

## Ironworkers Conduct “Topping Out” Ceremony At Gun Lake Casino

BRADLEY, MI – Ironworkers Local 340 in conjunction with the Gun Lake Tribe of Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians conducted a beam signing and topping out ceremony on January 28 at the site of the Gun Lake Casino. The ceremony was a celebration of completing the steel structure for the first stage of the gaming casino.

The Gun Lake Casino will be an 83,000 square foot structure with 1,200 slot machines, 36 table games, an entertainment lounge and a restaurant seating 300. When the casino is completed it will directly employ about 600 people.

In building construction, “topping out” is a ceremony held when the last beam is placed at the top of a building. The term may also refer to the overall completion of the building's structure, or as in this case, is when the framework is completed.

While others join the celebration of topping out, it's the ironworkers and their skills that make them first to reach the pinnacle of a structure, and it is around this group of workers that topping out revolves. The last beam to be hoisted is painted white and signed by all those involved. Tradesman on the job joined in the celebration with their supervisors, the Gun Lake Tribe, representatives of project management firms Skanska USA and architect Friedmuller Group of Las Vegas, Friends of the Gun Lake Indians (FOGLI) and many other community VIPs.



Craftspersons pictured from left to right on the top are Reily Beight and Bob Ely, Ironworkers Local 340. On the bottom from left to right are Dave Wakely, Ironworkers Local 340; Jeremy Nicewonder, Ironworkers Local 340; Bill Shue, Ironworkers Local 340; Hugh Coward, Business Manager, Ironworkers Local 340; Jim Mansfield, Supervisor, Ace Steel Erection; Rudy Pou, Owner, Ace Steel Erection; Rob Case, Ironworkers Local 340; Jeff Fann, Ironworkers Local 340; Mark Farley and Geoff Potter, Operating Engineers Local 324; and Bob Raemer, Ironworkers Local 340.

Participating from the Building Trades included Ken Pifer, Business Agent, Painters Local 312; Dennis Crane, Business Agent, Sheet Metal Workers Local 7; Joe Michilizzi, UA 333 Business Agent representing Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 357; Dave Rudnick, Business Agent, Laborers Local 355; James Brylowski, Business Agent, Bricklayers Local 9; and Roger Johnson, Heat & Frost Insulators Local 47.



Ironworker Local 324 members ready to place the beam in place are Jesse Souders & Matt Eldred.

He stated that the evergreen tree stationed upon the beam is to symbolize growth and to recognize an injury free workplace.

The custom of decorating the uppermost point of the structure with an evergreen tree is a tradition that predates the structural-steel industry in America by hundreds of years and has old Northern European roots. According to *The Ironworker*, the union's official publication, "for some the evergreen tree symbolizes that the job went up safely without a loss of life, while for others it's a good luck charm for the future occupants."

Beam signing and ceremony took place within the Gun Lake Tribe's administrative building. At the conclusion of the ceremony a lunch was provided. After lunch, the beam was hoisted into place by crane. The pinnacle of the ceremony takes place when the beam is lifted into place and after the ceremony it was completely secured.

D.K. Sprague, Tribal Chairperson, led the proceedings by encouraging those present to sign the last steel beam to be placed on the structure. An evergreen tree was placed upon the beam with American and Gun Lake Tribe flags.

Tribal leaders conducted a smudging of the beam in order to cleanse bad spirits or negative energy in honor of the sacred ceremony. A drum song was performed by Frank Sprague. A blessing of the food was given by Lorraine "Punkin" Shananaquet.

Hugh Coward, Business Manager, Ironworkers Local 340 and President of the Southwest Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council explained the meaning of the beam signing and topping out ceremony.



Hugh Coward, on the right, with assistance from D. K. Sprague holds the Ironworkers Local 340 banner which is in celebration that the structure was built by "drug free" workers.