

Balancing A Rough Image With Modern Gambling

BY AMBER HUNT
Associated Press

DEADWOOD — The store signs of this Old West village are drawn with a typeface reminiscent of “Wanted: Dead or Alive” posters. The streets are paved with bricks that evoke the dusty 1800s.

But don’t be fooled. The streets are new. So are the signs. And that quaint trolley that just rolled down Main Street? Yep, that’s new, too.

Deadwood, a town of 1,300 born in a gold rush, has more in common these days with modern Las Vegas than with the famous historical figures who lived and died here, such as Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane. The giveaway is inside the buildings, where gamblers gather around shiny slot machines and felt-covered poker tables.

Now Deadwood is confronting another challenge: How to keep its rough-and-tumble aesthetics while still offering the comfort, convenience and profitability of a 21st century gambling spot that draws 2 million tourists each year.

Gambling “was always meant to benefit historic preservation here. From the get-go, that was the No. 1 goal,” said Kevin Kuchenbecker, Deadwood’s historic preservation officer. “Preservation is never-ending. It’s ongoing. Deadwood was a dying community, and gaming brought it back.”

Larry Eliason, executive secretary for the South Dakota Commission on Gaming, said Deadwood has to look vintage from the outside in keeping with the city’s historic past. But inside, all bets are off.

“In a licensed casino, the managers want to have the most modern gambling equipment they can afford to buy,” Eliason said.

Less than a quarter-century ago, this place was on the verge of becoming a ghost town. The buildings were old and falling apart, and the city had too few residents to raise the tax money needed for repairs. Then gambling returned. Today’s Deadwood is part Vegas, part Tombstone, Ariz. It only pretends to be old, like a pair of designer jeans with holes already in them.

State officials want to ensure that the town’s popularity doesn’t wane, so they are increasing gambling limits from \$100 to \$1,000. It’s only the second time the limit has been increased since gambling was re-legalized in 1989. The change takes effect July 1.

Officials won’t venture to guess how much money the increase will bring, but the last time the limit went up — from \$5 to \$100 in 2000 — the casinos collected \$14 million more in revenues in the following two years.

“We have more competition now in our surrounding states,” said Republican state Sen. Tom Nelson, citing casinos in Colorado, which permits roulette and craps, and North Dakota and Minnesota, which have higher betting limits at \$250 and \$1,000, respectively. Iowa also has gambling, with no betting limit.

Lawmakers testified in Pierre last month that raising the limit could attract worldwide poker tournaments and deep-pocketed professional players.

But residents, while hopeful that the increased limit will bring more tourists, don’t want it to come at the price of authenticity.

“When we first got here, Deadwood was pretty much a shambles of a town,” said Andy Smith, who has lived with his wife in the Black Hills near Deadwood for nearly 30 years.

The couple left Springfield, Ohio, in 1983 to walk across the country. They ran out of money in South Dakota, and though they finished their transcontinental journey to California in 1984, something about the history and the forests drew them back to the Deadwood area.

Back then, the downtown was a series of vacant, dilapidated buildings, except for a military surplus store and the No. 10 Saloon — famous as the spot where Hickok was shot in the back of the head while playing poker.

“It was pretty decrepit,” Smith recalled.

That’s when a group called Deadwood You-Bet began lobbying to restore gambling, which had long been banned to clean up the town’s gritty image and keep the peace.

In a complicated formula, most of the gambling profits were funneled to historic preservation, though some money was also diverted to the state’s general fund, school districts and the tourism department. After the first full year of gambling, in 1990, gross revenue skyrocketed from about \$29 million to \$106 million in 2010.

Kuchenbecker, the historic preservation officer, said the money resurrected the town. The asphalt streets returned to old-fashioned brick. The green-and-yellow trolleys gave 50-cent tours. Deadwood now spends \$7 million a year to keep its buildings aesthetically authentic and structurally sound.

Grant programs helped historic preservation beyond Deadwood, too — South Dakota towns such as Buffalo Gap, Hitchcock, Spearfish and Sioux Falls also benefited.

In addition, the money funded archaeology projects. The city’s former Chinatown, where Chinese immigrants clustered in the late 1800s, has yielded some 400,000 artifacts in four years of digging, Kuchenbecker said.

But not everything post-gambling has been golden.

“When it first started, we thought it was pretty crappy. There were slot machines in the grocery stores and just everywhere. It was tacky,” Smith recalled. “You’d walk into a place, and there’d just be these brain-dead people smoking and dropping coins into the slots.”

Then the improvements began. The money started sprucing up Deadwood by dressing it down. And even more life was breathed into the town after HBO produced a Western series named after the town. The foul-mouthed and critically acclaimed show was set in Deadwood after Hickok’s death.

The show contributed to a \$30 million increase in gambling revenues during three seasons that aired from 2004 to 2006. In 2007, revenue surpassed \$100 million.

But lawmakers got nervous when 2011 tallies showed a \$6 million dip from the previous year. Legislators worried that the recession and the state’s recent ban on public smoking were going to take a long-term toll.

“There’s a direct flight from Sioux Falls to Las Vegas, so, really, we compete with Vegas, too,” Nelson said.

House Majority Whip Charlie Hoffman said he favored the betting limit increase because it would encourage high-stakes players to “blow their money in Deadwood.”

Smith hopes so, too — to an extent. Money in Deadwood has meant more jobs and more opportunities. In the summers, the downtown bustles with visitors gathering for outdoor concerts and antique auto shows. There are more restaurants than the Smiths ever envisioned when they arrived.

But, he said, the prosperity comes at a cost.

“It’s a fantasy, and what they want to do is create an image. I think they’ve done a good job overall,” Smith said. “But having more people always creates a little more conflict. I hope they can keep things balanced.”

Neb. Panel Advances Bill To Help Pipeline

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A legislative panel has advanced a proposal that could help with the development of the Keystone XL pipeline through Nebraska.

The Legislature’s Natural Resources Committee advanced the bill Tuesday.

The *Lincoln Journal Star* reports that the bill could mark a breakthrough for Canadian pipeline developer TransCanada, which wants to build the \$7 billion, 1,700-mile pipeline.

Schuyler Sen. Chris Langemeier says the new language seeks to clarify that Gov. Dave Heineman can approve the route agreement between TransCanada and the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality.

TransCanada spokesman Shawn Howard says the measure will allow the state to continue its environmental review, which had come to a halt after a federal decision to deny the pipeline permit.

Nebraska Human Trafficking Bill Advances

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A measure aimed at human trafficking in Nebraska has won first-round legislative approval.

Lawmakers voted 36-0 Wednesday to advance the measure by Lincoln Sen. Amanda McGill.

The bill would increase penalties for anyone convicted of pandering, require training for police officers and prosecutors who may encounter human trafficking victims, and create a task force to study further study the issue. It also would require strip clubs and rest stops to post signs with the toll-free number of a human trafficking help center.

Omaha Sen. Brad Ashford says the proposal seeks to address a problem that has gone largely unnoticed in Nebraska.

Sen. Mark Christensen of Imperial says Nebraska has some of the nation’s weakest human trafficking laws. He says lawmakers will have to do more in the future.

Ellsworth Air Force Base Airman Disciplined

RAPID CITY (AP) — A senior airman at Ellsworth Air Force Base in southwest South Dakota has been disciplined for several military violations including shooting a gun near his wife and infant daughter during an argument.

The Air Force says Kyle Schmidt pleaded guilty during a recent court-martial to failing to obey an order or regulation, drunken or reckless operation of a vehicle, assault, reckless endangerment and adultery.

The Air Force reduced his rank to airman, ordered him confined for 10 months and gave him a bad conduct discharge from the 28th Civil Engineer Squadron.

4 Tornadoes Hit North Platte Area, Service Says

NORTH PLATTE, Neb. (AP) — The National Weather Service has completed its survey around North Platte and now says four tornadoes were spawned by the powerful supercell thunderstorm that passed over the area.

Authorities say Sunday night’s twisters injured at least four people and damaged homes, farm buildings and vehicles and derailed or knocked over 31 railroad cars.

Two of the tornadoes were rated on the EF3 on the enhanced Fujita scale, with winds between 136 and 165 miles an hour. One was rated an EF2, with winds between 111 and 135 mph, and the remaining tornado was rated at EF1, with winds between 88 and 110 mph.

Lincoln County emergency management director Dan Guenther told the *North Platte Telegraph* that he doesn’t expect a firm damage estimate for the area until early next week.

Iowa Regents Close U. Of Northern Iowa Programs

BY RYAN J. FOLEY
Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — The University of Northern Iowa will no longer offer degree programs in French, German and numerous other subjects ranging from geology to microbiology under a budget-cutting plan approved Wednesday that will shrink the choices available to students.

Brushing aside criticism from faculty leaders locally and nationally, the Iowa Board of Regents voted 9-0 to terminate 22 undergraduate majors, 20 minors and 16 graduate programs offered at the campus in Cedar Falls. The regents suspended admissions to another eight programs while they undergo restructuring, rounding out a plan that touches about one-fourth of all programs and easily amounts to the deepest cuts in school history.

University officials say they targeted programs for closure that had low enrollment and completion rates, focusing on those with 10 or fewer graduates per year. They say the cuts will eliminate an \$800,000 deficit that academic programs face next year and pave the way for future growth of high-demand programs.

School president Ben Allen urged the regents to take quick action during their meeting in Iowa City, saying further discussion of the cuts would be fruitless.

Regent Bob Downer said he was concerned the cuts will limit class options for non-majors, and suggested school officials could ease concerns by sharing more information about classes that will still be available.

The cuts will be felt across campus. Figures given to the regents show more than 400 students were enrolled in the affected programs as of last fall.

The Faculty Senate and a union


representing faculty have both accused the administration of rushing harmful cuts without enough consideration and input. The cuts were released publicly two weeks ago, and university officials were revising the list up until hours before Wednesday’s meeting.

Provost Gloria Gibson could not tell the regents definitively how many majors were being cut. She said “around 19 or 20, maybe a few more.” Nonetheless, Allen insisted the process was “carefully done.”

Even before the plan was released, the faculty issued a vote of no-confidence in Allen and Gibson. The American Association of University Professors launched an inquiry last week that could lead to a largely symbolic censure of the school, saying the administration appears to be violating faculty rights with program eliminations and buyouts.

Allen told AAUP in a letter Wednesday that the school was

honoring the principles of academic freedom and the terms of its collective bargaining contract with professors, which calls for layoffs to be a last resort.



AM 1450

MORNING COFFEE

WEEKDAYS MONDAY-FRIDAY

Thursday, March 22

7:40 am Yankton Chamber (Carmen Schramm)

8:15 am Yankton Conv/Visitors (Lisa Scheve)

Friday, March 23

7:40 am Yankton P&D (Nathan Johnson)

8:15 am Social Work Month (Barb Mechtenberg, Ashley Termansen)

Public Notice

The South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation is now accepting proposals to operate Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) programs under Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. AEL programs assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency; assist adults to become partners in their children’s education; and assist adults in obtaining a GED® Test credential. This grant operates on a three-year cycle. The program year begins July 1, 2012, and ends June 30, 2013. The grant is renewable for a second year and a third year based on performance and availability of funding. A copy of the Proposal Request document may be obtained by contacting:

SD Department of Labor and Regulation
700 Governors Drive
Pierre, SD 57501-2291
(605) 773-3101

The Proposal Request document is also available online.
http://dlr.sd.gov/workforce_training/ael_grants.aspx

The Letter of Intent deadline is March 30, 2012. The proposal submission is due by 5:00 pm on April 27, 2012.

An applicants’ conference will be held April 19, 2012, via Dakota Digital Network; the time and location sites will be determined after the receipt of Letters of Intent.

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