



AP photo

Indians' hotel: This is an artist's drawing of the \$10.5 million Oneida Rodeway Hotel and Convention Center under construction near Green Bay's Austin Straubel airport. The facility is a project of the state's Oneida tribes.

Oneidas building a luxury hotel

ONEIDA (AP) — The Oneida Indians have a \$10.5 million project growing within earshot of the planes arriving at Green Bay's airport and the aim is to attract lucrative convention business and the high rollers of bingo.

Promoters of the Oneida Rodeway Hotel and Convention Center have scheduled "topping out" ceremonies this afternoon that include hoisting a lighted Christmas tree to the roof.

More than one-third complete, the hotel's opening is set for June.

Shepherding the project is Bruce King, 31, president of the Oneida Hotel Development Corp.

Wearing a hard hat, he stood recently on the rough concrete floor among the hanging electric cable conduits and the wooden and steel bracing that would some day be part of his people's 202-room luxury hotel.

Here, he said, is the lobby with its sunken conversation pit. There is the restaurant and beyond that the auditorium. And then there are the rooms and 12 suites, five with natural fireplaces.

Jobs for the Oneidas are one of the goals of this development set on a 15-acre wooded tract across a highway from Austin Straubel airport.

Unemployment among the Oneidas, King says, is a whopping 27 percent, but jobs are not the only reason for the hotel.

"We want to become non-reliant on past funding sources," he said. "It used to be that nearly all our operations were financed through government grants. Now we have nearly 500 people working in our own operations and the hotel will provide about 90 more jobs for the tribe."

One of their own operations, and a significant one, is the Irene Moore Activity Center on grounds adjacent to the new hotel site. The Indians also operate a printing business, tobacco store, health center, nursing home and industrial park on Oneida reservation property in the Green Bay area.

The activity center is a high-stakes bingo operation, which the tribe operates every day except Monday, with both morning and evening sessions.

As Indians on reservation property, the Oneidas are not bound by Wisconsin bingo laws. Their bingo prizes range from \$150 to a \$50,000 Bonanza, which requires a \$300 special admission fee.

King emphasizes that the hotel is not a bingo hall but a separate facility, although he allows that the connection is obvious.