

## Turning Stone continues growing

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VERONA - More than four million people visit the Turning Stone Casino Resort each year. And now when those guests arrive, there will be more room to gamble and more attractions at the 10-year-old complex. On April 11, Turning Stone held a ribboncutting ceremony to announce an expansion of its gaming floor and the completed renovation of its original casino. Attendees also were briefed about the progress of the \$308-million, resort-expansion project - of which this is the first phase.

The Oneida Indian Nation, which owns Turning Stone, added 42,000 square feet to the gaming floor, bringing the total gaming area to 122,000 square feet. The resort also is set to open a 98-suite hotel, which will include a 4,000-square-foot presidential suite on the top floor, this fall.

The Oneida Nation moved poker tables to a completed 15-table poker room, opened a high-stakes bingo hall, and made available 2,100 instant multi-games - cashless versions of traditional slot machines, which are outlawed in New York State. Finally, there are 106 traditional table games available, including blackjack, craps, roulette, mini-baccarat, pai gow poker, and Caribbean stud poker.

"The demands we face - during the week, promotional times, and on weekends - [dictated] the expansion," Turning Stone General Manager Craig Clark says. "We've concentrated on a transformation to truly cashless gaming, because our marketing has helped us [learn about] our customers and [cater] to them."

"The games are a tremendously different mix than when we began," says Ray Halbritter, a Nation representative and chief executive officer of Nation Enterprises. "We're very happy with everything."

Clark says the technology used for cashless gaming is similar to that of an automated-teller machine. The machines use a debit card, which adjusts its balance based on the results of the game. If the participant places a winning bet money is added to the card - and deducted for a losing bet. This strategy also enables Turning Stone to learn about all of their guests, Clark says. As an example, Clark says at Harrah's 26 properties, only 76 percent of guests use the company's Gold Card for, slot machines and similar games. The card also helps Turning Stone set prices for its games.

"The demand generates the price points, and the minimum and maximum [amount of a bet] is [fixed]," Clark says.

### Other additions

Turning Stone is set to build two more hotels (including a 20-story, 300-room tower hotel); an events center that will hold up to 5,100 people; a casino atrium that will feature waterfalls and trees; and a spa that will open this winter. The events center will be designed to host concerts, trade shows, boxing matches, and even soccer and lacrosse matches. And by the fall, the resort also will have nearly 5,000 parking spots available both outside and inside a new 2,400-vehicle garage.

Furthermore, Turning Stone is adding a new golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., that will open Aug. 1, and another designed by Tom Fazio that will open next year. The overall expansion will bring the resort to 1.8 million square feet and add nearly 1,000 new jobs to bring the work force to approximately 4,300.

"There's a choice of gaming and nongaming options for our guests," Clark says. "For avid golfers, there are several options available as well as the spa. We're a springboard to other attractions in the area."

The Oneida Nation owns 16,000 acres in Central New York. Halbritter says nearly \$500 million has been committed for additions to the resort over the next two years.

"[Our] sovereignty has allowed us to create and develop this resort," Halbritter says. "[In the current] economy, people start to understand how this is good for the region. It not only benefits the Nation, but the region around us."

Turning Stone focuses mostly on niche advertising, gearing marketing efforts to golfers, meeting planners, and other groups who can

use the resort. Clark hopes to create another 1,000 permanent jobs and attract another one million to two million guests per year over the next few years.

"We've continued to increase our reach over a 10-year period, and we're reaching out further and further," Clark says.

To continue that process, Turning Stone has partnered with the DestiNY USA project to attract even more guests to the region. According to Halbritter, DestiNY and Turning Stone have discussed a joint marketing and advertising campaign.

"The more choices people have, the more opportunity [Central New York has] to attract people," Halbritter says. "People need to start believing in this area again... If you have more attractions, then more people [will visit]."