

TOPPING-OUT CEREMONY GOOD SIGN FOR CASINO

By Justin B. Phillips

Over 700 members of the Yates Construction crew working on the new Golden Nugget Casino watched as the wind pushed around a spruce tree hanging 100 or so feet above them. The tree was part of the casino's topping-out ceremony Friday, an event signifying the final pour of the hotel tower.

The tree, which represented luck and growth, swayed back and forth a few times before finally being placed on the 25th floor. For the construction workers and representatives from the Golden Nugget and Landry's Inc., a slight breeze was the only moment of hesitation during an event marking another milestone in the construction of Southwest Louisiana's newest entertainment attraction.

As the casino gets closer to the planned opening for late 2014, the entire process has picked up steam. The closing of the purchase of the casino was announced by its owner, Tilman Fertitta, during the last week of November and with the recent topping-out ceremony, the project's end is partially in sight.

Still, Fertitta said he's OK with taking slower, meticulous steps, especially when they can affect the future success of the casino.

"Well, really we're just topping off the building. It's primarily a religious thing, you know, wanting to keep bad spirits away," Fertitta said. "It's a casino, so you want good luck."

The \$600 million project will include 750 hotel rooms and suites, an 18-hole golf course, restaurants and an 18,000-square-foot ballroom. Fertitta said the sheer scope of the project is something visitors will take into consideration as they see the construction process continue.

"This is really just an unbelievably gorgeous project. It's also a big project with over 2,000 employees," Fertitta said. "There aren't really any other \$600 million projects going on, so this is also one of the biggest projects around."



Fertitta said that with the ceremony marking a culmination in one particular aspect of the casino's construction, he hopes more people come out to see the progress.

"I think people are going to start noticing, and it's going to make them want to stop by and see what's going on," Fertitta said. "One of the things that's going to get people's attention is just the size of this property. With the 750 rooms, pools, an 18-hole golf course, people are going to be blown away when they get a look at everything."