



Casino keeps local subs busy

by Lynn Stevens



Rendering courtesy Perez Inc.

“They’ve got a lot of different surfaces in there, a lot of fancy ceiling—neat ceilings—a lot of stuff that waves and curves,” says Cook Jackson’s Bays.

[Stress-Con Industries](#) added 40 to 45 people to its Kalamazoo plant to keep pace with demand for architectural and structural precast concrete for the sound barriers along Interstate 94 and for the parking garage at FireKeepers Casino, going up just east of Exit 104 near Battle Creek.

“This project is a four-and-one-half story parking garage five bays wide. The bays are 60-foot each. This is not a small project,” said Malek Eljizi, vice president and general manager of Stress-Con. “This is not a small project by any means—not for us or any other company.”

Construction cost of the 236,000-square-foot casino and the five-level parking garage is estimated around \$115 million. Total work hours to build it are estimated around 295,000. Site preparation began in May, and the building is scheduled to be enclosed by Thanksgiving. It is scheduled to open in the summer of 2009.

“It is fast-tracked,” said Jeff Bays, vice president of Cook Jackson Co. in Battle Creek.

“When we bid it, we were required to bid 10-hour days Monday through Friday and eight hours on Saturday. So that’s the game plan.”

Local contractors such as Stress-Con and Cook Jackson are benefiting from the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi Indians's mandate that the tribe's general contractor, Clark Construction Co. Inc. of Lansing, hire Native American and local subcontractors whenever possible. The tribe set a goal of 20 percent Native American labor on its casino southeast of Battle Creek but left the local-sub goal open.

It hasn't been difficult to find talented contractors in the Battle Creek area. Clark Construction had an office in Battle Creek until the late 1990s and had worked with many of the contractors that have bid on parts of the casino construction, according to Duane Wixson, senior project manager.

"Of the 53 people on site today, 47 are local, so we're contributing to the local economy," Wixson said on a tour of the 77-acre site last week.

Bidding is sequential. Some interior and finishing work has not yet been awarded. Bids have been turned in, but Bays said bidders still are "tweaking as we go, updating pricing."

"Interior work has not been awarded yet—that will be going on as the building is enclosed during the winter," said Art Szczpanek, project estimator for Battle Creek Glass Works.

The company is installing all the exterior glass—about \$750,000 worth—for the casino building. That includes storefront glazing doors and windows, Szczpanek said.

The company isn't adding people—there are no experienced glaziers available, he said. The 40 people in Battle Creek Glass Works's commercial division are working on the casino, some public schools and "dozens of commercial buildings" all at once. In all, this summer's work totals 15 projects, he said.

Cook Jackson has 100 carpenters, plasterers and finishers, and Bays can visualize 80 of them working on the casino at one time. Cook Jackson presently is erecting the exterior steel studs and sheathing the building.

The company is familiar with big, fast-tracked projects such as the FireKeepers Casino because last year, it did all the acoustical ceilings for the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indian's Four Winds Casino near New Buffalo.

The exterior package Cook Jackson won gets the casino enclosed and fireproofed, Bays said. It includes the EIFS—the exterior insulation and finish system. That's routine work for the company, but the interior design isn't typical.

"We're hoping within the next few weeks we're going to hear on interiors," he said, referring to the bid package. "They've got a lot of different surfaces in there, a lot of fancy ceiling—neat ceilings—a lot of stuff that waves and curves."

The “wow” factor for FireKeepers Casino will be its interior lighting, Wixson said. It will play off those waves and curves and remind visitors of the Motor City Casino in Detroit. Swan Electric of Lansing is partnering to build the light show, he said.