

The Runner 50 Cents

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Path is open for a second casino in West Valley

Sells, AZ- The probability of a second casino built and operated in the Phoenix area's West Valley by the Tohono O'odham Nation was ramped up with the signing of an amended tribal gaming compact by Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey in April.

The amended gaming compact, which is good for 10 years, allows four new casinos to be built and operated in Arizona—one by the Tohono O'odham Nation, and one by the Gila River Indian Community. Those two casinos will be in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

The rights to build the other two casinos go to the Navajo Nation and the Pasqua Yaqui Tribe.

Though published reports already designate locations for the anticipated Gila River and Tohono O'odham casino projects, the office of Tohono O'odham Nation Chairman Ned Norris Jr., issued a more

guarded statement on the possibility of a second casino in the West Valley.

It reads: "A great deal of effort has gone into negotiating new compacts with the state and other tribes. Our focus throughout has been to ensure that our rights to game remain secure into the future, and that the new compacts offer additional economic and employment opportunities for our citizens. The Nation has also taken other steps, including the purchase of land that may be suitable for a new casino, to be prepared for the implementation of the new compacts. Now that these negotiations have successfully concluded, we will continue working internally with the Legislative Council and San Lucy District on the best way to move forward together for our Nation."

By the mention in the statement that the tribe has pursued the purchase of land, it appears that tribal officials have

been in discussions with City of Glendale elected officials since early this year.

A report published by the Arizona Republic in late February said that the Glendale City Council canceled plans to annex unincorporated county land next to the most recently built freeway on the western edge of that city, ostensibly to make it available for purchase by the tribe. It further reported that that cancellation was in agreement with the Tohono O'odham Nation in exchange for financial considerations.

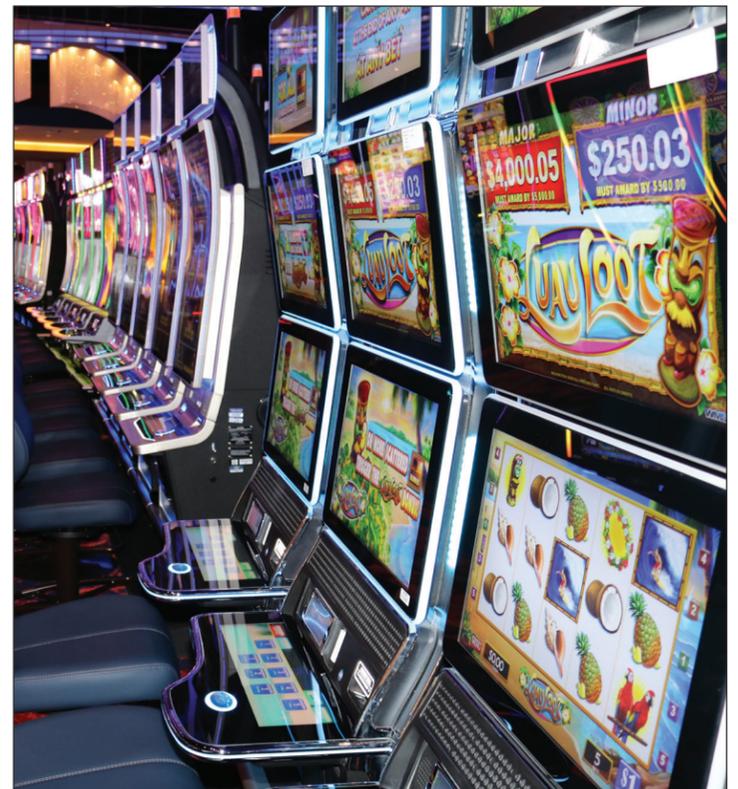
Nonetheless, whatever the tribe's intentions, if indeed it does follow through on the development of a second casino in the West Valley area, it will have to go through the complex process in which it successfully navigated to develop, build, and operate its current Desert Diamond Casino West Valley.

In that effort it purchased land next to the City of Glen-

dale with funds provided by the U.S. Government to settle a claim that part of San Lucy District land was flooded and rendered unusable by the construction of a federal dam. That settlement stipulated that the land could be used for economic development.

After numerous court contests brought by Arizona's

elected officials, Phoenix-area tribes, and Glendale City officials, the Nation prevailed, and applied to the Department of the Interior to put the land into trust status, to make it officially part of the Tohono O'odham Nation. Making it part of the federal Indian reservation paved the way for the existing Desert Diamond Casino.



Slot machines in Desert Diamond Casino West Valley. The Runner file photo.

Seven incumbents win re-election to Legislative Council, four newcomers

Sells, AZ- Incumbents usually have the upper hand when it comes to being re-elected, and that was true to form in the 2021 Tohono O'odham Nation General Election for seats on the Tohono O'odham Legislative Council.

Results posted by the tribe's Election Office for the May 22 election shows incumbents reclaiming all but four of the 11 seats up for a vote. Each of the Nation's districts has two Legislative Council seats, one was up for election this year.

An interesting but not surprising result of the **Pisinemo District** election is the return of Edward D. Manuel to the Legislative Council. He is a former Tohono O'odham Nation chairman who served three terms, and also is a former member of the Legislative Council. He beat out incumbent representative Monica Morgan.

Other newcomers are Cynthia Saavedra who won the

Gu Vo District representative post over incumbent representative Dallas Lewis; Roger Manuel who won the **San Lucy District** election after incumbent Gloria Ramirez did not seek re-election; and DeLissa M. Ramon who was elected to the **Schuk Toak District** representative post. Incumbent Quintin C. Lopez did not seek re-election.

Incumbents re-elected are: **Baboquivari District's** Leander Mase.

Chukut Kuk District's Vivian Juan-Saunders.

Gu Achi District's Victoria Hobbs.

Hickiwan District's Sandra D. Ortega.

San Xavier District's Janice Felix.

Sells District's Evelyn Juan-Manuel.

Sif Oidak District's Lucinda Allen.

Those who were elected to office must be seated at the latest by June 12.

TOCC looking to capitalize on Arizona's okay to community college four-year degrees

Sells, AZ- In May the Arizona State Legislature passed a bill saying that community colleges throughout Arizona can offer four-year degrees in limited fields of study, and Tohono O'odham Community College plans to take advantage of the change.

The legislation, Senate Bill 1453, details a complex process that community colleges must go through before they can offer a four-year degree, such as a financial analysis, and for community colleges in Pima and Maricopa counties, they must show that the degree does not duplicate programs offered by the University of Arizona and Arizona State University.

In spite of the complexities involved in offering a four-year degree, TOCC President Dr. Paul Robertson said it is something the college has investigated.

"We have discussed it internally and have been talking about the possibility more in recent months. Our strategic planning has been underway informally and our Leadership Council is in general agreement about

adding four-year degrees. Our February visit from the Higher Learning Commission, which was very positive, spurred us on. There is specific interest in-house about offering a bachelor's degree in Tohono O'odham Studies. Faculty in that program along with the director are working on curricula that could develop into such a degree. In addition, the Dean of Education and faculty more generally believe that we should consider developing a four-year degree in Early Childhood and in Business Administration," Robertson said.

He also emphasized that the state's agreement to allow community colleges to offer four-year degrees does not impact tribal colleges.

"It is important to note that the okay from Arizona (legislature) to community colleges does not directly impact us. We are independent of the state. Our process would be internal approval, including by the Board of Trustees, and then submission to the Higher Learning Commission, and if they approve, we could proceed," Robertson explained.



He also notes that the community is aware of the college's considerations regarding four-year degrees.

He said, "We have received comments from various (Tohono O'odham Legislative Council) council members over time, and from community members during our annual report presentations to the districts. Our oversight committee, the Human Resource Development Committee, has also heard us advance the idea of developing four-year degrees."

Robertson added, "In sum, I think we're poised to move forward and when our next strategic plan is completed in June 2021, I anticipate that the development of bachelor's degrees will be among the goals."