

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



Opinion: Chumash deserve a hearty thank you

Travis Armstrong

November 22, 2006 7:29 AM

The Chumash economic engine continues to pick up speed. Already, enterprises owned by the Santa Ynez tribal government employ 1,500 residents. That number surely will grow with the Chumash tribe's purchase of the largest hotel in Solvang.

The 133-room Royal Scandinavian Inn will get an eight-month makeover. And, although the tribe is being mum, let's hope the renovation plans include bringing a bit of California Indian heritage to the town.

The tribe's casino resort, a short ride away, combines hints of contemporary and traditional Chumash designs.

Tribal chairman Vincent Armenta and other Chumash leaders deserve praise for respecting the community by building a casino resort that isn't patterned after Las Vegas garishness. It would have been in their rights, for example, to erect tall buildings or huge, towering, blinking signs.

I've always wondered how some residents of the Santa Ynez Valley can complain about the complex's appearance when there's a tourist-generating faux Danish village plunked down in their midst.

The tribe's chief operating officer, David Brents, says: "We plan to upgrade the Royal Scandinavian Inn to meet the high standards we have set with our four-diamond-rated Chumash Casino Resort property."

Can anyone dispute that the region's tourism industry will benefit from an upgraded and renovated hotel, four-diamond or otherwise?

Yet I bet we can expect to hear cries about the Chumash's efforts to further their own prosperity and that of the greater community.

The same day the News-Press reported the sale of the Royal Scandinavian Inn, the county Board of Supervisors discussed its "legislative agenda" to pursue in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. One item might involve limiting the Chumash government's authority as a sovereign entity and ability to reclaim some of its historic territory. In doing so, the board would be going down an antagonistic path rather than a cooperative one.

At Tuesday's meeting, Andy Caldwell of the Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business, compared the county government's approach regarding UCSB and the

Santa Ynez band of Chumash.

He noted: "UCSB is responsible for 60 percent of all the alcohol-related offenses in the county. You look at the fact that just last week you waived maybe \$5 million to \$10 million in fees that should have accrued to this county as a result of building projects there. They are the ones in my opinion that are causing the most grief and the most impact to county services and our quality of life. But when will we ever see on the list, you going to Sacramento and asking the University of California or the Cal States . . . to pay their fair share of their impacts to the community?"

"Yet year after year we're picking on the tribe. The tribe in our opinion gives more back to this community than any other organization or entity in the county. We need to start dealing with them with respect . . . instead of trying to go behind their back to the feds to get some policy changes back (in Washington)."

AM 1290: At 10 this morning you can hear my interview with Central Coast businesswoman and former congressional candidate Beth Rogers on AM 1290. The program repeats at 8 tonight and 10 a.m. Sunday.

A reminder: You also can hear 1290 programming streaming on newspress.com.

Travis Armstrong is the editorial page editor of the News-Press. Disclosure: Mr. Armstrong is a member of an Indian tribe that operates three casinos and two hotels in the Midwest.