

“Wind Creek will be focused on becoming good neighbors in Bethlehem”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Serious Issues, Wind Creek Casino October 15, 2019

 Latest post in a series about Wind Creek Casino 

Jon Harris, “At grand opening, Wind Creek pledges to reinvest in Bethlehem property. In fact, hotel construction could start in early 2020.” Morning Call, October 10, 2019.

Keeping an eye on Wind Creek. Holding my breath a bit.

Especially this week with the Touchstone Festival, Gadfly has been thinking a lot about Bethlehem’s nature, culture, history, heritage, personality, identity, character — and future.

He doesn’t see a third-of-a-mile-long adventure and water park — once described by Wind Creek something like the “premier destination in the Northeast” — in that future.

Or should he say he *doesn’t want to see it* in Bethlehem’s future, because it looks like a sure thing.

Wind Creek seems determined.

Looks like it will be here.

Gadfly’s resistance to that reality is visceral not intellectual, not logical.

A waterpark in the No. 2 Machine Shop? Feels like dancing on a grave.

In a way his repulsion is beneath explanation, his own explanation.

And he hears no one else expressing anxiety.

It's lonely on this limb.

For sure, we don't want barren brownfields. Given the alternative, we should be glad for the Sands, for Wind Creek. Huge tax money. Lots of Union construction jobs (you are in Gadfly's head, Councilman Callahan). Visitors pouring dollars into the local economy. 2,360 employees and growing. And Wind Creek throwing money at non-profits. That's a "good neighbor," right?

He knows all this.

Why can't Gadfly be happy? Why so conflicted, so cranky?

Makes no sense.

Gadfly wasn't Gadfly when we were going through the Sands pregnancy.

He was bothered, but only out of the corner of his eye. He didn't feel involved.

Now as a toddler-Gadfly he feels involved.

Granted, he's come to accommodation with the casino. In fact, it's virtually invisible to him. He's barely aware of it. It's not in his world. We don't bother each other. We co-exist. We live in separate spheres. Alternate realities.

Perhaps the same thing will happen with the hotels and water park.

But it feels like on a mega-scale what he sees too often in front of our City committees on building-scale — an "outside" developer plunking in something for his gain that does not fit our grain.

When Gadfly came to Bethlehem 50 years ago, he was proud that it was known as the home of moral might and technological might.

Strange combination but serious stuff.

And now we might be advertised to the world for a waterpark that is the premier destination in the Northeast.

A playground.

Doesn't compute.

Gadfly waits for the slap upside the head.

Help him.

Talk him down.

Stage an intervention.

It's lonely on this limb.

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Jon Harris, "At grand opening, Wind Creek pledges to reinvest in Bethlehem property. In fact, hotel construction could start in early 2020." Morning Call, October 10, 2019.

- [Wind Creek's] to-do list . . . includes a proposal to transform the No. 2 Machine Shop via a \$250 million infusion and a \$90 million plan to build another hotel, with potential for a groundbreaking on the hotel early next year.
- Those plans have Wind Creek and local officials excited about the 10-year-old property's future — and they said as much during a grand-opening ceremony on Thursday just outside the casino's main entrance.

- “Bethlehem is the jewel of the Lehigh Valley and as Wind Creek thrives, we’ll continue to shine,” state Sen. Lisa Boscola said, adding that she believes the crucial property, built upon what was once the country’s largest brownfield, is in good hands with Wind Creek.
- Boscola, State Sen. Pat Browne and Bethlehem Mayor Robert Donchez also reflected on the past, back 15 years ago when it was far from a sure thing that Bethlehem would even allow casino development. Donchez was then a councilman, actually casting the deciding vote to allow the project in the city.
- “There’s no question in my mind that was the right vote,” Donchez said.
- But Thursday was more about the future, something ushered in with a tribal dance and song, fireworks, appearances by Emeril Lagasse and Buddy Valastro and a charity-giving contest. In the contest, in which [10 area nonprofits were pre-selected](#) and then the public voted to decide the winner, Wind Creek Executive Vice President and General Manager Brian Carr announced Via of the Lehigh Valley as the winner of \$25,000. He then announced Wind Creek had decided to give the remaining nine nonprofits a prize of \$10,000 each.
- Tribal Chair Stephanie Bryan said the tribe and Wind Creek will be focused on becoming good neighbors in Bethlehem, planning to build on the legacy Las Vegas Sands Corp. left in the city and to create additional job opportunities beyond the property’s current employment of about 2,360.
- Arthur Mothershed, Wind Creek’s vice president of business development, said plans are moving along for a 276-room hotel and another 42,000 square feet of meeting space near the existing 282-room hotel. He said Wind Creek believes it can break ground on the hotel shortly after Jan. 1, a project that will take about 14 months to complete.
- More fluid is the plan to turn the No. 2 Machine Shop, which is a third of a mile long, into a 300,000-square-foot adventure

and water park that also would include a roughly 400-room hotel. Mothershed said that, conservatively, Wind Creek is probably eight months away from getting the design to the point where it can think about a groundbreaking.