

# Casino in context

By Vince Toya

Chris Erickson is a paid consultant for Sunland Park Race-track & Casino, the most profitable race track in the state. The race track is opposing the Pueblo of Jemez and the people of Anthony because the track wants to preserve its lucrative monopoly. Erickson continues to make misstatements and half-truths about the proposed Jemez-Anthony Casino in his Letter to the Editor on May 15.

The Pueblo of Jemez looked at the economics of opening a casino on our reservation. We understand that it would be much easier to do so, if only it were feasible. However, we commissioned studies from some of the best qualified experts and were told that a casino of any size, shape or form would fail.

Since our reservation could not support a viable casino, we selected a site that would not diminish the value of the investment made by other tribes. This ruled out Albuquerque and Santa Fe. As a result, eight pueblos are supporting our application for an in-state, off-reservation casino. We wanted a county that already embraced gaming. This brought us to Doña Ana County. We wanted a host community that had similar needs as the pueblo. This brought us to Anthony.

We selected a developer who has a reputation for doing everything in a first-class manner. His buildings are beautiful, his business plans are sound and his ventures are successful. These goals pointed to partnering with Gerald Peters.

The Sun-News editorial board said that a new Indian casino would be ok if it were proposed by a local tribe. There is no local, federally recognized Indian tribe eligible to game. We think our proposal makes sense for our pueblo and for Anthony. It is such good public policy that it overcomes the 293-mile hurdle that is the distance from our current reservation to our proposed site.

## Guest column

Over 80 percent of our customers will come from outside Doña Ana County. This is new money flowing in to the county that wouldn't be here but for the Jemez/Anthony Casino. The hotel will be built on private land and will pay more than \$30,000 in

property taxes every year — two fiscal facts that have the county coming out ahead financially. There is no erosion of the tax base. It is an enhancement! A \$28 million payroll will take people off welfare and make them tax-paying citizens. We think this is a good public policy that improves the financial picture of the county.

Our project will create almost 1,000 new, direct casino jobs with full health benefits and another 2,000 indirect jobs in the county, all paying state and local taxes. A study by the Texas comptroller evaluating the Speaking Rock Casino prior to its closing proves that gaming creates good-paying jobs and imports money and tax dollars to our state and the county.

The pueblo will pay its own way for fire, police, roads, emergency medical services and gaming addiction programs.

Lastly, the majority of Anthony residents on both sides of the state line, as well as the residents of the city of Sunland Park, support a new casino. The proposed casino will bring badly needed jobs and infrastructure to these areas. Residents feel it is long overdue and want the opposition outsiders to quit meddling in their economic future.

I believe the Pueblo of Jemez has a legal right under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act to a good location for our casino. Congress made it possible for us to pursue this when it passed the act in 1988.

We ask for a chance to use this legal process, and for the federal government to evaluate our pueblo's application.

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Vince Toya is a member of Pueblo of Jemez Gaming Enterprise Board.