

*Bois Forte Band of Chippewa*  
**Fortune Bay Resort Casino - Tower, MN**



Although the bright lights of the big city will never be associated with Fortune Bay Resort Casino, that's fine to those who visit the popular resort casino in northeastern Minnesota. The property, which is located on the shores of Lake Vermilion, has held its own against other casinos and vacation destinations, despite being somewhat isolated due to its remote location.

"We've done quite well," said CEO Gary Gotchnik of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa's property. "Instead of looking at our location as a negative – we've always looked at it as a positive." After all, the property bills itself as a northeastern Minnesota getaway, while still making sure that its players have that big city

casino feel once they enter the doors to Fortune Bay.

The property has continued to evolve since opening in 1986 as a high stakes bingo hall. It was an exciting time for the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa as the creation of the Fortune Bay meant it was on the right path to financial stability. But it was more than that. The creation of Fortune Bay proved to be an excellent opportunity to create jobs for Bois Forte band members and non-natives alike who were looking for a job so that they could stay in the area and not have to move out of financial necessity. The progress was an arduous one, but by the time the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act passed in 1989, there was no stopping the economic engine that Fortune Bay

would develop into for the region.

Slot machines and blackjack were added in 1991 and that provided the increased revenues to help support the tribe's plans for improvements to its infrastructure, programs and service. "Although the first slot machines and blackjack tables were minimal in numbers, it did provide the impetus for further expansion," said General Manager Norm Adams, a Bois Forte Band Member, who previously worked as the human resources director at Fortune Bay.

By 1996, a 114-room resort was introduced to keep up with the demands to develop Fortune Bay into a premier vacation destination. It also marked the arrival of a restaurant; full conference center and several other amenities, like a marina, RV park and heritage museum. The additional amenities not only created a boon for area construction companies and vendors, but it also meant even more job creation for the area.

Looking to further position itself as a premier vacation destination, the Bois Forte Band gave the green light to go forth with the development of The Wilderness at Fortune Bay golf course in 2002. The \$12.8 million dollar project was completed in May of 2004 and has since proved to be a great investment and perfect complement to Fortune Bay Resort Casino. This coming summer, the course, which has earned several state and national awards, will be celebrating its 10th anniversary. Just this past year, The Wilderness earned *Golfweek's* top ranking in Best Courses You Can Play in Minnesota and was ranked 59th in America's 100 Greatest Public Golf Courses by *Golf Digest*.

"The golf course has been a phenomenal addition to our property," said Gotchnik of The Wilderness, which is managed by Kempersports. "It continues to win awards by prestigious publications, which in turn promotes our entire property. It has been a tremendous asset for us."

While the golf course was a great addition, Fortune Bay could not sit idle as there continued to be a growing demand for gaming and tourism in the region. It was back to the drawing board and by 2007, 58 new premium rooms were added to the property. Renovations were also done to the resort lobby and an executive dining room was also added.

This past June marked another milestone for the property as the Sunset Steakhouse was added to give guests a more upscale dining experience. More recently, the former Tamarack



Fortune Bay's luxury hotel includes first class amenities and breathtaking views of Lake Vermillion.

restaurant was totally renovated and recently opened as the Tamarack buffet. The renovation has been nothing short of amazing as the designer gave the Tamarack a true north woods feel, complete with a large mural of Lake Vermillion, a wooden canoe filled with fishing items and several walls decorated with other northern Minnesota treasures.

The property will also be introducing a Tim Horton's Café and Bake Shop, which has been a staple in Canada since 1964. "We are pleased to bring a proven international company to Bois Forte and the State of Minnesota," said Bois Forte Tribal Chairman Kevin Leecy of the café, which opened its doors this past month. The new endeavor should be a big hit with resort guests looking for a quick pick me up before heading out for the day or for those who want to recharge their batteries after a day of activities on the expansive property. There are also plans by Fortune Bay to market its Bois Forte Heritage Museum, which is located less than a half mile from the resort. Those plans entail a better marketing plan to showcase the hidden gem, and will also involve selling locally made Native American art and jewelry online.

Over the years, the casino has continued to make great strides in making sure that the games offered were what players wanted and expected when they came for another visit. Management has not wavered from that fact today, as the gaming floor continues to progress with the latest games that keep guests longing for yet another visit to the property with the hopes of striking it big.

"We installed 24 new Konami games in mid-December," said Slot Manager Jim Hunt. "Konami games continue to be



The Wilderness at Fortune Bay, set among majestic pines and dramatic rock outcroppings, is a true golfer's dream.

in high demand by our players so we want to do our best to give them what they want." However, the Konami games weren't the only new game in town as Hunt secured the state exclusive with IGT for the Avatar game. "We had the state exclusive for the new game for 30 days," said Hunt in reference to the fact that no other casino in Minnesota was able to have the game until that time frame ran out. Other additions to the gaming floor include: Michael Jackson games, Ferris Bueller games, Lord of the Rings games, Back to the Future games and Wyland from IGT. "We also have a \$5 Wheel of Fortune game where a player can become a millionaire with a two coin bet," said Hunt. "This is our first \$5 denomination since I have worked here, so some exciting things are starting to take shape and I'm looking forward to crowning our first millionaire!"

The property's conference center boasts a spacious ballroom and several breakout rooms, including a boardroom that was completely redesigned in 2012. The center draws in many corporate groups throughout the year as well as many Native American conferences and several non-profit groups. Regarding the latter, the ALS Association holds a February snowmobile ride, which features current and past Minnesota Twins Major League Baseball celebrities. "We enjoy sponsoring events like that," said Gotchnik. "The organization does a great job in raising money for ALS and we are honored to partner with them."

Fortune Bay, which has 450 full-time employees, also lends its support to area fundraisers that ensure the longtime viability of Lake Vermilion and the snowmobile trail system that runs through the property. "We've always prided ourselves in being a good community partner and that's why we support events like Let's Take a Kid Fishing and the annual Fun Run," said Gotchnik of the events. "Those events look out for the long term success of the lake as well as have a great impact on tourism in the area."

And Fortune Bay does its part to bolster tourism in large part

due to its amenities, but also by putting on numerous concerts throughout the year. Some of the concerts take place inside the Woodlands Ballroom, but it is the outdoor concerts that draw the most excitement to the area. "Our summer concert series have been very successful for us, but perhaps the most memorable one was when we had Heart perform under the big tent

in the middle of December," recalled Gotchnik. "It was such a unique venue for a concert and those in attendance loved the experience."



Like every successful business model, Fortune Bay Resort Casino prides itself on delivering impeccable customer service to every guest who walks through the door. It's not uncommon to see employees engaging in conversation with its players while they try to win big on one of Fortune Bay's nearly 800 slot machines or 10 blackjack tables. The conversation going back and forth shows that the employees have established true friendships with guests who are proud to call Fortune Bay Resort Casino their home away from home.

"We built this company on our customer service and teamwork," said Adams. "We are very proud of what we have achieved through hard work, dedication and an undying commitment to provide our customers with outstanding excellence in service." ♣

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