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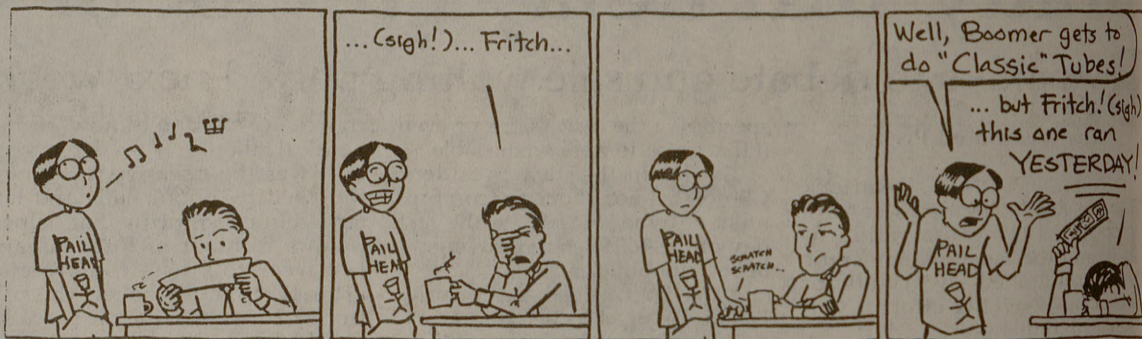
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Fritch



By Critch

Tigua Indians open first gambling venture

Tribal leaders praise new bingo hall

EL PASO — The Tigua Indians threw open the doors to a high-stakes bingo hall with eager anticipation Tuesday night, hoping their first gambling venture will be the forerunner of a full-fledged casino.

Hundreds of enthusiastic people lined up outside the 900-seat Speaking Rock Bingo and Entertainment Center on the tribe's El Paso County reservation hours before the hall even opened.

The early arrivals were entertained by tribal singers belting out ritual songs to the accompaniment of reverberating drums while a young man clad in white eagle headdress and wings circled in front of the center's doors in a traditional dance.

Then tribal leaders came forward to praise the tribe's newest — and they believe most promising — commercial endeavor.

"Our people have traveled a road of poverty," said tribal Gov. Julian Granillo. "Today is a new beginning for our people."

The high-stakes "superbingo" offers sessions six days a week with prizes ranging from \$400 to progressive jackpots of up to \$10,000 and \$50,000.

That was enough to quicken the pulses of gambling enthusiasts like Carl Marks, who said he has played high-stakes bingo in Las Vegas, although he doesn't see as much need to travel now.

"If they had this type of gambling here, there's really no reason why I have to leave town," said Marks, who said he will return to

Speaking Rock if he enjoys his first session.

That's the kind of thing tribal leaders want to hear, although the opening of the gaming center has them seeing more than just dollar signs. They also see the beginning of a new age of self-sufficiency for the Tiguas.

Projections say Speaking Rock could generate up to \$6 million for the tribe each year. Seven Circle Resorts, the management company hired to run it, has guaranteed the tribe will receive at least \$50,000 each month.

The tribe is hoping the facility will eventually give way to a more lucrative casino, but the state has refused to negotiate on a necessary gambling treaty and forced the Tiguas to file suit in federal court.

The Tiguas won the first round of the legal battle when U.S. District Judge Lucius Bunton recently ordered Texas to negotiate the compact which will allow them to build the proposed \$70 million gaming complex. The state is appealing that decision.

The tribe would receive a minimum payment of \$300,000 a month from the casino, according to the contract with Denver-based Seven Circle.

"The many dreams that we've had are just beginning," said tribal elder Miguel Pedraza.

But the flip side of those dreams has been the nightmares envisioned by charity groups that rely on bingo for operating rev-

enue. They fear the tribe's bingo hall will drive out many of the smaller charitable operations and cut heavily into the profits of the larger ones.

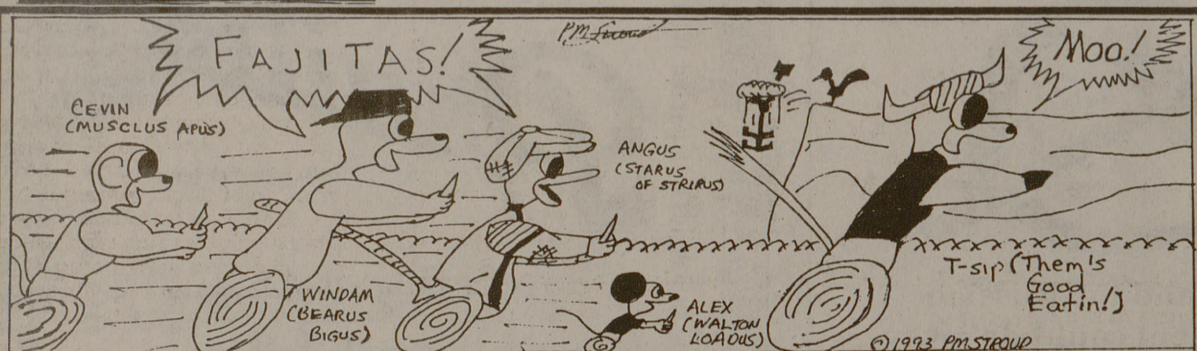
"We're trying to keep to keep our own spirits up," said Rita Kimball, a member of the El Paso Bingo Association. "We know there are a lot folks going down there for curiosity and I don't blame them."



WEATHER

Wednesday: mostly cloudy, turning colder, windy with a chance of rain, highs in 60s.

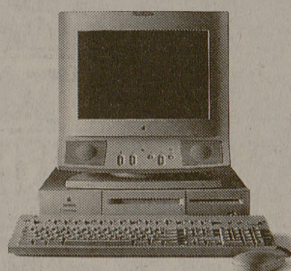
Thursday: cloudy, windy with a chance of rain, highs in 40s.



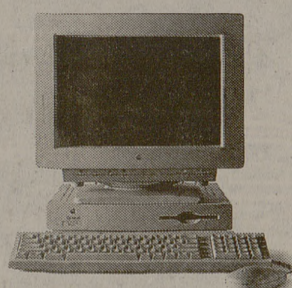
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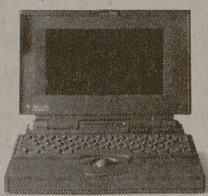
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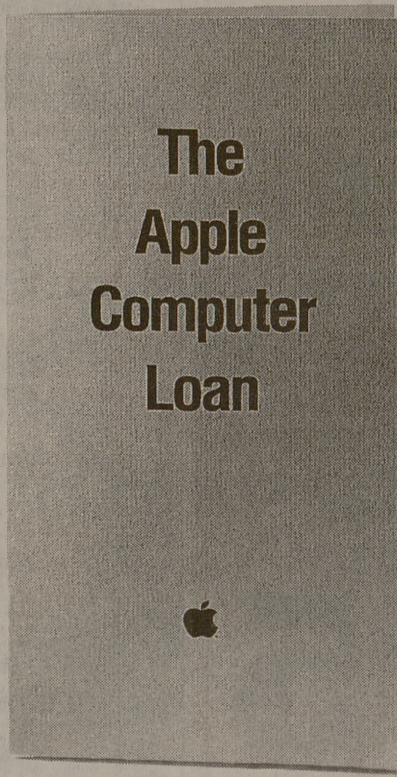
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