

A crane loomed in the background of the new hotel construction the morning of Friday, May 19, reaching its arm like a stinger on a scorpion. Its arm was bent toward the roof, dropping its load of cement onto the top. The workers dashed about, like bee drones, working feverishly to keep up, first evening the mixture across the surface, then smoothing the top to a glassy surface.

The cement poured on the corrugated metal sheets, with a mixture of rebar and wire at various spots.

The process might have appeared to be a usual one, one that has been going on for some time, but this was an occasion to be marked and remembered.

It was the topping of the hotel at the Ho-Chunk Gaming – Black River Falls site.

“In the world of construction, the topping of the roof is a milestone,” said Henry Corken, project manager with Hill International Inc., Phoenix AZ. “At 64 feet, it’s the highest building in the area. With the roof poured, it’s the end of climbing for the construction crew.”

The cement is of lightweight nature, a mixture of fiberglass and other strength-added material.

The project crew includes anywhere from 51 to 60 people, depending on the day.

The new hotel will have 123 rooms available to rent, which includes singles, queens, double queens, kings, suites and one-and-a-half suites. Behind the casino, a specially equipped building has been constructed which houses a mock-up of a hotel room. This is where the design of a room is perfected and standardized so that design can be duplicated to each new room in the hotel.

The hotel lobby will be spacious, which will provide enough room for people to gather. The present hotel will be integrated into the hotel scheme and be connected through the lobby.

Along with the hotel construction, simultaneously the casino is undergoing its expansion project.

On July 25, the newly-added portions of the casino, such as a high stakes gambling area, will be finished and open for business.

On August 7, the new phase will start, transforming the front area of the present casino structure, giving it a facelift. Then the next phase, transforming the other half of the old casino beginning on Aug. 28. The whole transformation should take only 6 weeks, Corken said.

At the moment, all the work of both the hotel and casino is about half complete, but the major construction is nearing completion. The remainder is the small, time-consuming finishing touches, fixtures and trim work.

The front outside of the casino has a distinctive look, with “Eifs trees” as decoration, but also adding insulating properties. At night, the trees become a striking scene, with LED lights lighting up the crevices between the trees.

Toward the back of the casino on the west end, a new loading dock area has been established. This general area also is where a convention center will be constructed sometime in the future.

In the new area of the casino, high stakes gambling will be offered in one section and in another section, a bar is being constructed with a stage area for performances. At the bar, a new system will provide liquor and other drinks by means of a tap system, thereby eliminating all bottles, Corken said.

Also, a new, larger buffet area is under construction.

Since some of the parking lot was taken for construction of the hotel and expansion of the casino, an area north of the Whitetail Crossing Convenience Store has been used for expansion of the parking lot.

The construction process has gone quite smoothly, Corken said, and a great deal of the progress is due to the cooperation and positive attitude of the crew.

“Having worked on numerous projects throughout the world, even a \$1.4 billion mega structure in Iraq, I have never seen such cohesiveness folks as here. I can’t even explain it. They people have synched so well. The friendliness of the people willing to help, with everyone on the same page,” Corken said.

“Everyone here is willing to help and make it happened. I have never experienced a team that has gelled so well,” he said.