

If the Gaming Referendum Fails, Greene County Loses

In 2013 on an otherwise forgettable March afternoon, I received a call wanting to know if the Greene County Board of Supervisors would be in favor of going after a casino. The caller had talked to Gary Kirke, chairman of Wild Rose Entertainment, about an idea to build a casino in Jefferson—in a region of the state referred to as the donut hole. Gary listened intently and offered a list of to-dos that included getting the support of the County as well as the City of Jefferson. He also said that Greene County needed to lead the project from within; that was the only way to ensure success.

That phone call kicked off a whirlwind year of activity in which various facets of our county— young people, retirees, business interests, volunteers, farmers and elected officials—came together and worked together to pass a gaming referendum and secure a license from the Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission. Underpinning our unity and cooperative spirit was a shared vision of helping Greene County and this region grow and remain relevant and vibrant for years and decades to come.

When the license was awarded to Wild Rose and Grow Greene County Gaming Corp. (the local qualified sponsoring organization) on June 12, 2014, cheers rang out and the Bell Tower chimed. Our community had indeed succeeded.

On Tuesday, November 2, we must vote one more time to approve gaming in Greene County. State law requires this second referendum for Wild Rose to continue operations and for Grow Greene County to continue receiving a 5-percent share of the casino's adjusted gross revenues. **The good news is that every county in Iowa with a casino has passed the second referendum.**

For my wife, Katie, and me, voting "YES," is a foregone conclusion, a no-brainer in modern parlance. Yet, I have been asked more than once what happens if the referendum doesn't pass.

I am not exaggerating when I say that there will be serious and even dire consequences if the vote fails. The effects will ripple far and wide affecting our schools, students, parents, municipalities, businesses, charities and nonprofits, property owners and economic development efforts. **In short, we—the people of Greene County—will lose.**

Here's how the math works:

- Wild Rose Jefferson pays Grow Greene County 5 percent of its revenues every week. In the 322 weeks since the casino's opening day on July 13, 2015, Wild Rose has paid nearly **\$9 million** to Grow Greene County, which has invested the money in community and regional projects, education and health care.

- The city of Jefferson and Greene County have *each* received another **\$850,000** approximately, separate from Grow Greene's distributions.
- Since 2015, 2.5 million people (far more than all our Bell Tower Festivals combined) have visited the casino—many of whom stayed at the hotel and spent money with other businesses.
- The \$40-million casino building and grounds has generated **\$3.1 million** in property taxes. If the vote fails, the building will sit vacant for who knows how long, and the county will see \$500,000 a year disappear from its property tax roll.
- Grow Greene County will no longer have money to support local projects, charities, public safety, schools, recreation, law enforcement, health care, cultural activities and more.

The reality is that Wild Rose and Grow Greene County have benefited our community even more than we initially hoped and predicted with financial support and resources that are irreplaceable.

While this year's election does not feature hotly contested federal and state races, this is, in fact, one of the most important elections we have ever seen in Greene County. As in most elections, those in opposition to a candidate or issue *always* show up to vote. All who live in Greene County have enjoyed the benefits of having the casino, and it is imperative that we make our voices heard once again. Our challenge should be to pass this referendum by an even bigger margin than we did before.

I urge everyone to join me in voting Yes. For Greene County, for continued growth, for the future. See you at the polls on November 2.

Guy Richardson