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Evangeline Casino Expects to Hurt Indian Rivals

by *The Associated Press*

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OPELOUSAS (AP) -- Officials at the new Evangeline Downs casino say that they expect the gambling hall to chop sharply into the profits of two Indian reservation casinos.

"We will be disappointed if we don't whack them by at least 30 percent," Evangeline Downs general manager Bruce Fraser said of Paragon Casino in Marksville and Grand Casino in Kinder.

On Thursday, the new "racino" opened its casino for a while for the media to tour. Fraser said that the casino is due to open at 6 p.m. on Dec. 19.

The \$90 million casino is the first phase of a project that will include a new racetrack to replace the current Evangeline Downs in Carencro. The casino will have about 1,600 slot machines.

Opening day is several months ahead of the original schedule. Fraser said that's due to good weather and good planning during the architectural and construction portions. Yates Construction of Biloxi, Miss., is the general contractor for the casino.

"This was supposed to open by the spring of 2004, but it was a good plan that was well executed by both the contractors and the architects," Fraser said.

The casino will operate 24 hours and will initially employ about 700 workers, Fraser said. Sixty percent of the casino work force will be composed of St. Landry Parish residents. The casino will have an annual payroll of about \$10 million.

Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse racing is scheduled to begin at the Opelousas track in 2005 and boost the number of employees to about 900, Fraser said.

The casino and racetrack facility will include about 200 acres, and plans are still incomplete about what to do with the remainder of the land purchased by Peninsula Gaming, the

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track's owner, Fraser said.

"There are plans to develop all 625 of the acres. I guarantee that." he said.

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