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News for the Hospitality Executive

The Seneca Nation Developing a 26-story, \$140 million Casino Resort Hotel in Niagara Falls, New York

By ndrew Z. Galarneau, The Buffalo News, N.Y.
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Dec. 26, 2003 - NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y.-- The Seneca Nation plans to break ground in April on a 26-story, \$140 million hotel that will give the city its first four-star rooms -- and a new skyline.

The hotel, another step in the Seneca Nation's plans to build a world-class casino resort in Niagara Falls, will feature 600 rooms and a full-service spa, said Seneca casino head Mickey Brown. Its top floor will be a lounge with views of the waterfalls' brink and the Niagara Gorge.

Photographs taken from a helicopter hovering where the lounge will be suggest future clients will be able to "see quite a bit," Brown said with a smile.

As planned, the Seneca hotel just east of the casino will be the tallest building in the city, topping the United Office Building by six stories.

Two restaurants will be part of the complex, as well as 37,000 square feet of new casino space and other public space, Brown said. The corporation is aiming to create four-star rooms, which casino high rollers are used to but cannot be found in Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Such luxury suites can be found across the river in Ontario. That has given Casino Niagara an advantage in attracting the biggest spenders.

"At Foxwoods the hotels were Mobil Diamond, which is four-star," said Brown, who formerly headed the Foxwoods resort in Connecticut, owned by the Mashantucket Pequot tribe. "I think we can achieve that here."

Delays in obtaining land slowed the Seneca Niagara Falls Gaming Corp.'s efforts to build the parking garage directly north of the casino. But its first 1,000 spaces are set to open Wednesday, and the remaining 1,400 spaces are set to open April 1.

Once the garage is in full operation, construction will begin on the spa hotel, Brown said. Because the Seneca Nation owns the 5.25-acre plot, currently a parking lot, it can break ground at will.

Mayor-elect Vince V. Anello said he was glad to hear of a first-class development in the heart of downtown. But when the Seneca hotel opens, it will strengthen the case for payments in lieu of property taxes, Anello said. Even before his Jan. 1 inauguration, Anello has been trying to make the case for such payments from casino local-share dollars.

The Seneca hotel will be able to offer rooms without charging sales, bed or property taxes, which can add 30 percent to a room price, Anello noted.

"That hotel will be competing directly with the hotels of taxpayers that have struggled here for 20 years," Anello said. "When are they going to get relief?"

David Fleck, who operates the Main Street Howard Johnson's, said a big CASINO sign 26 stories above downtown Niagara Falls would certainly attract attention. "It'll give us a skyline, all right," he said.

Fleck expressed confidence that his hotel could compete.

"I'll compete against it in my own right," said Fleck, president of the Niagara Falls Hotel and Motel Association. "It'll be a four-star property, and I'm two stars. I've got my niche."

But other hotels could be hurt if the Seneca property doesn't charge four-star prices, Fleck said. "If they come in low, then we're going to have a problem," he said. "But what can

we do? They can do whatever they want."

The hotel groundbreaking will bring the total Seneca development under way or completed in Niagara Falls to about \$280 million, making it the largest building spree in the Niagara Falls area since the Niagara Power Project of the 1950s.

An expansion of the current casino, valued at more than \$100 million, remains in the planning stage. It's set for the former splash park at Daly and Rainbow boulevards.

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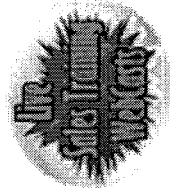


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