

Suburbanites make a run to the border — to gamble



STAFF PHOTOS BY JOHN STORMZANO

Table etiquette: Marshall Wise of Southfield chats up one of the blackjack dealers. Dealers learn their skills at classes in St. Clair Shores.

Area cops, support group wary of Detroit gambling

BY PAT MURPHY

Next week Detroit residents for the third time will vote on whether casino gambling should be licensed in the Motor City.

While many suburbanites — as well as Detroiters — would like to see gambling on this side of the river, a note of caution is being sounded by members of two groups — police chiefs and Gamblers Anonymous.

The police chiefs as a group have not taken a formal position, but individually they are wary.

"You can't have gambling without the possibility of organized crime moving in," said Jerry Tobin, director of public safety in Southfield.

"You just can't get away from it," said Tobin, a former vice squad sergeant in Detroit.

Another police veteran, Emory Price, chief of the Westland Police Department, insists voters — and gamblers — should take a realistic approach to casino gambling in Detroit.

"If people recognize the problems associated with gambling up front — and take a realistic approach — it might work over here," said Price.

"Somebody other than the companies running them (casinos) must exert tight control and insist on strict accountability," Price said.

Birmingham Police Chief Edward Outin is not as skeptical. "As long as it's run by the Indians on a small scale — with tight

■ 'You can't have gambling without the possibility of organized crime moving in.'

Jerry Tobin
director of public safety,
Southfield

controls — casino gambling shouldn't cause a problem in Detroit."

Many metro Detroiters seem skeptical about these kind of warnings, or discount them as predictable knee-jerk reactions.

"Crime is already bad in Detroit," said Eleanor Garfinkel of Southfield, who said she enjoys gambling in Windsor with her husband, Marty.

Besides providing jobs, she said, casino gambling would add something to downtown Detroit. "Greektown is two blocks. After that, what else is there?"

A West Bloomfield resident, who identified himself only as Mark, said he's been gambling in Windsor more than once. Asked if he'd play if the casino was located in Detroit, he said, "Sure, I'd do it."

Farmington Hills Police Chief William J. Dwyer recognizes the view expressed by the Garfinkels, Mark, the couple from Plymouth and countless others.

But organized crime will inevitably rear its head if casino gambling is available in Detroit or the suburbs, Dwyer said.



We have a winner: Debbie Kraus of Livonia triumphs at the blackjack table. She took her winnings with her; a portion of the house cut goes toward charities in Canada.

Crime may be high in Detroit, Dwyer acknowledged. But with gambling, it would be worse . . . and more entrenched.

"There'd be loan sharking, money laundering and prostitution," he said, adding that there simply aren't enough safeguards available to keep that from happening.

Casino gambling not glitch free

Casino gambling in Windsor is not glitch free.

Partly because of Ontario law and partly because of problems associated with any business, customers often have to wait and they don't have the gambling options available at casinos in Mt. Pleasant or Las Vegas.

Also, the games float from location to location — because of a law against a casino operating in one place for more than three days. Consequently games are rotated between hotels and nightspots.

The Windsor games don't offer dice, roulette, poker, slot machines or other gaming variations available elsewhere.

The only games available in Windsor are blackjack, rapid blackjack (described as "tournament blackjack") and "wheel of fortune," which is like roulette but lacks the options.

The Windsor games are called "charity gambling" because various non-profit organizations — such as the Chippewas by the Thames Indian group near London — obtain the casino license,

then hire professional managers for day-to-day operations.

The Windsor games are not exclusively run by Indians, as is sometimes the case in Michigan and elsewhere in the U.S. They can be operated by any charity with proceeds going to some worthwhile cause.

One major concern, according to Sean Higgins, casino operations manager for B.J. Games, is the availability of dealers. His company is one of several that provide equipment and offer operating expertise.

"We rely on local dealers," he said. "Sometimes there's enough, sometimes not."

When enough local dealers are not available, frustrated customers must wait . . . and wait.

A group from Farmington Hills, who didn't want to be identified, waited more than an hour for a dealer.

Many of these problems will be worked out, according to Aubrey Zidenberg, president and owner of Casino Amusements Canada, a marketing company. Especially when Ontario builds its \$200-million casino with hotels, restaurants and a marina.

"We plan to have a very attractive, permanent facility," said Zidenberg. "We'll have slots, roulette and blackjack, but no dice."

In the meantime, people wanting more information about the games in Windsor can call the casino hotline, 1-800-567-2121.

BY PAT MURPHY

STAFF WRITER

It's a good bet suburban Oakland and Wayne counties are part of the reason casino gambling is expanding in Windsor.

Charity gambling — run by a professional management company with proceeds going to a charity — is now available six days a week, rather than three.

That expansion is significant. But it's also a hint of things to come. Sometime in 1995, the Ontario government plans to open a \$200 million casino with a 75,000 square-foot gaming area, restaurants, marina and hotel.

Some of the companies bidding to go into partnership on the so-called Windsor Project are Donald Trump and Mirage Resorts from Las Vegas.

Ontario is betting an already beautiful market will get even richer.

That market is fueled by dozens of free-spending suburbanites having fun betting \$1, \$5, or \$10 a clip. In one game, rapid blackjack, players can wager \$100. But normally \$10 is the maximum.

Since a casino opened in Windsor March 26, an average of 4,000 people have trekked to the border city each weekend to gamble, according to Aubrey Zidenberg, president and owner of Casino Amusements Canada, a marketing company.

Of those, about 75 percent are from the United States, said Zidenberg, with most of them being residents of metro Detroit.

Neomi Leach of Oakland Township, for example, has gambled in Windsor more than once. "We're die-hard Vegas fans," she said, gesturing to a co-worker from the Oakland Probate Court. "We come here when we can't get to Vegas. It's fun."

Having casino gambling just across the river is very convenient, according to Susan Stagg of Troy, who said she's just learning how to play blackjack.

She's played at other casinos — such as the one near Mt. Pleasant. But she likes Windsor better. "It doesn't take a whole day to get here. And it's nicer."

A Farmington Hills woman, who identified herself only as Margaret, said she has played in Windsor at least four times. "Sometimes I win, sometimes not. But I always have fun."

Michael Thomas of Rochester Hills enjoys the competition. "I like the one-on-one aspect of blackjack," said the businessman. "It's me against the dealer."

Thomas said he has played Vegas, Atlantic City and even Paradise Island in the Bahamas. "But I've never seen dealers as friendly as these."

Dealers are highly trained, according to Abe Rudover, a former Detroit who now teaches dealing at St. Clair Community College. "Dealing is just another kind of job, and we teach people how to prepare for those jobs."

That training, he said, includes more than the mechanics of dealing. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of treating customers well, like a guest.

Part of the secret of getting and keeping good dealers, according to pit boss Gord Welland, is the pay. Windsor dealers are paid better than their counterparts in Las Vegas. "But our dealers don't get to keep their tips."

Thomas Costney of Southfield said courteous dealers are part of the reason he and his wife Lois have gambled in Windsor two or three times.

Costney is in marketing and his

wife works at EDS. Both moved to southeast Michigan from Minnesota about two years ago. He said they really enjoy the restaurants, theatres and other attractions of metro Detroit.

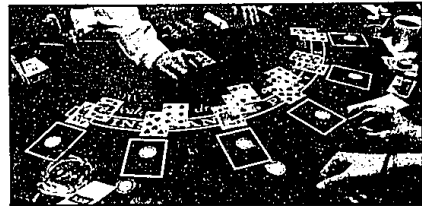
They consider gambling in Windsor as part of metro Detroit. "It's only across the river. We enjoy gambling, a good restaurant and a show."

Another Southfield couple, however, say Windsor gambling doesn't quite have the kick they expect in Las Vegas. "It's a bit small," said Marshall Wise, with his wife, Connie, nodding agreement. "It just doesn't feel like Vegas. It just doesn't have the glitz."

For Edith Polier, casino gambling in Windsor is exciting, or glitzy, enough to keep luring her back. "It's a lot more fun than gambling at St. Mel's."

She was referring to St. Mel's Catholic Church in Dearborn Heights, which, like numerous other nonprofit organizations, offers gambling — or Las Vegas nights — occasionally as a fundraiser.

Polier, a worker at the St. Mel's fund-raiser, said she enjoys those games, but they're not as exciting as gambling in Windsor. "My husband (Floyd) is home washing windows," she said. "I leave him at home and really enjoy myself."



No dice: Blackjack, a faster version of the game called "Rapid Blackjack" and a game similar to roulette are the only forms of betting currently offered. Dice games are and will continue to be outlawed in Windsor.

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Casinos magnify the seduction for addicts

BY PAT MURPHY

STAFF WRITER

Gamblers Anonymous of southeast Michigan doesn't have a formal position on casino gambling either in Windsor or, if it happens, in Detroit.

But the availability of gambling does mean more temptation . . . for GA's 300 active members in the area as well as dozens of other people who may become addicted, according to a spokesman.

"As casinos are more available, more people will have a problem," said Ron C., who like other members of GA prefers anonymity.

Another is a cleric, who asked that his name and religious denomination not be used.

"I've been clean for five years," he said. "But I realize how insidious gambling is. It (the addiction) just doesn't jump up and bite you over night. Getting addicted is a gradual process."

While he didn't condemn — or embrace — casino gambling, the cleric had a word of caution. "Everybody won't be tempted to become compulsive gamblers. But casino gambling in Windsor (and possibly Detroit) will broaden the potential for problems."

GA has 13 chapters in metro Detroit, including one at Embury United Methodist Church in Birmingham and one at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Bloomfield Hills.