

Region hits jobs jackpot

Expansion of Pechanga, Morongo and other Inland casinos will boost area's employment, economy, officials say

By JONATHAN SHIKES / *The Press-Enterprise*

Two of Inland Southern California's biggest casinos plan to show off their growing economic muscle by hiring at least 2,700 people in the next few months.

The Pechanga Resort & Casino wants to add at least 1,700 new employees by November, when it expects to open its expanded casino and hotel. That will make it Riverside County's second largest private employer, with around 5,000 people.



In Cabazon, the Morongo Band of Mission Indians plans to hire at least 1,000 people by the end of the year as it opens a new casino and a 23-story hotel.

"For the Riverside/San Bernardino County area, and for Southern California, the casinos definitely add another dimension to the overall economy," said Jack Kyser, chief economist for the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp.



Crisostomo / *The Press-Enterprise*

A new two-story bar and restaurant and a 100,000-square-foot wing are among the construction projects under way at the Pechanga Resort & Casino. Officials say the construction will lead to at least 1,700 new jobs at the casino in southwestern Riverside County.

Employment by California Indian tribes reached 44,400 in June, a 17 percent increase over the previous year. It has also been one of the state's fastest growing employment sectors, recording double-digit growth for the past three years.

'Multiplier effect'

And for every casino job, there is a "multiplier effect" that creates additional jobs nearby to support the casino operation and its employees, Kyser said by phone.

The Fantasy Springs Casino in Indio, which will open a new, 12-story hotel and expanded casino in December, and the San Manuel Casino in Highland, which is building an enormous new facility, also plan to hire several hundred employees each.

The expanded Pechanga casino will include a new 100,000-square-foot wing and a two-story bar and restaurant - among other improvements.

"There will be a lot of people hired, and many of the people we have already will move into new positions," said Pechanga human resources manager Lucy Allen. The casino's payroll will increase from about \$56 million to nearly \$79 million.

To help it pull in that many applications, the casino will hold a job fair in its grand ballroom on Aug. 1-2 looking for everything from valets, housekeepers and cooks to poker dealers, pit managers and slot machine mechanics.

"We want to be out there, see people and let them know we are here," Allen said by phone. "But we are already testing the job market, sending out letters of intent to people we need right now, particularly in food and beverage and security."

Allen anticipates that most of the applicants will come from northern San Diego and southwestern Riverside County, but she also expects to hire gaming professionals from Las Vegas and other established casino cities.

Pechanga has been "incredible" for the local economy, "because those workers have to live around here and shop in the Temecula area," said Alice Sullivan, president of the Temecula Valley Chamber of Commerce, in a phone interview.

CASINO JOBS

A sample of hourly pay ranges at Pechanga Resort & Casino:

Housekeeper	\$8-\$11
Slot-machine repair	\$17-\$24.50
Dealers	\$8.75 plus tips (minimum wage)
Hotel and casino management	\$20-\$38

SOURCE: PECHANGA RESORT & CASINO

CASINO EMPLOYMENT

	Current number	After expansion
Pechanga Resort & Casino (near Temecula)	3,500	5,200
Casino Morongo (Cabazon)	1,400	2,400
San Manuel Indian Bingo and Casino (Highland)	2,000	N/A
Spa Resort Casino	1,000	N/A

SOURCE: THE BUSINESS PRESS BOOK OF FACTS, THE CASINOS

BECKY HAGEMAN/THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

The resort is also a good place for young people without job experience to learn new skills and get training, Sullivan said. "Quite a few people from Temecula work there and I know they are happy with the pay and the benefit packages."

Morongo job fairs

Morongo human resources director Merrick Dresnin said he plans to hire "a ton of people from anywhere and everywhere," but especially up and down Interstate 10.

"The advantage we have is we are right off the freeway," he said by phone. "It's a wonderful location for both customers and staff."

Casino Morongo plans to hold job fairs on Aug. 16, 17 and 21, and Sept. 13-14, Dresnin said. "That should give us sufficient time before the opening."

Esmael Adibi, an economics professor at Chapman University, said by phone that the two casino resorts should have no problem finding enough people.



Julie Busch / The Press-Enterprise
 Casino Morongo will hold job fairs in August and September. It plans to add around 1,000 jobs to staff the expansion.

He said the key question will be whether the jobs will require skills that aren't easy to find. "If most of the jobs are for people who are cleaning or serving food, where very little training is required, the jobs will be easily absorbed."

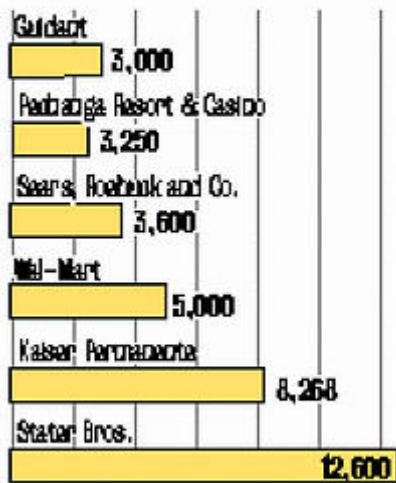
The unemployment rate in June for Riverside and San Bernardino counties was at 5.8 percent, Adibi said, meaning there are about 101,000 people without a job.

"If this was in Orange County, someone would say, 'Who cares about these jobs? We want high-tech jobs,'" Adibi said. "But when you have high unemployment you should take any

jobs, and the unemployment rate is higher there than in Orange County."

To find people with specific, gaming-related skills, the casinos may end up competing with each other, as well as with other casinos, he added.

TOP EMPLOYERS: Pechanga Resort & Casino ranks among the Inland region's largest private employers and will move even higher after its expansion.



SOURCE: THE BUSINESS PRESS
 BOOK OF LISTS: THE CASINOS
 BECKY HAGEMAN/THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Bob Hester, the director of human resources for the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, said the tribe had "plenty of applicants" when it was hiring last fall before the opening of the expanded Spa Resort Casino in Palm Springs.

"We do compete with other gaming properties in the valley, as well as with other employers," like restaurants and hotels, he said by phone. "But overall, the opening of the new Morongo hotel will help with the employment base of the Coachella Valley."

Economist Kyser said that the bigger California's casinos get, the more they will cut into Nevada casinos' revenues and employee base.

"It causes problems for secondary destinations in Nevada, like Laughlin, which we know has been struggling, and Reno," he said. "For California, the casinos are now intercepting some of those casual visitors to Nevada. It's a little payback."