

# Wind Creek Hospitality, officials break ground for casino

BY CHRONICLE STAFF

Construction is officially underway for the Wind Creek Chicago Southland Casino at the intersection of 174th and Halsted Streets. The site is shared by the villages of Homewood and East Hazel Crest.

On May 31, representatives from the Poarch Band of Creek Indians and Wind Creek Hospitality joined with local government officials, including Mayor Richard Hofeld of Homewood and Mayor Tom Brown of East Hazel Crest, in turning over the first spades of ground at the official groundbreaking ceremony.

The Illinois Gaming Board selected this location along I-80 over other south suburban sites in Matteson, Lynwood and Calumet City. The casino is slated to open in 2023.

During a dinner hosted by Wind Creek Hospitality May 31, Hofeld and Brown said they had worked on getting a casino for more than 10 years, adding they were excited to see the vision becoming reality.

While Homewood and East Hazel Crest will share 2% of the casino revenues – with Homewood getting 45% of that and East Hazel Crest 55% – Hofeld said he expects the neighboring communities also will benefit. The plan calls for



Carole Sharwarko/H-F Chronicle

Arthur Mothershed, left, executive vice president of business development for Wind Creek Hospitality, stands with (from second left) Homewood Mayor Richard Hofeld; Stephanie Bryan, tribal chair and CEO of Poarch Creek Indians; East Hazel Crest Village President Thomas Brown; and Charlotte Meckel, tribal council of Poarch Creek Indians.

another 3% of casino revenues to be distributed among 41 other south suburban communities.

“Wind Creek doesn’t just build casinos, we truly build communities,” said Stephanie Bryan, tribal chair and CEO of

the Poarch Creek Indians. “We’re so very thankful for the support of community leaders, local organizations and residents of the South Suburbs who helped get us to this point – and look forward to working with you to ensure that the benefits associated with this project are experienced by the entire region.”

The 70,000-square-foot casino, will feature 1,350 slot machines, 56 table games, entertainment, dining, a 252-room luxury hotel, and will bring approximately 800 jobs to the region.

In addition, the project will create approximately 600 construction jobs. Revenues will be shared with the state of Illinois and surrounding south suburban townships.

Wind Creek, East Hazel Crest and Homewood will contribute to the Southland Public Benefit Fund. The fund will distribute \$150,000 per year for the first five years of operation to provide scholarships for disadvantaged students and health services for the south suburban region through partnerships with South Suburban College, Prairie State College, Moraine Valley Community College, the Ingalls Development Foundation and Advocate South Suburban Hospital.

Once the fund reaches \$20 million, it will distribute \$1 million annually.

## H-F board hears how science wing will improve learning

BY MARILYN THOMAS

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The new science wing planned for Homewood-Flossmoor High School will greatly improve the teaching and learning of science, and give students options to collaborate on projects in coordination with other areas, such as technical education and the fine arts.

The District 233 school board heard a presentation from Kim Smith, chair of the H-F science department, and Jennifer Hester, director of curriculum, instruction and professional development, at its June 21 board meeting.

The space can help teachers implement the latest Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), Hester said. Of the 2,700 students enrolled at H-F, about 2,000 students, or 75%, are enrolled in a science class. The nation-

al recommendation calls for science classrooms of 45-50 square feet per student, but H-F has 24 to 28 students per class in a space that averages 24-35 square feet per student.

The National Science Teaching Association recommends two exits per classroom, but most H-F classrooms have only one exit. Smith said teachers put off doing some experiments because rooms are poorly ventilated and lack sufficient access to electrical outlets. Furnishings, including lab tables and student desks, limit students’ ability to move around and collaborate.

Planning for the new science wing also would give science teachers the chance to expand instruction from mainly college prep classes, such as biology, chemistry and physics, to include more engineering courses and add a health career curriculum, Hester

said. There may be a proposal in the future that would change some of the science requirements for graduation by giving students more choices in the science curriculum, she told board members.

Hester said state law calls for high schools to offer career endorsements by 2025. These science curriculum changes would allow H-F to offer endorsements.

“H-F moving forward with science for college and careers really allows kids to make the connection between the high school experience, the college experience and the career they want to have,” Hester told the the district’s planning committee at a June 8 meeting. “We really need to be able to implement the science pathways, not just the traditional college pathways, and we need to be able to have the facilities

that allow us to have the space and equipment and safety features for our students in the best ways possible so that we can remain competitive.”

The school board is financing this addition with a \$20 million bond issue. The district has an interest rate of 2.8% interest through direct placement with J.P. Morgan Chase. Planning and design of the space will begin shortly. The timeline calls for construction contracts to be approved in December with work beginning in March 2023. The new wing would open in July 2024.

Wakeley says H-F freshmen and sophomores will be using the new space, but all students at H-F are direct beneficiaries of the project because teachers will implement NGSS curriculum changes as soon as this coming school year.

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