundraisers and contributes to local chapters of the United Way.

"We roll up our sleeves and get the work done together," she said. "We use our position to help create awareness for nonprofits and we use it to help form partnerships with local businesses. This is an opportunity for Fort Dodge to make the turn for tourism. I think if we help spread the facts and remain informed and make informed business decisions, we know that it is in the benefit of everybody in Webster County to make sure the casino gets here."

A press conference is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. today at the Best Western Starlite Village Inn and Suites detailing further plans and specifics for the casino.

Contact Angela Burch at (515) 573-2141 or aburch@messengernews.net

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