

Musin' in Minnesota

by Ernie Vietor

There isn't an awful lot of noteworthy happenings at the casinos in Minnesota! In fact, by Las Vegas standards, new chip issues are very S-L-O-W arriving and far between. So when we do have new chips issued, it is a grand day and it sends most collectors into afterburner mode!

With the exception of the following facilities, the casino chip and token situation remains basically unchanged from last year.

Seven Clans Thief River Falls:

This facility was formerly known as the River Road Casino. It was renamed Seven Clans Thief River Falls and opened in May of 2001. A new four story, 151 room luxury hotel and greatly remodeled expanded casino is directly connected to a massive indoor water park. The waterpark is 40,000 square feet of FUN. The complex contains 8 water slides that have a total of 750 linear feet of slippery slopes. Four of the slides start inside and go through the walls to the outside and then re-enter and empty into a large pool of 80 degree water. The largest slide is 275 feet long and drops 32 feet to the pool. For toddlers and smaller youngsters, there are 3 starter slides. There is also a 473 feet 'lazy river' that is perfect for wading and floating and is complete with waterfalls and even a 'rapids' section. So while your family is enjoying the waterpark, you can be in the newly remodeled casino. It now has 30,000 square feet of gaming area and over 800 slot machines. They have upgrad-

ed the blackjack area and it now contains 12 tables. The new casino also features a new 200 seat buffet—the WOW factor certainly kicks in with this new facility. New chips, from \$1 to \$100 were issued on 5/25/01. The new \$1 chip is already "out of play". I talked with administration and there are no plans to revive the \$1 chip at this time. The tables currently use new \$1 tokens. The new \$5 house chip, as well as the \$25 and \$100 are still in play, but the new \$5 Grand Opening chip has practically disappeared. (The G.O. chip has the phrase 'Hotel & Waterpark' underneath the denomination and the phrase 'Grand Opening' along with 'Thief River Falls' displayed on the edge). The old 50 cent Red Lake Gaming Enterprises chip rounds out the selection of chips at this really fun facility.



Seven Clans Red Lake:

This casino has always been known as the Red Lake Casino. The facility at Red Lake, as well as the ones at Thief River Falls and Warroad are all owned by the Red Lake Nation and are operated by Red Lake Gaming Enterprises. Now named Seven Clans Red Lake, they have eliminated all table games. They do have video blackjack, but this facility seems to rely mostly on its slot machines, keno and the bingo parlor. I have talked with management and they can't see the return of the blackjack chips and tables in the near future. The only thing new here is a new Seven Clans logo \$1 token.



Seven Clans Warroad:

This facility used to be called Lake of the Woods International Casino in Warroad. They do have a small addition started, and did purchase a local Super 8 motel nearby and a well known lakeside restaurant, so there does seem to be a major plan in the making. I was casino hopping and stopped in for a looksee and counted 324 slot machines, and 6 blackjack tables. They are still using the Lake of the Woods International Casino logo chips and I look for this to change soon, though I couldn't get anybody to commit as to when this might happen. They don't utilize any form of players club. The only thing new here is, again, the \$1 token featuring the new Seven Clans logo.



Northern Lights:

The Northern Lights Casino located 4 miles south of Walker, also constructed a totally new facility. The Grand Opening was held on May 19, 2001 when they ushered everyone into the new facility and closed the doors on the old one at midnight. The plan is to have an ongoing Hotel & Convention Center project being constructed around the totally completed

Casino. The gaming facility has a very 'Vegas like' feel to it, plus the incredible ever changing sky scenes in the dome ceiling adds to the tremendous atmosphere. Here is what I found:

- More than 600 (\$.05 to \$1) slots
- Draw poker, keno & progressive machines
- \$3-\$200 live blackjack tables
- Full Bar featuring all your favorite cocktails.
- 24-hour restaurant.
- Live entertainment every week (usually free)
- Snowmobile Corral in the winter
- Heated gear storage in the winter
- "Goodie Bags" For snowmobilers.

New chips were issued (\$5 - \$100), but were pulled shortly after, and the casino has reverted to using the old logo style Northern Lights chips, though both old and new style \$1 tokens are being used throughout the facility. We hopefully will see the new chips resurfacing again soon!



Fond-Du-Luth:

This casino, operated by the Fond-du-Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, is located in downtown Duluth. The place has always been hopping when I've been there. The situation there remains unchanged with the exception of a new 2002 \$1 token issued in March 2002. This token is not just a new '02 issue of the older style token, it is a totally new and redesigned dated token.



Grand Casino Hinckley:

This fantastic place has 163,000 square feet of space just in the gambling area alone! I counted more than 2000 slot machines and found 46 table blackjack tables in operation, with six restaurants and 2 hotels. The blackjack tables offer a betting range of \$3 to \$5000 and they also have a 320 seat bingo hall, 12 video blackjack machines, 6 video craps machines, and 387 video poker machines.

They do have a "Advantage Players Club" and with four personnel manning the counter, the waiting line doesn't get very long. The sumptuous accommodations of the hotel complex with a total of 535 rooms also adds to the draw of this great getaway location. Another big plus is the RV Resort. It is within easy walking distance and has 274 RV pads with year 'round hookups, and also offers 50 fully furnished one and two bedroom chalets, which include touch-tone phones, cable TV and kitchen facilities. This is an awesome

casino where the seemingly non-stop action really enhances the overall gambling experience. A whole new chip rack in the following denominations: \$1, \$2.50, \$5, \$25, \$100 was distributed for use beginning in early March 2002 (HOORAY!!!), are certainly beautiful and nicely designed. A very nice place indeed!



Grand Casino Mille Lacs:

I found the gaming at this fine facility to very very stimulating and lively (that's code for having won!!). Here is some of the interesting data I found out about this 178,000 square foot casino.

The gaming floor contains 1,500 slots with \$.05 to \$25 bets and 36 blackjack tables offering betting limits of \$3 to \$1000. The Bingo Hall has 350 seats and there is also Progressive Video Poker, Video Blackjack, Video Craps, standard

Video Poker, and Video Roulette. The hotel complex has 284 rooms and overall there are 4 restaurants. But - the only thing new or different that I found here is a 2002 reissue of their \$1 token. It might be the 'old' style, but it certainly is a beauty!



Prairie's Edge Casino Resort: (under construction)

This very ambitious project by the Upper Sioux Indian Community is going to be located on a bluff overlooking the Minnesota River Valley about 5 miles south of Granite Falls. It is slated to open in January of 2003 and supposedly is going to replace the Firefly Creek Casino. The new complex is being built on 30 acres and will include a 90 room hotel. The gambling area is rumored to be half again as large as the current Firefly Creek facility and NEW CHIPS will be issued! So keep a watch out and remember that date (and start hoarding any Firefly Creek chips that you have!).

Shooting Star:

Last, but not least is the Shooting Star Casino located in Mahanomen. This great facility about 70 miles NE of Fargo, ND also has undergone a major expansion project. With the addition of a convention center, a new hotel complex and numerous shops, it has reaffirmed its' position as a major player on the Minnesota casino scene. The real modification affecting us as collectors and traders was the addition of the new Poker Room in the gaming area of the casino. This very

popular pastime, has a faithful following and there is almost always at least 1 game going on in this area. There are 4 poker tables to accommodate almost any type of betting situation and 7 card stud seems to be the game of choice. The chips need to be purchased and redeemed in the poker room, and I have seen the poker room manager go out onto the general gaming floor to request that the player return to the poker room and redeem his poker chips before leaving the poker area! These chips are extremely hard to get out of there with. It's almost as bad as trying to get roulette chips! Also, they have quit using the special \$1 High Roller Room tokens and are now using standard \$1 tokens instead.



Well, that seems to sum up the current major changes in the casino scene in Minnesota for the moment.

Vaya con dios and keep on chippin'! ❖