América has either come one very long way or sunk to its moral depths, but this much can be said with little fear of contradiction: Casino gambling is beginning to carve itself a niche in the nation's fastest-growing vacation trend, the family-style destination resort.

Indeed, the idea of changing your average resort into a theme park may have already taken hold. Don't expect the good folks at Disney to install slot machines in Epcot Center any time soon, but don't be surprised if more traditional vacation spots start buying into the lucrative, low-overhead appeal of gaming.

Las Vegas has been the birthplace of modern American gambling, is further along this curve than any of its resort competitors. As it matures further, Vegas will look more and more like a giant, gambling theme park. By day, "fun for the whole family" will mean parents playing golf and shopping; kids frolicking by the pool. As it matures further, Vegas will look more and more like a giant, gambling theme park. By day, "fun for the whole family" will mean parents playing golf and shopping; kids frolicking by the pool and indulging themselves in various "theme" activities. The whole brood will get together for dinner, after which the kids will go to bed and parents will make a bee-line for the casino.

Indian tribes across the nation have begun to see gaming as their economic panacea (see story page 1), drawing millions of Americans to out-of-the-way places like Fort McDowell, S.D., and Loughlin, Ariz. Following the lead of Las Vegas — the gambling community's role model — tribes also see gaming as the first step toward creation of full-service, destination resorts.

You have gathered I'm not a big fan of organized gambling, which tends to separate cash from the pockets of those who, in general, can least afford to lose it. However, it's impossible to ignore the bright side here, which is the huge potential growth for golf.

The game has long been a favorite of resort developers who must occupy vacationers during daylight hours. Unlike seaside resorts, most Indian reservations have no beach component — making golf even more important to providing outdoor activities. Golf developers who've spent the last 10 years wading through seas of red may salivate uncontrollably at the idea of building courses on land unregulated by local pols. Land on Indian reservations is often plentiful and, because the tribe owns it outright, beyond cheap.

Don't get me wrong: There is money to be made here as golf rides the coat tails of this burgeoning trend. But, developers beware: There are pitfalls that shouldn't be underplayed (see story page 33).

The temptation — as it was in the late-1980s with regard to real estate-based developments — is to seize immediately upon this new golf vehicle before the competition does.

Yet the family-style gaming theme park is not a proven commodity.
Homestead case
Continued from page 3

expected on other site.

In 1992 the Chicago Region 5 branch of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) vetoed the wetland permits. Later that year, the EPA, in Washington, D.C., reversed its Chicago branch decision.

According to Jones, the EPA in Washington, under pressure from the Bush Administration, lobbied to overturn the Chicago decision. Michigan Gov. John Engler, an ardent Republican backer, has voiced his support for The Homestead expansion throughout the six-year permitting process.

Jones said he believes the Engler/Bush connection was behind the federal appeal of EPA’s own branch office.

“The EPA exceeded its authority in overturning its own Region 5 — the jurisdiction really belonged to the Army Corps of Engineers,” said Jones. “Michigan is the only state in the country where the EPA permits the local state to grant wetland permits. If politics had not gotten into it, the EPA would not have overturned its Midwest region.”

Is this golf course going to pollute the waters, or isn’t it? That is what this should be about.”


It was the last decision before April’s pro-Homestead finding and FCR’s subsequent appeal.

“It has gone through gauntlet after gauntlet — legal gauntlets, emotional gauntlets and design gauntlets,” said Ben Whitfield, town supervisor for Glen Harbor. “The golf course is just a state-of-the-art design, being sensitive to the environment. The township voted in favor of the golf course. DNR approved it... I’d like to know where the leverage, the pressure is coming from.”

Phillips comment
Continued from page 12

ity. Las Vegas has only recently decided to push for this more wholesome, all-encompassing image and — in my humble opinion — the jury remains out as to its profitability.

A similar transformation is taking place in Ledyard, Conn., where the Mashantucket Tribe is adding golf and other resort components to its wildly successful Foxwoods casino complex. But this is a special case. Ledyard is situated between Boston and New York in a heavily populated area. The Foxwoods courses will get significant play irrespective of gaming patrons.

Further, from a golfing perspective, the Greater Vegas area has long been undersupplied, meaning daily-fee and resort development was imminent regardless of whether Las Vegas decided to make The Strip more appealing to “the whole family.”

“Similar golf development may be inevitable in Loughlin and Fort Thompson, but I’m not so sure the rounds will be there.