

## Construction primed for big future



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### Casino, other commercial projects make 2004 stand out

RICHARD TROUT  
NEWS-SUN

The first phase of the \$45 million Zia Park Race Track and Black Gold Casino is responsible for a mammoth year in Hobbs construction that may go unrivaled for years to come.

Then again, there are still about four more phases to go at the horse track and the first phase — the casino and grandstands — was only about \$12.3 million.

In 2004, the total value of construction in Hobbs was \$42.8 million, a 62.5 percent increase from \$26.4 million in 2003 and a nearly 200 percent increase from \$14.3 million in 2002. The city's previous all-time 12-month high of \$29.9 million occurred in 1983 (not adjusted for inflation).

Total Hobbs construction — including remodeling and additions — was \$20 million in 2001 after being a meager \$6 million to \$14 million between 1993 and 2000.

According to Hobbs building inspector Manny Marquez, it's possible 2004's total construction value will remain a record year in construction for a long time. But 2005 is already looking to be another strong year, he noted, so it's also possible the record will be shattered.

In general the annual construction values will probably tend to be much higher than during the 1990s despite not reaching the breathless height of 2004, Marquez said. The construction of the horse stalls and other buildings at Zia Park's complex should contribute to another strong year in 2005, for example.

"It's going to fluctuate from year to year," Marquez said. "But obviously in the next five to 10 years I think it's going to tend to go up. I don't see the amount dropping to any less than it's been in the past few years (leading up to 2004). We should be above the average (of years past) in the next five to 10 years."

Although Zia Park led the commercial construction charge, Hobbs noticed a string of other projects during 2004 that continued altering the landscape of Lovington Highway and Joe Harvey Boulevard.

In July Lea Regional Medical Center started the construction of a new \$5 million emergency room that had completed its first phase by February.

The new, expanded ER has more than double the space of the previous 7,900-square-foot building. Although the new 8,900-square-foot ER building is now open to the public, the remodeling of the previous area — the project's second phase — won't be complete until this summer.

The other permits issued for new buildings this year have included a wide variety of projects, including fellowship halls for two churches, a new medical clinic, Lucky Rental Tool, a Lowe's RV addition, a Halliburton lab, Mail Services, Del Norte Car Wash, a new Social Security office and storage buildings on Comanche.

The heat generated in 2004 hasn't simmered down yet, say some of the area's commercial contractors.

"Lasco's off to a good year," said Johnny Cope, owner of Lasco Construction. "We just had our groundbreaking on First National Bank and four to six projects that very possibly will come under contract. We'll concentrate on and further develop the area on Joe Harvey between Grimes and Lovington Highway."

While state-funded projects are not included in the total construction figure for Hobbs, Lasco recently started construction on a \$2.2



Year	Value
1993	\$9,506,086
1994	\$8,848,394
1995	\$13,527,733
1996	\$13,885,632
1997	\$12,145,629
1998	\$11,588,811
1999	\$5,794,394
2000	\$8,008,538
2001	\$20,030,890
2002	\$14,320,008
2003	\$26,361,267
2004	\$42,840,514

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