

VICTORYLAND EXPANSION CONTINUES

Growth brings more jobs to area



VictoryLand owner Milton McGregor stands in front of current expansion taking place at the facility.

Photo SUBMITTED

GUY RHODES
Special to The Tribune

Anniversaries are a time to look at the past—mostly with pride, sometimes with sorrow, such as 9-11. But anniversaries also offer an opportunity to not only assess where one has been, but also where one is headed.

VictoryLand's 23rd anniversary observed in late September was cause for celebration of past achievements. It was a time to look at what is planned and already taking shape for the future.

Business is booming at VictoryLand, and it appears that what's going on now is only the tip of the iceberg. New buildings, new gaming areas, parking lots, a parking deck and thousands of customers can be seen in every direction at the track in Shorter.

In 1983 when Macon County voters approved a referendum authorizing pari-mutuel dog racing in the county, the site where VictoryLand stands was a soybean field. Today, the dog track remains,

but that only touches the surface of what VictoryLand owner Milton McGregor has developed.

There are about 3,600 electronic charity bingo machines at the Quincy's Triple Seven, located with the VictoryLand Greyhound Racing Complex. Quincy's is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Millions of dollars have been paid out to players at Quincy's, as well as to winners of live dog racing and simulcast dog and horse racing.

In turn, VictoryLand has paid nearly \$150 million in taxes since it opened in the mid-1980s. The track has also paid out millions more in charity bingo and charity (dog racing) days through the years. Sixty non-profit organizations (charities) have contracted with VictoryLand to operate charity bingo on their behalf for which they receive \$15,050 for weekly sessions at the track.

Nearly 75 percent of every dollar wagered in pari-mutuel gaming is immediately returned to the player

Continued • PAGE A2

VICTORYLAND... From Page A1

with better than 90 percent going back to those playing electronic charity bingo.

With its current employment at about 1,200, VictoryLand is the largest public entity paying ad valorem and sales taxes in the county.

Again, that represents only a portion of what's to come. Within a couple of years, expect nearly 2,000 employees on VictoryLand's payroll.

Expansion at VictoryLand

VictoryLand already represents a \$100 million investment. That's about to double with another \$100 million in expansion and improvements in the works.

When McGregor decided on the massive expansion, he went for one of the best builders in the country. Brassfield and Gorrie Construction is the same company that built the Georgia Aquarium and the Georgia Dome, home of the Atlanta Falcons of the National Football League and the Southeastern Conference Championship Football Game.

The architect is Evan Terry & Associates of Birmingham with Rosser International of Atlanta, whose CEO is Roland Vaughan of Tuskegee, the engineering firm for the expansion.

Already completed is a five-story \$11 million parking deck. Under construction in Phase I of the expansion is a new entrance, huge buffet restaurant and sports entertainment center. Phase II will include an entertainment center and hotel with another five-story parking deck.

McGregor describes what is taking place.

"In June of 2008, the buffet restaurant and new entrance should be completed," McGregor notes.

"It will be one of the largest buffet restaurants in the country. Next to it will be a Race and Sporting Entertainment Center. It will be eye-catching, something everybody can be proud of."

That Race and Sporting Entertainment Center, part of Phase I, will have huge movie screens (some taking up entire walls) to watch every major sporting event from around the world. Those events will range from NFL and college football, boxing, baseball, all kinds of racing—any major event.

McGregor explained that patrons can take food from the buffet into the viewing area and enjoy a meal while watching events. There will

also be tables for those handicapping events to do their work.

The current clubhouse area will be "spruced up," according to McGregor.

Phase II will include the hotel, entertainment center, completion of a variety of shops, more eating areas and more parking.

"Site work is already begun for Phase II. Some of the work on Phase II will begin before Phase I is completed," McGregor pointed out.

VictoryLand, which is averaging about 55,000 to 60,000 patrons a week now as compared to 15,000 a week in its 1980s' peak for dog racing, is anticipating a tremendous increase in its business.

According to McGregor, the hotel will initially have 300 rooms, including suites, at reasonable prices. Pads will be laid for two towers that will eventually be built. Each tower will have 500 rooms, making it the largest hotel in the state of Alabama when completed.

An entertainment center that will seat 1,500 and will look similar to the one like Beau Rivage Casino in Biloxi, Miss., will feature "legends" and contemporary artists, according to McGregor. Prices will also be reasonable.

When the hotel is completed, there will be a 300-yard covered walkway from the current parking deck to the hotel. Along the walkway will be numerous shops and speciality eating spots, such as an ice cream parlor.

Shops and such will be similar to Beau Rivage with one exception. Rather than going up to additional floors, all of the shops will be in a semi-circle around the first floor. The hotel is expected to include a first-class steak house and many convention rooms, as well as areas that can be used for functions.

With 75 percent of revenue at gaming centers coming from non-gaming activities, it is paramount to have a variety of amenities for guests. VictoryLand is also looking at providing golf packages for Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail courses in Opelika and Prattville.

McGregor said he is proud to provide the most jobs of any private business in Macon County and more proud that those job numbers are expected to grow to nearly 2,000 when expansion is completed in 2009. That's quite an anniversary present from VictoryLand to the citizens of Macon County.