

Mohegan Sun plans expansion

Mohegan – While hotels in the region struggle to fill rooms, Mohegan Sun casino is contemplating plans for another hotel as part of its next big expansion, according to casino officials.

Mohegan Sun now has an architect working on a master plan for future development, said Mohegan Sun President and Chief Executive Officer Mitchell Etes.

„We know for sure the demand for hotel rooms exceeds the supply,“ Etes said. „We need more hotel rooms.“

The tribe is not sure, however, where and when to expand, or what the future development would look like. Mohegan’s last expansion was the USD 1 billion Project Sunburst. Completed in 2002, the expansion included a 1,200-room hotel, concert arena, retail shops and convention center.

Hotels at both Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods Resort Casino continue to buck regional trends by filling rooms on holidays and weekends.

Foxwoods Resort Casino is working on a USD 700 million expansion that includes a hotel and convention center. Utopia Studios’ planned USD 1.6 billion entertainment complex in Preston includes hotels with 4,200 rooms.

Chris Jennings, president of Mystic Coast & Country, said research shows hotels are not reaching capacity, and along with visitors to regional tourism attractions, have failed to meet expectations for the past three years.

„The numbers haven’t been there,“ Jennings said.

But the casinos are on a separate plane from the region’s tourism.

Indicators, such as a monthly travel index, shows casino

visitors continue to increase, Jennings said.

„The region is obviously still poised for growth. I think that’s pretty evident when you see people coming in with plans for new shopping malls and hotels,“ Jennings said. „They can’t do that without some understanding of the market.“

Donna Simpson, executive director of the Eastern Connecticut Tourism District, said Eastern Connecticut has about 8,000 rooms.

Many of the visitors to casino hotels have made the casino their primary destination, she said.

„They’re essentially looking to be on the property to make it nice and easy,“ Simpson said. „(The casinos) don’t have anywhere near the hotel rooms they need.“