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Nov. 17, 2006- Tribe sees 2007 casino opening

By Roger Phelps, Democrat staff writer

Prospects have improved for an upswing in El Dorado County commerce as a tribal casino timeline has begun to take shape at Shingle Springs Rancheria, with a mid-2007 opening expected.

That was a message heard Wednesday by members of the Cameron Park-Shingle Springs Chamber of Commerce. Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Tribal Council member Elaine Whitehurst addressed chamber members.

El Dorado County recently settled a lawsuit against a casino freeway interchange project. With a watchword of "self-reliance," the tribe plans to use casino revenue to help cure shortfalls for rancheria members in job prospects, education, housing, health care and other areas of life, Whitehurst said.

"There are 462 rancheria members right now, as 15 new babies were born this year and one elder died," Whitehurst said. "We're growing. We just came out of court, where the county was suing. We now have a memorandum of understanding. Things are going so smoothly."

An anti-casino group has said it plans further litigation, but Whitehurst said the tribe is looking to the near future as a time to begin its long-awaited \$41 million interchange project to serve a planned casino.

"We plan groundbreaking for the first part of the year, late January, or February (2007)," Whitehurst said.

Whitehurst said once the planned hundreds of casino jobs are filled, their impact cannot help but be felt on local commerce.

"We estimate 1,500 new jobs," she said.

Fliers being distributed by the tribe describe dozens of job types expected to have openings, ranging from accountants, audit staff and cashiers to purchasing agents, landscapers and truck drivers.

"Want a job? Go to shinglespringsrancheria.com," Whitehurst said.

The state Department of Transportation has planned, and completed environmental documentation for a tribe-funded freeway interchange between Shingle Springs Drive and Greenstone Road.

“From Cameron Park, it will be an easy in, with no stop signs,” Whitehurst said. “The first part of the project will be a construction road coming from the direction of Placerville.”

She said interchange contractor C.C. Myers has a reputation for speed and had “promised me 14 months” to finish the roadway. Other contractors will erect a casino and 2,800-car parking garage concurrently, she added.

Sometime in mid-2007, the tribe expects to hold a job fair to help fill casino-related positions, Whitehurst said.

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