

## Chukchansi leaders meet with members, financiers

By Carmen George

Chukchansi tribal members gathered in Coarsegold on Saturday in hopes of assembling enough members to make decisions on behalf of the tribe, but their numbers fell short.

According to the the tribe's constitution, members are allowed to pass resolutions — acting as the governing body, bypassing tribal council — if 35% of the membership is present at a general council meeting.

Leaders said around 150 people attended the meeting at the old pow wow grounds in the Coarsegold Historic Village. To reach the needed quorum, about 280 of the tribe's approximately 815 voting members had to be present, said Reggie Lewis, co-chairman of one tribal council.

Tribal members have tried unsuccessfully to assemble a quorum a few times since the Oct. 9 armed infiltration of Chukchansi Gold Resort & Casino, which resulted in a closure order the following day by a federal judge. On Oct. 31, Madera County District Attorney Michael Keitz announced the filing of felony charges against 15 people allegedly involved in the casino incident.

Among the charged and arrested is Tex McDonald, chairman of the competing tribal council, who entered the casino with security guards in search of missing documents to complete late audits.

On Friday, tribal leaders met with a couple representatives of the casino bondholders. Lewis didn't describe what was discussed, but said "the things they are asking for, I think we can take care of. We're on the verge of getting this all settled."

At Saturday's general council meeting, leaders from the faction led by Lewis and Nancy Ayala, along with leaders from the faction led by Morris Reid, were present.

Members of the faction led by McDonald decided not to attend because "they (the Lewis/Ayala group) raided the casino and installed themselves as a self-styled 'unification council,'" said their spokesman, David Leibowitz, referring to the takeover of the casino's 11th floor by Lewis and Ayala's group about a month and a half before the Oct. 9 raid.

Why meet with a group that has caused so much "financial tragedy," Leibowitz asked.

This week, the faction led by Reid — which was not involved in the recent takeovers — put forth a proposal to reopen the casino that included a caretaker government of six members — two from each of the competing factions.

When asked about a joint council, Lewis said it's a possibility. "I think everyone realizes we have to come together to make this work."

On Saturday, the tribe's late audits were central on the minds of many Chukchansi who gathered in Coarsegold, Lewis said, and a firm hired to do scoping for the audits was present to talk to concerned tribal members about the process.

Reid said tribal members also talked about their hopes for an election. Normally, tribal council elections are held each December, but this year — with leadership severely splintered and so many sanctioned by competing groups — questions loom about how voting will work.

Said Reid, "We just have to come together and get this done in way that's best for the tribe."

Contact Carmen George: [cgeorge@fresnobee.com](mailto:cgeorge@fresnobee.com), (559) 441-6386 or [@CarmenGeorge](https://twitter.com/CarmenGeorge) on Twitter.

Copyright

© 2014 www.fresnobee.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.fresnobee.com>