



**MADERA TRIBUNE North Fork Rancheria at Town Hall meeting**

**ARTICLE**

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**By Cal Tatum - Tribune Writer /  
Photographer**

"The North Fork casino will probably be built," Rodriguez said. "We need to inform the public what they can expect and what the tribe will do for the community. Ag jobs are disappearing as farms become more mechanized and people need other jobs. They need jobs that pay well and have benefits. Our future is dictated by our earnings. I'm not necessarily for gambling, but I am for jobs." Rodriguez did say that he has been known to slip a coin or two into a slot machine on occasion.

Tribal council member Jackie Van Huss said the tribe is hoping to open the casino in 2008. "In total, the resort will create 4,250 new jobs," Van Huss said. "There will be 1,500 well paying, full-time jobs and 750 temporary construction jobs. There will also be more than 2,000 spin off jobs. This development will spend \$45 million for goods and services. And, we plan on investing in the community. We will bring an additional \$87 million into Madera County's economy. But, something we feel is important, we'll bring fun." The casino will be more than just gaming, Van Huss said, it will bring much-needed entertainment. There will be restaurants and possibly dancing and shows.

Supervisor Gary Gilbert spoke in support of the casino. "I have supported casinos all along," he said. "I have learned the benefits of casinos, especially the jobs they create. These are not low paying jobs, these are jobs that average \$40,000 to \$45,000 per year."

The boost to local economies casinos have made has impressed Gilbert. "I have traveled all over the state and visited casinos," Gilbert said. "I have spoken with employees at these casinos and I'll tell you, for many of them, these jobs are the first ones they have had where they received 401K benefits, or time off for family leave. Tribal gaming has created 50,000 jobs in California. To me, that's where the rubber meets the road."

When the North Fork Rancheria first started plans to building a casino, they looked for a partner and found Station Casinos and were impressed with the quality of the company, a tribal spokes-person said. Station Casinos is one of the top 100 companies to work for," Gilbert said. "The tribe looked for a management company with integrity and they found it with Station Casinos." Gilbert said at their own operation, Station offers employees on-site child care and even offers employees a loan program to purchase homes because they want dedicated workers. Station Casinos is a partner with the tribe but Van Huss said they will look into similar programs for their employees.

Besides direct employment, Van Huss said they are already looking for local vendors to meet their needs. Everything from printing to landscaping opportunities will be available at the proposed casino.

Sheets were passed out to the audience, allowing them to show their support of the casino and to list if they were interested in working for the casino or being a vendor.

The tribe is also proposing four different charitable funds to benefit residents of Madera County, including funds to help provide assistance for people suffering with gambling addictions.

Gilbert addressed the question of compulsive gamblers. "The tribe is taking steps to recognize those with gambling problems," he said. "But, recent studies have shown that 95 to 99 percent of all gamblers do so responsibly. The numbers are the same for people who use credit cards responsibly. If a person has a problem with gambling, they will satisfy their addiction any way possible, whether that means going to Table Mountain or even to Reno. Today, more gambling is done on the Internet than anywhere else and no one can monitor a compulsive gambler when they are doing it at home. At least with the casino, there are funds set aside to help problem gamblers.

"The state already has millions of dollars set aside for problem gamblers, money they have collected from casinos

but that money has not been released."

The MOU with Madera County sets aside more than \$1 million in funds for everything from their charitable foundation to economic development, educational foundation and a foundation for unincorporated areas.

Gilbert pointed out that Madera probably doesn't have a workforce qualified to fill the jobs needed by a large high-tech company, such as Microsoft. "If a Microsoft wanted to relocate to Madera we probably don't have the people for them," Gilbert said. "But 85 percent of the jobs at the casino will probably not require a college education. A lot of people in Madera County can't afford to go to college. The jobs will revolve around working with money, security, public relations, and technology. Not all the jobs are glamorous, but they pay well and provide benefits."

Former county supervisor Jess Lopez repeated the high points of the meeting in Spanish. "This is our kick-off meeting for the Spanish speaking community," Rodriguez said. "There will be more meetings like this in the future." "Together, we want to help build a better Madera County," said Van Huss.

The tribe is currently finishing their draft environmental report and should be ready for a public scoping session in June.