

Gaming &  
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**ODAWA CASINO RESORT**  
A SURE BET FOR INNOVATIVE DESIGN

THE MAGAZINE FOR MANUFACTURING EXECUTIVES

# Odawa Casino Resort





## A Sure Bet for Innovative Design

*Written by Shelley Seyler  
& Produced by Rob Benson*

Along the tranquil face of Lake Michigan may not seem like a place to find all the excitement of Las Vegas, but adventure seekers can do just that at the Odawa Casino Resort. Strategically remodeled and equipped to accommodate its planned growth, Odawa is using some of the latest green technologies, while providing its customers with top-notch service, high-class amenities, cutting-edge casino games and all the comforts of home.

### A Sketch of its History

The original Victories Casino facility for the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians

served locals as a bowling alley before being converted into the town's only casino. Popular though their facility was, the Tribe looked to the future and a four-star facility. Odawa Casino Resort has since become an incomparable entertainment provider. In 2002, the casino bought a Holiday Inn that it refurbished with an infusion of \$5.3 million in upgrades, the first stage of its five-year plan to introduce Odawa Casino Resort to the community.

From the beginning, the founders went about the creation of the Odawa Casino with inside knowledge. They researched what the community longed for and sought to deliver. The answer: "Our year round residents, out of town visitors, national and international tourists to this resort town needed something more to do" says Sean Barnard, General Manager at Odawa.

Coming to Odawa a year ago with 30 years of casino experience, Barnard is a native of Brighton, England. With the casino industry in England lacking in advancement opportunities, Barnard worked in the Bahamas from 1984 to 1991 at what is now the Atlantis Resort. His boss was then opening a river boat in Illinois and invited Barnard to join him, even going so far as to sponsor Barnard's immigration and employment



Clark Construction Company is proud to have provided construction management services for the Odawa Casino Resort in Petoskey, Michigan



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visa and pay the expenses. Barnard eventually moved to a nationally recognized casino company, running his own marketing agency for a while before being a victim of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Jumping back into the casino industry he worked for Resorts International before being invited to join the Odawa Casino when it was just one-year-old.

Owned and operated by the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, the company had a construction plan that “speaks well on three things,” Barnard explains. “It was never value engineered, the forward planning for future expansion is exceptional, and the quality of design and workmanship is four star all the way. This property represents so many of the qualities that the Tribe embodies.”

Insisting that they do it right, and do it right the first time, a work group consisting of many of the Tribe worked closely together with contractors and designers to create something exceptional. The Tribe finished construction on time and within budget. A planned Phase II with an on-site hotel is next on the drawing board; the facility is already equipped to accommodate the additional infrastructure with generator bays, plumbing and more. “It’s ready to plug and play,” as Barnard puts it.

Saying that Odawa is like a little bit of Vegas in Michigan is no accident. The founders, in fact, took many trips to the city for inspiration. “We wanted to look at finishes rather than build mock-ups,” explains Barry Laughlin, Director of Property Operations.

## Internal Workings

With a vision of what the casino would look like, the founders did not build with



Sean Barnard, GM

the intention of glorifying the tribe, but rather with ideals that would serve both its customers and the society at large.

The first of these objectives is seen in its myriad of environmentally friendly features, one of which is its wastewater treatment plant. Laughlin explains that the founders wanted the casino’s water to be “better quality than in Lake Michigan.” Using some of the latest technology available, the water is taken through a membrane batch reactor and goes through six tanks where it is filtered through an ultraviolet purification system. Currently running at half capacity, this system will also serve the hotel when it is completed.

Thanks to this system, the casino is completely self-contained and can run on generators if necessary.

Another green feature that was installed when the casino took over the hotel is its lighting. The Holiday Inn used candle-stick type features that polluted the horizon. “It caused a glow on the horizon during the evening,”



says Laughlin. “As we went forward, we used shoe box-style lighting that doesn’t add to the light pollution. When you look across the bay at night, you can’t even see it.”

## Above and Beyond

Within its walls, the casino made a point to answer the call of locals; it created exactly what they said they wanted most. Odawa Casino Resort has something for everyone; a deli, buffet, ice cream shop, and a fine dining restaurant ranked with four stars, and a Gourmet 2 Go gift store featuring Michigan fare. There’s also a gift shop that has “more than just t-shirts,” but of course the casino’s games are its trademark. Offering black jack, roulette, a private poker room, craps and a private lounge for high rollers, the casino is “very,








very tastefully decorated to the max,” says Barnard.

There is also a nightclub on site called O zone, which offers two levels of high-class excitement. The O zone features “party pods” that are equipped with seating for eight, a personal fireplace and two private plasma screens. The dance floor is the epitome of excitement with both its design and reverberating sound.

Odawa also has a VIP club, reworked when Barnard came on board, that embodies the best of everything the casino has to offer. There is an “O” lounge where members can “get away from it all,” that has a fire place and brand new furnishings. The annual membership, which, quite impressively, has grown by 10 percent every month, has many “highly tangible benefits,” including double earned points in slots 24/7 and 365, store and restaurant discounts, preferred parking, two free tickets to every show and access to suites when they are available. Members are also sent mail offers and information on prize giveaways.


Odawa Casino this year was named the “Best Casino in Michigan” in the Michigan Meetings & Events Magazine, an award that is chosen by voters. Significant was the property’s ability to beat out the major casino properties in downstate Detroit.

“We spend a lot of money keeping it new, and that’s one of the reasons we were voted best in Michigan and we beat the big boys in Detroit,” says Barnard with pride. It is spotlessly clean and our employees

  
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## COMPANY AT A GLANCE

Victories Established : 1999

Odawa Casino Resort Established : 2007

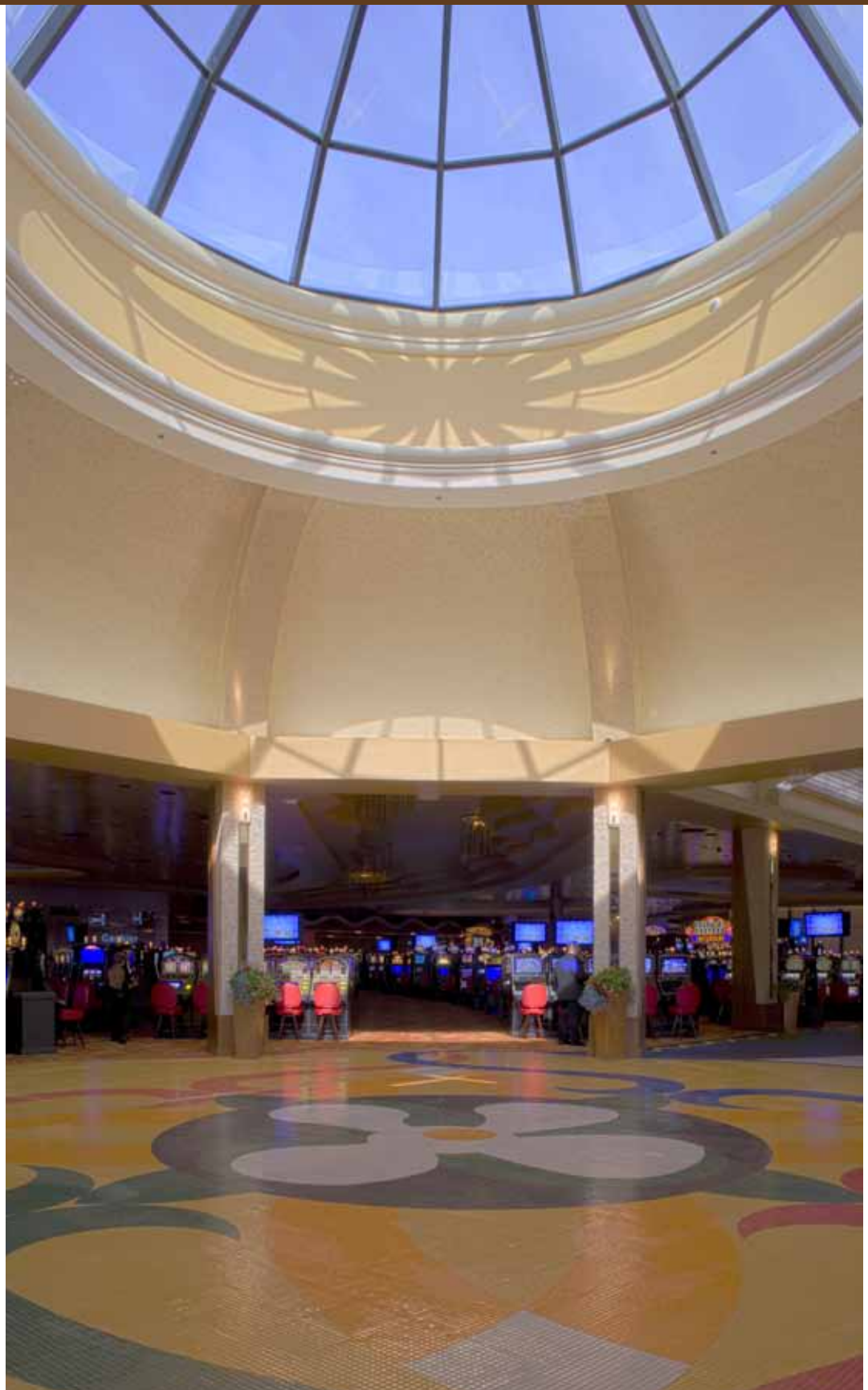
GM : Sean Barnard

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understand customer service...People understand hospitality here. In fact, our level of customer service was specifically mentioned in the award.”

### **Climate Challenges**

Given the heavy snows and harshly cold winters that Michigan endures, the casino watches its customers flee the area in October and slowly find their way back in May. With 86 percent of its customers being from the state, this is of course a challenge, especially in today’s economy. But Odawa is still “doing better than could be hoped for and when I look at the national gaming statistics we’re doing much better than most,” says Barnard.



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