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Sweet escape

Margaritaville Casino to provide shopping, dining, entertainment

By MARY PEREZ
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Margaritaville Casino and Resort renderings (May 31)

BILOXI -- Jimmy Buffett believes everyone needs a place to escape their cares for awhile and when Margaritaville Casino opens in 2010, guests will drift away again with a mix of entertaining shops and restaurants.

The look and feel of the \$700 million Margaritaville Casino will come from Buffett's memories of time spent on the Coast. He was born in Pascagoula and began performing professionally in Biloxi, and he has creative control of the property Harrah's Entertainment is building on the beach in Biloxi.

Putting the fun in the shopping is Simon Property Group Inc. Headquartered in Indianapolis, the company owns or has interest in 285 properties in 38 states and Puerto Rico, including the Northpark Mall in Jackson.

Buffett's Margaritaville restaurant will be the centerpiece of at least 60 shops and restaurants and Simon CEO David Simon said in one location, "It's going to be a way to relax, shop, eat and be entertained." There will be a total of 250,000 square feet of shops, restaurants and entertainment.

In 2008 the company will open Pier Park in Panama City Beach, Fla. Similar to the Margaritaville Casino in Biloxi, it will feature outdoor dining and Margaritaville trademark music and food like crab cakes, jambalaya and bayou shrimp pasta. Among the shops and restaurants opening at the Panama Beach site are Ron Jon Surf Shop, Dillard's, Back Porch Seafood House, Panera Bread and Reggae J's Island Grill.

"Our goal is to make Simon's properties the best retail properties in the best markets," said Les Morris, manager of corporate public relations. The company develops enclosed malls, outlet centers, outdoor lifestyle malls and mixed used regional malls that encompass housing and office space.

"Restaurants have become increasingly important to shopping centers," Morris said. "All Simon properties start with great retail."

Construction begins this summer. The resort will feature a new 420-room hotel plus restoration of 378 rooms at the former Casino Magic Biloxi. There will be 100,000 square feet of casino space, 66,000 square feet of convention space, a pool and spa.

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