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DeBary may get horse track

By Cecil G. Brumley

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An Iowa real estate developer has applied for a permit to build a quarter-horse racetrack with a poker room in DeBary.

Under the name DeBary Real Estate Holdings LLC, Green Bridge Co. of Bettendorf, Iowa, is seeking approval from the state Department of Business and Professional Regulation. The manager of DeBary Real Estate is Michael F. Goldstein of Fort Lauderdale, who declined comment about the application through a representative.

Goldstein's application shows the track would be part of the DeBary Town Center project for which Steve Costa of DeLand has been trying to get approval. The development cost is \$8.72 million with the horse track and poker room. Costa could not be reached for comment and city officials said they had not been presented with any plans for a horse track.

There has been a flurry of applications for horse tracks in Florida in the past few months, according to a story in the St. Petersburg Times.

But the Times story questions whether the applications are an attempt by a few businesses to corner the market and capitalize on card-room gambling.

That's the debate surrounding a bill pushed by Sen. Dennis Jones, R-Treasure Island, that easily passed the Florida Senate Thursday, 33-5. The plan (SB 604) would impose tougher requirements on anyone applying for a quarter-horse racing permit in the future.

But the stricter standards wouldn't apply to six applicants that applied for a quarter-horse racing permit since February, including the one in Volusia County. The six join two others that have applied since last year, when lawmakers greatly relaxed card-room gambling rules.

Under current law, quarter-horse permit holders can run just one race a year but operate lucrative poker games much more often. To appease critics, Jones agreed to amend the bill Thursday to require 20 race days in 2009. But that might not be enough. Besides anti-gambling forces, the measure has also drawn the ire of competing pari-mutuels, who worry competitors will be able to start up easily with the exemptions in the bill. In Volusia, Daytona Beach Kennel Club is nearing completion of a new facility with an expanded poker room. The club has pari-mutuel gambling on dog races.

Green Bridge, the Iowa company, isn't new to gambling. It helped Isle of Capri Casinos develop a riverfront entertainment complex at Davenport, Iowa, which includes a casino, according to newspaper reports there.