

Amador County casino debate reignited

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

The last time the town of Plymouth and its 980 residents felt so agitated about the prospect of an Indian casino rising on their golden meadows, voters recalled the mayor and two other City Council members.

Jon Colburn made sure one of those getting the boot was his own brother, then-council member Gary Colburn.

“I helped run it,” Jon Colburn, 72, said of the 2004 recall. “The people were pissed off. They gave their opinion and the council said, ‘We don’t care.’ ”

Now, rural Amador County faces the possibility of having not one but three tribal casinos – a development that has reignited tensions and the Colburn family feud in Plymouth.

On May 25, the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs ruled that the Ione Band of Miwok Indians has the right to take 228 acres into trust as tribal land to build a proposed \$250 million gambling resort just off Highway 49 in Plymouth.

The decision comes as Amador, a county of 38,000 residents east of Sacramento that is home to the Jackson Rancheria Casino & Hotel, has been fighting a mostly losing legal battle to stop a third tribe – the Buena Vista Rancheria – from building a casino near the town of Ione.

In Plymouth, Gary Colburn, now 74, had joined City Council colleagues in 2004 in supporting negotiations with the Ione Band on an \$85 million, 20-year agreement aimed at offsetting the effects of the tribe’s planned casino, a 120,000-square-foot structure with a five-story hotel and events center.

That effort, born of the belief that the town couldn't stop the casino and should bargain for concessions, made Gary Colburn an ex-council member.

Now the issue is back, five years after Amador County unsuccessfully sued the federal government over the Plymouth project and six years after 84 percent of Amador voters declared in an advisory vote that they didn't want more casinos in the county.

Read the whole story