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Local News - November 17, 2002

World Promotions

Mill Bay resort closes the gates

By Laurie Smith, World staff writer

MANSON - Mill Bay Resort, the proposed site for a new waterfront casino and hotel, went out of business Friday.

Members of the recreational vehicle resort on Lake Chelan's north shore will have until April to clear out their belongings, said Richard Price, the Omak attorney who represents the campground's owners, Chief Evans Inc. It's not clear whether they can camp at the facility.

"I'm somewhat surprised that they've taken this action, because I think it is the triggering event for all kinds of things to come down," said campground member Frank Smith, a Seattle attorney who represents the membership. "We just feel it's just plain wrong what they've done."

According to Smith, Chief Evans has cheated the more than 180 members out of their contract rights. By their estimate, they paid \$1.5 million for 25- and 50-year memberships during the 1980s and '90s.

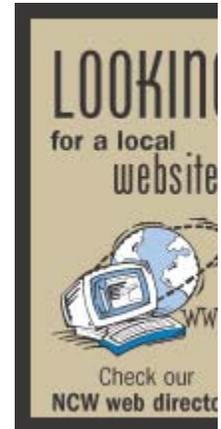
Said Price: "They haven't been cheated out of anything. It's like any business venture. It worked for a while." He said the members were unwilling to negotiate adequate maintenance fees. As a result, Price said, Chief Evans has lost \$100,000 a year on the operation.

According to Smith, the company wanted to triple or quadruple membership dues as a condition of staying open. And "they won't show us their books" as proof that they're losing money, Smith said.

"It is clear that it's not a question of losing money," he added. "They want to make more money."

Chief Evans has worked with the Colville Tribal Enterprise Corp. (CTEC) on plans to build a new Mill Bay Casino, hotel and conference center on the site, which is located on Indian trust lands

CTEC has provided a preliminary drawing of the proposed development to the Lake Chelan Reclamation District. However, CTEC attorney Joseph Caldwell declined to comment on the plans this past week.



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Price said Bill Evans, owner of Chief Evans Inc., decided to close the resort. For reasons that include his failing health and the death of his wife last month, Evans, who is in his 80s and suffers from kidney failure, won't publicly discuss the matter, the attorney said.

"His interests in life right now are staying alive and recovering from the loss of his wife," Price said.

As a descendant of the Wapato family - 19th century residents of the former Chief Moses Indian Reservation - Evans holds the master lease on about 175 acres known as Moses Allotment 8. Besides the former resort, a nine-hole golf course and Mill Bay Casino, currently housed in temporary buildings, occupy the land.

Leslie Evans, Bill Evans' granddaughter-in-law and the campground's former manager, said Friday: "I've been instructed to close the park. Right now we are no longer operating as Mill Bay Resort."

She answered the telephone at the resort office Friday morning with the greeting "Wapato Heritage."

One resort member, Heidi Neal, e-mailed The Wenatchee World on Friday afternoon, saying a new sign, "Wapato Heritage LLC," had been posted at the office. Neal also said she was told by an employee that power would be turned off later in the day.

Asked whether water and utilities to the park had been shut off, Leslie Evans referred the question to Price. In turn, Price said he didn't know the answer and referred the question back to Evans.

However, Price did say the needs of one family of full-time campground residents were being provided for. He also said the closure doesn't deprive members of access to their trailers. About two dozen members paid \$25,000 each for the right to park their RVs there year-round.

In the coming week, Smith said, members plan to file a lawsuit alleging violations of the state's Consumer Protection Act and Camping Resorts Act.

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WORLD GRAPHIC MAP BY CHERYL GRAHAM SHOWING LOCATION OF RESORT

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