

Tribe marks midway point for \$215M hotel

by Debra Gruszecki, *The Desert Sun*

RANCHO MIRAGE - The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians set a good luck talisman on the bedpost of the Agua Caliente Casino hotel on Monday.

It happened in a "Topping Off" party where VIPs, tribal leaders and construction workers gathered to sign the last steel beam that was lifted into place for the tribe's \$215 million, 16-story hotel.

Tribal chairman Richard Milanovich called the event a "milestone" in the tribe's history.

When he stepped up to the beam, he wrote: "A dream realized."

Hundreds of tribal members and leaders, construction workers, civic leaders - and surprise guest celebrity Kay Ballard - scrawled their name or a message on the I-beam to note the midway point of the hotel project.

"The hopes and dreams of all who signed that beam are now affixed to the top of the hotel," Milanovich said. "Their sentiment will forever be encapsulated here, like a giant dream catcher."

The "Topping Off" party included a "thank-you" barbecue lunch for the VIPs - most decked with hard hats - and a gift: a silver lunch bucket with a commemorative T-shirt.

Juan Macias, a Carpenters Local 547 from Mexicali, said he enjoyed the festivities as much as his six-month-stint, commuting daily from the border with two other card-carrying carpenters.

"It's worth it," he said. "Good money. Safe environment, and overtime."

Maynard Zillmer, a Roel Construction Co. superintendent, was beaming with pride.

"It's involved a lot of wind, a lot of manpower, many decisions and a great deal of support," he said.

Despite 54 wind days, the project by a workforce of 350 to 450 is running on time. Look for an opening in the spring of 2008, Milanovich said.

Tribal member Annette Guzman called the day a proud moment in her life.

"It was great to see the tribe's logo on the beam, a great honor" she said. "We are happy to move forward."

Tribal member Kelly Slagley wrote, "It's about time."

"To have a new hotel" to compliment the decades-old Spa Resort Casino is nice, she said. It also is a visible sign for her three, teenaged sons that "dreams can be attained."