

Ministers rally against casino

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Railing against "an industry that capitalizes on people's desperation," a group of area ministers met last week to voice their opposition to a proposed Native American gaming resort that is planned for the outskirts of town.

The 6 p.m. rally, held in the Life of Worship Ministries' sanctuary, was timed to precede a monthly meeting of the Kings Mountain City Council, whose members have mostly supported a proposed Catawba Indian-run casino.

About 70 people turned out for the Interfaith Pastors Coalition meeting, which was organized with assistance from the Kings Mountain Awareness Group, a grass-roots organization that has spearheaded efforts to rally opposition to the casino. Many of those in attendance walked the short distance to City Hall to publicly comment on the issue at the 7 p.m. City Council meeting. The meeting also drew the attention of television news crews from WCCB and WSOC.

The meeting drew more than 20 ministers, many of whom took to the church's pulpit to denounce the proposed casino and to draw a bead on gambling in general.

"If you believe in loving your neighbor, you cannot

support gambling," said Mark Creech, the Executive Director of the Christian Action League, called gambling a get-rich scheme. "We should care for the poor, the disadvantaged."

The ministers who spoke at the rally made direct references to scripture to illustrate their argument that the casino will sew little good will.

"The evidence is overwhelming - casinos make really bad neighbors," said Richard Land, who serves as President of the Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte and is Executive Editor of the Christian Post. "Every crime that the FBI tracks - from illegal drugs to assault and prostitution - rises considerably in the immediate neighborhood of a casino."

Land also said that his research on the matter has indicated that gambling is the second fastest growing addiction in the United States, after pornography.

Proponents of the casino argue it would create jobs in the short term as well as the long term and claim the gaming resort would draw a fresh wave of tourism dollars to Cleveland County.

Last week's rally was at least the fifth public gathering of casino opponents in Kings Mountain. Members and supporters of the Kings Mountain Awareness Group have also made repeated

appearances before the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners, which has also robustly supported the casino as a jobs boon, and the Kings Mountain City Council.

Meanwhile, the fate of the multi-million dollar development planned on a parcel of land located at the intersection of I-85 and Dixon School Rd. still rest with a small group of bureaucrats in Washington, D.C.

An application submitted by the S.C.-based Catawba Indian Tribe has been in the hands of the Bureau of Indian Affairs since September of last year. The BIA is a part of the Department of Interior.

A long delay in handling such an application is not uncommon, according to Joseph Kelly, a New York-based attorney who specializes in gambling law.

"It can drag on for a long time," said Kelly, who teaches business law at the State University of New York-Buffalo and co-edits Gaming Law Review.

He said that the Bureau of Indian Affairs is very careful about covering all the environmental bases that comes with putting land into trust, including wetlands protection regulations and ensuring compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

"You can't put a time limit on it," he said in a telephone interview last week.



Rev. Mark Creech speaks at meeting of the Interfaith Pastors Coalition last week downtown. He joined more than a dozen ministers in denouncing gambling and a tribal casino planned for south of Kings Mountain.

Photo by DAVE BLANTON

75 pastors sign letter, ask city to withdraw support of casino

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A letter signed by 75 pastors calling for city council to withdraw support of a proposed casino was presented to Mayor Rick Murphrey last Tuesday night.

Rev. Steve Taylor also presented the results of an anonymous survey sent to 250-300 pastors and 111 pastors responded. The survey asked two questions: "do you believe gambling is right, wrong, depends, undecided" and do you believe a gambling casino in Kings Mountain would be good, bad, neutral, undecided?" He said that 101 believed gambling is wrong while 10 said it depends on circumstances and 102 believed a gambling casino would be bad for Kings Mountain while four were undecided.

"I hear what you're saying, I hope someday my fellow councilmen will hear you too," Ward III councilman Tommy Hawkins interjected. A half dozen pastors

spoke out against the casino project in a standing-room-only city council chambers, urging council to withdraw a letter of support that went out last year with the signatures of the mayor and six of seven councilmen. At-large councilman Keith Miller refused to sign the letter and in October a second councilman, Hawkins, also stated his opposition.

"Why don't you make a trip to Cherokee and ask the residents what they think of the big casino there?" asked Jim Bishop of Shelby. "A casino is wrong, wrong." He said he realizes that council loves this community and wants to better it but he says a casino won't do that.

Rev. Scott Whitney, pastor of East Gold Street Wesleyan Church, said "We don't consider you (council) our enemy, you are just on the wrong side of the issue. He said three councilmen had asked him "where are the ministers and their stand on this issue. "Well, here we are and the opposition is grow-

ing." Rev. James Lochridge, pastor of Second Baptist Church, told how he (as a boy of 14) took money his dad gave him and sampled a one arm bandit on a ship coming to the United States from England. "I didn't have any money left and like a child I wanted more." Pride comes, then comes the fall and shame, he said quoting Proverbs 11:2.

"Can you say you represent the people?" asked Adam Forcade of Bessemer City, who has led the Kings Mountain Awareness Group since its inception last year. "We have filled this room for every council meeting and will continue to fight for what's right. We're not small, we're not agitators."

He asked council to withdraw its support of the casino, as did Jed Duarte, Acton Beal of Lattimore, and Paul Pruitt who added he wants to focus his energy and time on more positive things. "I love this area and I know you do too," said Pruitt.

Crisis Ministry receives donation



CRISIS MINISTRY DONATION - Carol Spriggs, left, a member of Advent Lutheran Church, presents a check for \$1693.00 from the South Blue Ridge North Carolina Chapter of Thrivent Financial to Lisa Harrison, Executive Director of the Kings Mountain Crisis Ministry. "Thrivent is honored to present this gift for use in the community," said Spriggs. Members of Advent and Resurrection Lutheran Churches rang the bell during the holidays and helped other volunteers from the community raise \$9,000 for the Crisis Ministry. The two churches are the only active churches in the Lutheran South Ridge Chapter.

Photo by LIB STEWART

"We are so blessed to have volunteers and supporters of the Kings Mountain Crisis Ministry," said the new Executive Director Lisa Harrison.

Harrison said that Christmas-season bell ringers collected over \$9,000 and the South Blue Ridge North Carolina Chapter of Thrivent Financial added \$1693 this week on behalf of the two Lutheran churches, Advent and Resurrection, who are active members of the chapter and also participated in the bell ringing.

Stella Putnam, a member of the Crisis Ministry board, said Harrison, who was first hired as financial director in July, brings a strong background in missions, working with people, and finances to the organization. A licensed CPA, Harrison formerly worked for an accounting firm in Charlotte and at Presbyterian Hospital. For the past 19 years she has operated a business, "Pampered Chef," from her home. She is married to Chris Harrison and they have two daughters, Morgan and Paige. The fam-

ily is active in First Baptist Church.

Harrison said that volunteers are needed at the Crisis Ministry which operates a food pantry and clothing closet and assists people with utility payments, medicine and fuel bills. The ministry is supported by donations from the City of Kings Mountain, the community and many churches.

Kings Mountain Ministerial Association sponsors the Crisis Ministry and Rev. Eddie Gray is chairman of the board of directors.

BRIDGE BUILDER AWARD - Ronnie Hawkins, right, received the Bridge Builder award from Cleveland Chamber recognizing him for working to unite people in Cleveland County to accomplish goals. Calvin Hastings, left, a winner last year, presented the award at the recent Chamber awards banquet. Hawkins is general manager of Harris Funeral Home, a county commissioner and long active in the Kings Mountain community and county.

Photo courtesy Victoria Rose Studio



Kings Mountain Rotary Club

The Kings Mountain Rotary Club meets every Thursday, noon, at the Patrick Senior Center, 909 E. King St., Kings Mountain.

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