

## Economic Opportunities

Given the demographics of the Tribe and the dynamics of the region, the Tribe has found the service sector to be the most beneficial channel for revenue generation and job creation on the reservation.

In 2002, the Tribe opened a convenience store and gas station that is slowly becoming profitable. But the small profit margin and limited employment opportunities the station offers are not nearly enough to address the long term needs of the Tribe.

One step towards a solution is to let the Tribe's strong leadership and proven entrepreneurial spirit guide them.

One of the most profitable and long-term economic development opportunities for the Tribe was the entertainment center they opened for tourists in 2001. The entertainment center offered casino gambling, carefully organized to be lawful under the 1992 Texas Lotto Law. This is the same law that legalized the state lottery, and horse and dog racing throughout Texas.

Unfortunately, a court ruling in 2002 forced the Alabama-Coushatta to close their entertainment center, a terrible economic blow to the reservation, not to mention inequitable, given the other gambling that exists throughout the state. The tribe is actively trying to re-open this economic avenue, as part of their long-term financial planning to fund much-needed jobs and social programs.

In the nine months that the Tribe's entertainment center was open, it employed 87 Tribal members, 50 percent of whom came off of public assistance. The Tribe's unemployment figures dropped drastically from 46 percent to 14 percent during that time period. The revenues from the entertainment center addressed the Tribe's budget shortfall and provided much need funding for Tribal programs such as health services, housing and Head Start.

The entertainment center also helped the regional economy. The center created more than 495 jobs, paid 4.3 million in

wages and paid almost 400,000 federal taxes. Local retailers saw an increase in sales. Car dealers sold more cars. And the county saw an increase in tax revenues. And upon the closure of the entertainment center in July 2002, the Tribe continued to provide each of its employees full wages and benefits for three months afterwards &ndash; totaling more than 1.2 million dollars in distributions