

Harrah's tied to Bay Area mega-Indian casino proposal

By John Simerman, Contra Costa Times

Nearly lost amid the shouting of a high-volume campaign season, 42,000 Richmond voters may do more to change the region's environment than in any election in decades.

They will vote on a gambling resort, right on the Bay, with more slot machines than all the casinos on Lake Tahoe's South Shore – the first Vegas-style casino in a California urban area. And if its magnitude is not well understood, its origins are even less so.

The resort's journey to the ballot – which, if voters agree, could prod federal approval – is a seven-year saga with an uncommon cast, from a figure with alleged criminal ties who spurred a small band of American Indians to pursue casino riches, to a development team that includes a former U.S. senator and Clinton-era defense secretary, a major Chicago real estate financier and a former governor's land czar.

Along with the Guidiville Band of Pomo Indians, a tribe with 112 members and roots in Mendocino County, they've pushed ahead with the help of, among others, a former top aide to U.S. Sen. John McCain, and financing first from Harrah's and now from the tribe that runs Cache Creek Casino Resort in Yolo County.

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