

THE LAS CRUCES Bulletin

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Monday, Nov. 19, at Casa de Peregrinos, volunteer Rebekah Segura hands out bottles of soda. The emergency food bank in the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope gave away 688 Thanksgiving dinners for those in need. For more photos from the distribution, see page A3.

Las Cruces Bulletin photo by Christopher Belardo

Fort Sill Apaches celebrate return Casino project site completes first year as official reservation

By **Todd G. Dickson**
Las Cruces Bulletin

With songs and stories by tribal members Friday, Nov. 16, Fort Sill Apaches celebrated the first anniversary when 30 acres in Akela Flats near Deming became their permanent homeland.

"This is an exciting and critical time for us," said Fort Sill Apache Tribal Chairman Jeff Haozous.

A 30,000-square-foot building sits on the land. It is designed to handle 650 slot machines, seven

table games, a full-service restaurant and a cultural center. Currently, the building houses a snack bar that is frequented by a small group of regulars and a cigarette store that does brisk sales of low-price cigarettes.

The property has parking capacity for 600 cars, 40 RVs and trucks, as well as for employees who would number between 280 and 300 workers if the casino opens. Haozous said the tribe is

See **Fort Sill** on page A14

Strip club to be allowed in Las Cruces city limits Constitutional freedoms force council to approve topless bar

By **Todd G. Dickson**
Las Cruces Bulletin

Saying they had no choice but to approve it Monday, Nov. 19, Las Cruces city councillors voted to allow a strip club to open in the industrial area of the city, but came up short on the vote to give it a liquor license.

Councillor Miguel Silva was the lone vote against overriding a Planning and Zoning Commission denial of a special use permit for a topless-dance bar called The Bronx, and was among three councillors voting

against the liquor license transfer, but with Councillor Olga Pedroza absent during the vote, it was a tie and failed.

According to City Attorney Harry "Pete" Connelly, the state liquor licensing board would likely still approve the license.

Still, it will mean a delay for opening the strip club, but the club will open, said Karen Wootton, a Las Cruces attorney representing the proposed club owners.

Unlike the P and Z meeting, the public wasn't allowed to comment

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Fort Sill

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working on the final touches of its application to the Interior Department for opening a casino.

The tribe bought the parcel in 1998 for \$30,000, and the land was put in trust for it by the federal government in 2002. A year ago, the Interior Department deemed the land the tribe's reservation. Apaches once called much of the area their home, but the Indian wars of Western expansion resulted in the Apaches being sent to Fort Sill, Okla., to live as prisoners of war.

According to historians and anthropologists, tribal members are descendants of two Apache groups, referred to as the Warm Springs and Chiricahua Apache bands. Haozous said the tribe will someday officially change its name to the Chiricahua/Warm Springs Apache tribe.

Michael Darrow, tribal historian, said members can't help but feel wistful about what they lost, considering they now have these 30 acres of desert land when they once controlled an estimated 14 million acres in southwestern New Mexico.

The casino project is needed to bring economic development for the tribal members to return, Darrow said.

"The government told us, 'You're welcome to have this land

if you want to farm rock,'" he said.

Bob Haozous, a cousin of the chairman, said he has been re-thinking his identity as a descendant of warriors.

"When I was young, my father told me to be proud you're Apache," he said. "But being of warrior blood is a limited view of our identity. When you're young, it sounds good, feels good to say that, but it doesn't reflect the tremendous depth of the culture."

Today, there are many different kinds of people living in the area that once used to be their land, he said, and the casino project will benefit everyone.

"As you get to know the Apache people, you're going to realize that we're just like you," he said.

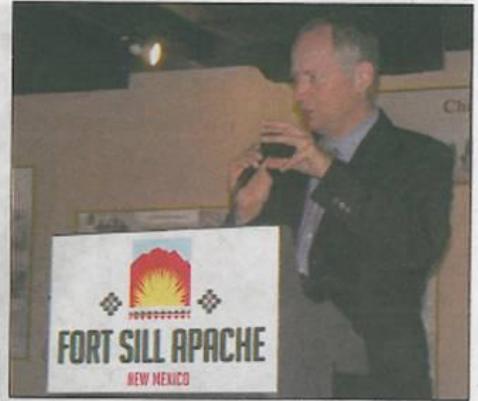
Luna County Manager Kelly Kuenstler said the area's high unemployment and poverty rates will get some relief if the casino is allowed to open.

"The economic potential is most welcome," she said.

For the Apache people, having the parcel of land they can call theirs is important, said Lori Gooday Ware, who has been working on preserving the tribe's songs and dances.

"When I first got here, it just felt like home," she said. "Then, you go to all these places that you only heard stories about."

"There is one thing we can all agree on," said Chairman Haozous, "everyone has the desire to return home."



Las Cruces Bulletin photos by Todd Dickson
Fort Sill Apache Chairman Jeff Haozous talks about the meaning of having 30 acres in Akela Flats officially designated as the tribe's reservation Friday, Nov. 16.



Michael Darrow sings a traditional romantic Apache song.



This historical display was added to the building that was designed to be a future casino.



Bob Haozous shares his thoughts about identity.



After the speeches, tribal members visited with residents and media in the building that currently houses a snack bar and smoke shop.



November 23, 2012 – LasCrucesBulletin.com - [Fort Sill Apaches celebrate return](#)

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