

Tribal casinos not rushing to reopen

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As several tribal casinos around Phoenix and Tucson prepare to reopen after May 15, officials for the Navajo Gaming Enterprise are still taking a wait-and-see attitude.

Brian Parrish, interim CEO of the enterprise, had already announced in late April the four Navajo casinos would be closed until at least May 17, and with deaths in the area still rising because of the COVID-19 coronavirus, no one is expecting the casinos to be open in the near future.

Parrish said this is partly in concern for the families and friends of the 1,000-plus employees of the casino.

"They live in 105 of the tribe's 110 chapters and we don't want them bringing the virus home with them when they return on weekends," he said.

The enterprise has been paying all employees since the casinos shut down in mid-March, but this has been expensive, costing the enterprise more than \$3 million.

The enterprise in the past has been generous with its employees and Parrish said he wants to keep them on payroll as long as possible because it is expensive conducting as the law requires an exhaustive background check before they are hired, as well as the months-long period of training each employee is required to undergo.

He's hoping that the enterprise will be able to get some help from the tribal government to help defray some future payroll costs. The tribe has received \$500 million in stimulus funds from the

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federal government, but Parrish said he realizes a lot of organizations are also in need of these funds as well.

He said once the Navajo casinos do open, he expects changes will have to be done to make the experience safer for its patrons and employees.

The Arizona casinos have already said they will place limits on how many people can be in the casino at any time so that social distancing can be followed. They are also removing some slot machines to put some distance between them.

Parrish said all of the Navajo casinos will receive a thorough cleaning before opening up again and frequent cleaning will occur throughout the day as well.