

RJA Serves as Building Official for Fast-Track Development of Massive Casino Project

Challenge. Typically, clients look to Rolf Jensen & Associates (RJA) to provide its consulting services and expertise in various projects related to fire and life safety for gaining approval of the Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJ). However, at Four Winds Casino Resort in New Buffalo, Michigan, RJA was dealt a different hand, so to speak: RJA was hired to be the AHJ, or building official, for the casino resort development.

Plus, after having been stalled for five years, the project suddenly went into high gear once the owner, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, could proceed. The tribe wanted the casino resort to open in August 2007, which allowed only 14 months from the start of construction.

The scope of the project for one of the country's largest tribal casinos was also unique. The casino covers an area of approximately 275,000 square feet with 3,000 slot machines and 100 table games, six restaurants, three bars, retail spaces, a child care center, back-of-house operations and administrative offices. The resort includes a six-story, 168-room hotel; a four-story, 2,200-car parking garage; a single-story, 9,500 square foot electrical/generator building; and a two-story, 43,000 square foot human resources building. The property covers 600 acres, not all of which are developed at this time.

Solution. Functioning as the municipality for the casino resort, RJA's responsibility was to enforce all codes for the casino during the design and construction phases, all the way through issuing the certificate of occupancy — in essence, everything a city would typically do. RJA reviewed drawings and issued permits for all aspects of the architectural, electrical, mechanical, plumbing, fire protection and road structure work. RJA managed a handful of subcontractors, inspectors and engineers in different disciplines, coordinated all their activities and made final decisions on what was approved.

Because there wasn't a city with which to work, the project team also had to decide which codes it planned to follow. After the project team decided to use the Michigan Building Code, RJA began delving much further into particular sections of the code, such as those pertaining to elevators or electrical power. At times, RJA had to evaluate alternate methods and code equivalencies from which a lot of complex calculations and discussions ensued. RJA needed to build a level of trust with the tribe to ensure that the owners were in agreement with its proposed solutions while meeting the intent of the code.

Result. RJA was able to facilitate the completion of the Four Winds Casino by providing staff on site five to seven days a week during construction, mitigating any problems that might cause delays, conducting inspections and witness testing, as well as coordinating the efforts of the numerous subcontractors. The owner and contractor noted that RJA's dedication to the project and its onsite presence contributed to successfully opening the casino resort within its aggressive, 14-month construction schedule.

RJA received a letter from the general manager of the casino resort, recommending RJA for future projects based on the consultancy's success.



■ Construction Management



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