

Business

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DOW 12,453.54

S&P 500 1,330.36

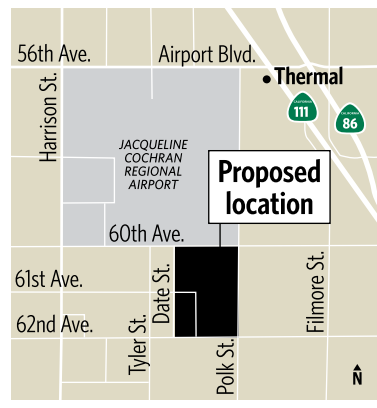
NASDAQ 2,802.51

AMEX 2,438.49

NYSE 8,457.65

Proposed raceway

Plans for a Thermal Motor sports Park would locate it on a 400-acre piece of land south of the Jacqueline Cochran Regional Airport, below Avenue 60.



Project pushed forward by county planning board

BY DEBRA GRUSZECKI
 The Desert Sun

Thermal Motorsports Park & Club on Wednesday headed toward the final stretch in a lengthy approval process to build a private, country-club modeled race track near the Jacqueline Cochran Regional Airport.

Meeting in La Quinta, the Riverside

County Planning Commission approved land-use modifications for the project, sending it to the board of supervisors for the final approval.

"We're elated," said Blake Miraglia, an investor in the proposed 4.5-mile track facility on 330 acres of land of the 2,163-acre Kohl Ranch.

The \$70 million project has the potential to create 477 jobs, according to one economist.

Testifying in support of the project were state Assemblyman V. Manuel Pérez, as well as hospitality and economic development leaders from the

Palm Springs Desert Resort Communities Convention and Visitors Authority Coachella Valley Economic Partnership and Enterprise Zone, and Fantasy Springs Resort Casino & Convention Center.

"It's a game-changer," Mike Kelly, executive director of PGA West and La Quinta Resort & Club, said as he described the international attention the track is getting from the racing community.

"The global car culture lives, breathes and resides here in Southern California," said Lee Morcus of Kaiser

Restaurant Group. He also holds leadership positions with the CVA and CVEP.

Jay Chesterton, vice president of hotel operations and food at Fantasy Springs Resort Casino, who holds board positions on the Palm Desert Chamber of Commerce and the CVA, called the track an important project, especially in the east valley, where unemployment runs as high as 27 percent.

"It's a permanent injection" of jobs into the economy, Chesterton said.

Please see RACEWAY, A13


JULIE JACOBSON THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Professional online poker player Robert Fellner lives north of the Las Vegas Strip, but wonders if his livelihood is gone with the federal action against online gambling operators.

Online poker may fold

Offshore sites closed as prosecutors look into possible crimes

BY OSKAR GARCIA
 the Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — America's multibillion-dollar run at the online poker tables has been interrupted by what could be a killer hand: federal prosecutions of the three biggest websites.

The government has blocked U.S. gamblers from logging on to the offshore sites, which are accused of tricking and bribing banks into processing billions of dollars in illegal profits.

Now gamblers who dreamed of enormous prizes in Las Vegas, or even used online poker to make a living, can't access online bankrolls that in some cases reach six figures.

Some predict the American online poker industry, estimated to be worth up to \$6 billion, may fold under the weight of the investigations as it threatens amateur and professional players, televised tournaments, and the marketing machine that helped Texas Hold 'em emerge from smoky casinos to become a dominant form of gambling on the Internet.

"It just cut the head off of everything," said Robert Fellner, a 27-year-old Las Vegas poker pro whose roughly \$250,000

bankroll on PokerStars was frozen after the indictments. "It's scary. It's much more scary."

Federal prosecutors said Wednesday they expect Internet poker companies whose employees are being prosecuted to return money to players, and they're reactivating two domain names to make it easier for that to happen.

The government announced it has reached agreements with PokerStars and Full Tilt Poker, two companies named in a civil money laundering and forfeiture complaint last week. It will restore the companies' domain names so they can return money to U.S. players, and the deal permits them to continue to let players outside the United States gamble online.

It said in a release that it was prepared to enter the same agreement with a third company, Absolute Poker, if the company chooses to do so.

Returning players' money

"No individual player accounts were ever frozen or restrained, and each implicated poker company has at all times been free to reimburse any player's deposited funds," U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said.

Pay-to-play poker sites have been on shaky legal ground for years in the U.S., but the government hadn't prevented gamblers from playing on the three biggest sites — PokerStars, Full Tilt Poker and Absolute Poker — before last week's

indictments of 11 executives and bank officials.

More than 75 company bank accounts in 14 countries have been frozen, and authorities are seeking \$3 billion in fines and restitution.

Poker players, meanwhile, now see an FBI notice where the websites once were. Some of them had treated their poker accounts like savings accounts, leaving significant portions of their net worth online and ready to wager anytime.

It appears that they will get that money back, though it's not clear when.

Fellner, who won more than \$57,000 at a small World Series of Poker tournament in 2007, is more concerned about how he would make a living without online poker. He said cards have been his only source of income since he was 19, when he matched his annual salary working at a dry cleaner by playing online poker for three months.

Since then, he said he's made more money each year and now plays for stakes that require \$5,000 to \$15,000 just to comfortably buy in and compete. He wouldn't specify how much he has earned so far this year.

Fellner relies on online poker because the Omaha game he prefers isn't normally offered at his stakes in the vast majority of Sin City casinos. He said he could support himself with savings while he waits for

Please see POKER, A13

palm desert

New tenants join Westfield

Restaurant and accessory shop expand lineup

BY K KAUFMANN
 The Desert Sun

A down-home diner and boutique-style accessory shop are coming to Westfield Palm Desert later this year, bringing at least 90 new jobs with them.

Richie's Real American Diner, a regional chain with locations in Temecula, Murrieta and Rancho Cucamonga, will open in early October in the second floor space previously occupied by Marie Callender's, said Jenna LeMaster, marketing director at the mall.

The chain specializes in Southern home cooking and Texas barbecue, along with burgers, milkshakes and sandwiches, with most items on the menu costing \$10 or less.

Charming Charlie, a fast-growing accessories chain started in Houston in 2004, will open in a first-floor space late summer or early fall, LeMaster said.

Sally Myers, owner of Richie's Real American with her husband, Gary Myers, said they will hire between 80 and 100 people

for the new restaurant.

Charming Charlie will start with about 10 new positions, said Patty Fadhouli, the company's marketing director.

While the chain has more than 100 stores across the country, the Palm Desert shop will be its second location in California, she said.

The only other Charming Charlie's in the state is in Thousand Oaks.

The chain has been successful in many markets, Fadhouli said, because it has cross-generational appeal.

"Since we specialize in accessories, friends, moms and daughters can shop together and all find something," she said.

Myers also sees Richie's appealing to a broad demographic in the desert, snowbirds and year-round residents.

The chain was started by Myers' parents, Jack and Linda Williams, and like its other locations, the Palm Desert restaurant will have an outdoor barbecue and desserts made from scratch on site.

"It's going to be a place where people can come and have a down-home meal in a warm comfortable atmosphere," she said.

Blixseth to settle tax claims with 2 states

Associated Press

BILLINGS, MONT. — Tim Blixseth is settling unpaid income tax claims from California and Idaho, but still faces a \$56 million bill from Montana.

The former billionaire who built the sprawling Porcupine Creek golf estate in Rancho Mirage disclosed the settlement Wednesday. He declined to reveal how much he will pay.

"While Idaho and California were disputed claims, we've reached a mutual settlement for them to withdraw," he said.

He said he would not comment further until court documents related to the settlement were filed.

Idaho and California tax authorities had alleged he owed more than \$2 million. They

joined forces with Montana earlier this month on a federal court petition that could force involuntary bankruptcy.

That petition was filed in Nevada, where Blixseth has transferred most of his assets into a family trust.

Wednesday's partial settlement was confirmed by Lynn Butler, a Texas bankruptcy attorney representing Montana and California in the case.

Butler said Montana still was seeking approximately \$56 million from the 59-year-old real estate baron.

Authorities say he drained hundreds of millions of dollars from the exclusive Yellowstone Club resort prior to its 2008 bankruptcy. Blixseth denies the allegations.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

detroit

GM worries flow of parts from Japan may slow

General Motors says it still could be hurt by parts shortages caused by the earthquake in Japan.

But the company doesn't expect the shortages to have a big impact on its financial results for the year.

washington

Regulators accuse Boeing of union-busting activity

Federal labor regulators are accusing Boeing Co. of illegally retaliating for a 2008 union strike by adding a non-union assem-

bly line in South Carolina for its new 787 passenger jet.

The complaint filed by the National Labor Relations Board said the remedy should include moving the assembly work back to Washington state.

louisville, ky.

Expanding China operations build Yum Brands profits

Yum Brands Inc., owner of the Pizza Hut, Taco Bell and KFC fast-food brands, said Wednesday that its first-quarter profit rose 10 percent as growth in its China operations more than offset sluggish performance in the U.S.

The company's Taco Bell chain began the period with momentum in the U.S., but it

suffered a "significant reversal" — a 2 percent sales drop — after a lawsuit, now withdrawn, over the percentage of meat in its tacos and burritos.

— THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

new york

Sales of iPhones drive Apple profits ever higher

Apple said it sold 18.65 million iPhones in the latest quarter, up 113 percent from the year-ago period.

On Wednesday, Apple reported a 95 percent profit jump with second-quarter earnings of \$5.99 billion on \$24.6 billion in revenue compared with \$3.07 billion in earnings on revenue of \$13.5 billion a year ago.

— USA TODAY

BUSINESSFACT

I've checked my personal emails ...
