



WESTERN GAMBLING JOURNAL

Contact: Rhonda Stone
Community Education Coordinator
360.352.6133
rstone@evergreencpg.org

THE BALANCING ACT

Self-Control and Keeping It Fun Help Prevent Problem Gambling

NOTE: National Problem Gambling Awareness Week is March 7-13, 2010. For State information on Problem Gambling, visit www.evergreencpg.org. For National information and news resources, visit www.npgaw.org.

Entertainment, relaxation, and fun—important qualities in a balanced life.

Most people who gamble never develop a gambling problem. For a small percentage, however, gambling can become a heavy weight that tips the scale off balance and into debt, stress, broken relationships, and more.

The Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling is working hard to share that message throughout Washington State. The goal is not to encourage or discourage gambling as a form of recreation. The Council remains steadfastly neutral on the topic. Instead, the goal is to inform residents of all ages that gambling has the potential to be addictive. It requires limits and self-control in order to preserve its purpose as a form of individual recreation or group social activity.

Standing before a class of junior high students recently, Rhonda Stone, the Council's Community Education Coordinator, admonished teens that gambling and gambling addiction are two completely different things. Gambling, she told the students, is a form of legal recreation in Washington State, while gambling addiction is a serious health concern. When asked if any of their parents or immediate family members work in the gambling industry, four of the 12 students raised their hands.

"The gaming industry is now an important part of state and family economics," Stone notes. In Washington State alone, it has grown from an \$863 million industry in the Year 2000 to a \$2.14 billion industry in 2008. Associated tax revenues to local governments help support a variety of services in local communities.

"The jobs support our communities, too," adds Dolores Chiechi, executive director of the Recreational Gaming Association (RGA) and a member of the Evergreen Council's Board of Directors. In a time when the number of available jobs is declining rather than growing, the gaming industry's above-minimum-wage jobs are an important source of personal and community revenue.

With gambling's ties to state and family economics, it is essential for all gamblers to remain vitally aware that gambling can cross the line from enjoyable recreation to unhealthy obsession or addiction, Stone says.

Chiechi concurs. "It's often been said that problem gambling is the Achilles heel of the industry," Chiechi notes. "It could make or break us. If we're not mindful of this, then it could come back to bite us."

Stone offers three practical tips to help insure that gambling remains entertaining and fun:

- 1) Before you gamble, set a budget and stick to it.
- 2) Monitor how much you win and lose and make sure that losses do not exceed your budget.
- 3) Seek assistance if you cannot stick to limits or you find yourself feeling guilty, depressed, or troubled in any way by finances or your gambling activity.

Just as beer, wine, or hard liquor require limits and careful use so that addiction does not result, gambling requires limits and careful use, too.

Assistance is available in Washington State for issues related to problem gambling. Many people have been helped with outpatient treatment (call the 24/7 Helpline at 800.547.6133 for information) and support through Gamblers Anonymous (visit www.evergreencpg.org for a list of Washington's GA meetings, also accessible through GA's national Website). Brand new inpatient treatment is available on a limited basis for individuals meeting the appropriate criteria.

Several key prevention and awareness initiatives are under way in Washington State to help minimize the impact of problem gambling. Initiatives include public presentations available to groups throughout the state; Responsible Gaming Programs for Tribal Casinos; proposed Therapeutic Justice for Problem Gamblers (Gambling Court, similar to Drug Court); Youth Problem Gambling Awareness and the Arts Projects; New Directions Youth Music and Arts Academies; and more.

For more information, contact Rhonda Stone, Community Education Coordinator, Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling, at 360.352.6133 or rstone@evergreencpg.org.



The Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling is dedicated to increasing public awareness of problem gambling, expanding the availability of services for problem gamblers and their families, and encouraging research and programs for prevention and education. Established in 1991 as a private, nonprofit organization, the Council provides statewide confidential support through its 24-hour Problem Gambling Helpline (800.547.6133) and public awareness, education, prevention, training, and resource development services. Visit our website at www.evergreencpg.org.