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Hitting a jackpot takes time -- pushing, pulling, demanding, cajoling, hoping. Praying and paying out. Then, things are set up. The last cog turns and payback happens. Red Hawk Casino, on-time and on-budget, opened its doors Wednesday to a gush of patrons whose commerce will cause cash to flow to coffers of casino owners, the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians.

A preview Tuesday made evident some of the ways in which, it is agreed, the casino changes the face of west-central El Dorado County.

Indeed, a gambler might lay you the following -- gambling, shmampling, it's the six more high-quality eateries that will mark the highest-profile change.

"Last night, I ate in the Chinese restaurant," said Lyle Berman, CEO of Lakes Entertainment, casino operator. "We had four people, around 10 dishes. The honey-walnut shrimp was very good, the Singapore noodles were great, the orange beef -- and the egg rolls were very good."

A foothilly jumble of waterfalls adjoins the porte cochere, and is visitors' first sight.

A plaque at once describing the casino, the effort to build it and the tribe reads in part, "Renowned for its great will and irrepresible heart, with features that shimmer and eyes that shine, it looks from above at a world of beauty."

The tour revealed a physical plant swathed in light earth tones and shades of gold for a subtle dazzle. Some of the southern walls are of rock. For flash, a silver Mercedes Benz SL 550 sits atop a bank of slots geared to win the machine. More flash -- a bartender-cum-court-jester pouring five blender jars at once. **More over-the-top -- a 12,000-square-foot children's play area featuring everything from kid kitchen to karaoke.** In short, even before opening they can be credited with a smashing view, an impressively jazzed-up staff and, the food again, culinary offerings using top-drawer ingredients put together by notably talented and painstaking chefs.

A sizable private employer -- 1,750 jobs -- emerges locally, and the area no more is home to an American Indian tribe impoverished by being deprived of commercial highway access.

"On March 11, 1920, this land was taken into trust by the federal government," said Nicholas Fonseca, tribal chairman. "It's taken 88 years to acquire legal (highway) access. With opening, we'll be self-reliant. After we pay bills -- and there's a lot of them -- we are investing in our own future, with an interest in the tribe's history to El Dorado County, so we and our neighbors flourish together."

Entertainment for opening night was the Jim Belushi Band, said Peter Fordham, general manager. Belushi's six-foot column of Sound Image amplifiers stood near a stage.

Heavy emphasis has been laid on the children's play area and the adjoining but separate teen arcade.

"Some people said having only no-violence arcade games was crazy," said Troy Dunkley, of the arcade staff. "We're going to do it anyway."

An entire floor is non-smoking. It features gaming, lounges and, that's right, food.

"Food becomes a great differentiator among casinos," Berman said. "At the end of the day, all of them have blackjack."

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