

# COMPULSIVE GAMBLING

## New casinos may bring major problems to Southeast Michigan

BY MIKE MALOTT  
HOMETOWN NEWS SERVICE  
mmalott@hometownnews.net

Compulsive gambling is already a significant problem in Michigan and the opening of three new casinos in downtown Detroit will undoubtedly lead more residents of southeast Michigan to addiction. But how many more victims will be claimed by problem gambling and how well prepared the state is to help them are questions with no easy answers.

Few are willing to give an estimate of the number of players who will become compulsive. Even Michigan's Department of Community Health, in charge of setting up treatment and prevention programs for the state, has yet to work up projections. But there is agreement among experts that the numbers are likely to be large.

Consider that the National Gambling Impact Study Commission this spring concluded that the prevalence of compulsive gambling in the general population doubles within a 50-mile radius of a casino.

"Currently there are enough problem gamblers (in Michigan) to populate a city the size of Flint and enough pathological gamblers to populate an additional city the size of Kalamazoo," a study conducted by The Evaluation Center of Western Michigan University for the state lottery bureau concluded back in 1997. The study found that 3 percent of the state's popula-



tion had an ongoing gambling affliction at that time.

Comparing those numbers to a current estimated population of 4.73 million in southeast Michigan's seven-county region, the conclusion is that casinos could lead to an additional 140,000 cases of compulsive gambling here.

Although large, such an estimate elicits general agreement from those familiar with problem gambling. Warren Biller, executive director of the Michigan Council on Problem Gambling; Carla Spight, head of gambling treatment programs at the Neighborhood Service Organization, the firm contracted by Michigan to manage its treatment network; and Lori Rugles, clinical director of Trimeridian Inc. of Indianapolis, who has been training therapists in the techniques of treating problem gamblers.

The fact there is already a casino in the area, Casino Windsor just across the river, "may skew those numbers a bit," according to Jim McBryde, who heads up Michigan's compulsive gambling programs for the Department of Community Health. In other words, many of those who are susceptible might already be hooked, resulting in smaller growth in the number of compulsive gamblers.

### High risk area

Biller however cited additional research findings that indicate the existing problem may be even more serious. One study of prevalence which examined compulsive gambling in Michigan, New York, Connecticut, Wisconsin, Louisiana and 13 other states (Nevada and New Jersey were not included) found that the highest

incidence of compulsive gambling among all those states occurred in Wayne County, he said. That study concluded that 8.1 percent of adults living there would experience a gambling problem at some time in their lives.

Tracking the numbers of new compulsive gambling cases is a high priority for the Department of Community Health, according to McBryde. His department will be monitoring the number of calls made to the state's gambling helpline, a referral service for treatment and support groups. Presently, the helpline receives about 1,700 calls per month.

The state has also contracted with The Evaluation Center at Western to update its 1997 study. Project Director Arlen Gullickson said he will conduct a second survey this fall, which will serve as the baseline against which future updates can be compared. He anticipates regular updates will be conducted.

McBryde, Spight and Rugles all contend much work has already been done in Michigan to prepare for the anticipated upsurge in compulsive gambling cases.

### State unprepared

But Biller says he's not sure it's enough. For one, he said, the state's new network will provide treatment only to the most seriously addicted, known as "pathological gamblers." Left untreated, the less serious "problem gamblers" will probably progress eventually to the pathological stage, he contended.

Problem gamblers seeking treatment will have to use their own insurance or pay for it out of pocket. Few insurance companies cover treatment for compulsive

gambling currently. Studies have noted compulsive gamblers often lose their jobs as a result of their addiction, losing benefits along with it. And many gamblers let insurance coverage lapse due to financial difficulty.

Pathological gamblers who are treated in Michigan's "payer of last resort" system, Biller further argued, will receive a maximum of 12 sessions with a counselor each year. But most pathological gamblers have a "chronic, hardcore and long-term" problem. Twelve sessions per year may do little for them, he said.

Biller should know. He is a recovering compulsive gambler who has spent the last 28 years in treatment and support groups, like Gamblers Anonymous, to "stay clear of the action." He is also credited with being the driving force behind much of the state's work to put a treatment network together.

### Seeking help

Spight however counters that few gamblers will be turned away. To identify compulsive gamblers, the state will use the South Oaks Gambling Screen, a set of 20 questions about the gambler's behavior. (Examples: Have you ever hidden betting slips, lottery tickets, gambling money, I.O.U.s or other signs of betting or gambling from your spouse, children or other important people in your life? Have you ever borrowed from someone and not paid them back as a result of your gambling? Have you ever lost time from work or school due to betting or gambling?) A score of three indicates a gambling problem. A score of five indicates the person is a "probable pathological gambler."

According to Spight, most gamblers who seek treatment score between 11 and 18 on the SOGS scale. So most will easily qualify for state treatment.

While Spight admitted 12 sessions may not be enough for a chronic, hardcore gambler, she said those treatment sessions will be "pooled." If one gambler does not use all 12, others seeking treatment will be able to draw on them, she said.

See GAMBLING, page A11

### Help is available for gambling addicts

Denial is a large part of the affliction, so most compulsive gamblers don't seek treatment. That makes it all the more difficult on family members, whose lives are directly impacted by the gambler's behavior.

Even if the gambler never enters therapy, help is available through the state for the family, according to Clara Spight, in charge of gambling treatment programs at the Neighborhood Service Organization, which has 30 offices spread across southeast Michigan.

Four to six sessions with a counselor will be made available to family members, she said. Mainly educational in nature, sessions will instruct family members on how to cope with the gambler's behavior, how to avoid enabling the addiction and, perhaps most importantly, how to insulate the family from financial ruin.

Gamblers or family members can contact the state's new treatment network through the Michigan Compulsive Gambling Help Line at (800) 270-7317. The help line office is open 24 hours a day. Calls are toll free.

Callers will be asked a series of questions from the South Oaks Gambling Screen, to determine the severity of the compulsion, and from a "financial needs assessment." Those who qualify will be eligible for counseling free of charge.

Help is also available at:

■ Gam-Anon, for family members and friends of compulsive gamblers, at (718) 352-1871.

■ Gamblers Anonymous, a support group for recovering addicted gamblers. The group's Michigan hotline number is (313) 535-3066.

■ The National Council on Problem Gambling, a non-profit health agency which disseminates information about problem gambling, at (800) 522-4700.

■ Trimeridian, Inc., which provides diagnostic, treatment, prevention and education resources, for individuals, families and employers at (877) 664-2025.



**VCA**  
Public Service Announcement

# 99¢

## Rabies Vaccines

For Dogs & Cats. Examination Included.

Adult Dogs	Adult Cats
• DISTEMPER • LYME • PARVO • COUGH	• DISTEMPER • FELINE LEUKEMIA • FIP

**Lansing Hills**  
VCA Animal Hospital  
11000 West 13 Mile Road  
248-593-2340

**Royal Oak**  
VCA Animal Hospital  
10000 West 13 Mile Road  
248-641-4440

**Southfield**  
VCA Animal Hospital  
14000 West 13 Mile Road  
248-569-5210

CELEBRATE  
THAT SPECIAL BIRTHDAY!

ROLEX

**GREENSTONE'S**  
CREATORS OF FINE JEWELRY SINCE 1925

528 N. Old Woodward, Birmingham, MI  
4 Bks. North of Maple  
248-642-2650

MONDAY-FRIDAY 10-5:30 • THURSDAY UNTIL 7:00 • SATURDAY UNTIL 5:00

Shown: Rolex Lady-Datejust Official Certified Swiss Chronometer  
Rolex, © Rolex Perpetual and Datejust are trademarks

**ENTIRE STOCK 1/2 Price**

Buy 1 pair at sticker price and get a 2nd pair of equal or lesser value for half price.  
Excludes Super Value Items & Bonus Buys. Not valid with any other sale or discount offer.

**PLUS, BONUS BUYS! No 2nd Pair Needed**

<b>SKECHERS</b> 1/2 Price Women's EVA HARD HAT Reg. 59.97 <b>29.98</b>	<b>GV</b> 1/2 Price Women's CIVIL LEATHER Reg. 9.97 <b>9.98</b>	<b>keds</b> 1/2 Price Women's LIT LEATHER Reg. 39.97 <b>19.98</b>
<b>NB new balance</b> 1/2 Price Women's CM325C Reg. 59.97 <b>29.98</b>	<b>FILA</b> 1/2 Price Men's GRANT HILL LO Limited Edition Reg. 79.97 <b>39.98</b>	<b>AVA</b> 1/2 Price Women's 1823 WWDF Reg. 59.97 <b>29.98</b>
<b>Rockport</b> 1/2 Price Men's M4518/9 Reg. 99.97 <b>49.98</b>	<b>Rockport</b> 1/2 Price Men's M5808/9 Reg. 79.97 <b>39.98</b>	<b>Children's</b> <b>ENTIRE STOCK</b> <b>AVA</b> Reg. 29.97-34.97 <b>19.98</b>

Not all styles pictured

**SHOE CARNIVAL** Brand name shoes for every walk of life

Selection may vary by store. Sale prices good thru 8/30/99 or while quantities last, unless otherwise noted

<b>Taylor</b> BIRMINGHAM SQUARE SHOPPING CENTER 734-374-3832	<b>Dearborn Heights</b> THE HEIGHTS SHOPPING CENTER 313-552-7553	<b>Farmington</b> DOWNTOWN FARMINGTON CENTER Farmington Rd. at Grand River 248-478-9048	<b>Fontaine</b> OAKLAND PORTE SHOPPING CENTER 248-332-8913	<b>Madison Heights</b> MADISON PLACE SHOPPING CENTER 248-589-7826
--	--	--	--	---

[shoecarnival.com](http://shoecarnival.com)

**Win \$25,000** **EASTLAND**

See store for details