



Calling on Everyone to Support Responsible Gaming Efforts

by Mike Goodrich

In 1991, things were much different for my tribe, the Forest County (Wisconsin) Potawatomi. Native American gaming was in its infancy, and we were on the verge of opening Potawatomi Bingo in Milwaukee's Menomonee Valley. Our bingo hall was a sea of tables with room for 2,000 in a building that can't be described as much more than a pole shed. At that time, the tribe's resources were few. We were proud of what we had created, but didn't realize the potential of the seed that had been planted.

Just as Native American gaming has flourished in the two decades since, Potawatomi Bingo Casino has grown from its modest beginnings into one of the largest casinos in the Midwest. And we realize, with that success comes responsibility. Gaming has provided my tribe, as well as many others, a voice. And we need to use that voice to bring attention to problem gambling – an issue that affects some of the millions of guests Native American casinos welcome every year.

As part of ongoing efforts to create awareness and educate our guests, team members and the public, Potawatomi Bingo Casino is participating in National Problem Gambling Awareness Week from March 7-13. National Problem Gambling Awareness Week is a grassroots effort spearheaded by the National Council on Problem Gambling. It is designed to educate people about the warning signs of problem gambling and raise awareness of the resources available to help.

During National Problem Gambling Awareness Week, Potawatomi Bingo Casino will be displaying educational information, distributing details to community leaders, promoting the week through various media outlets and hosting contests for our team members.

Problem gambling isn't exclusive to any one demographic. In fact, according to the National Council on Problem Gambling, many of those in the five to seven percent of the population that develop issues related to gambling are viewed as responsible by those that they know. Anyone that gambles can develop problems if they are not aware of the risks and lose the ability to control their behavior. And the consequences of this issue are frightening. Financial crime, domestic issues, bouts of depression and incidents of suicide touch the individual, their friends and loved ones, those they work with and the community as a whole.

Responsible gaming is Potawatomi Bingo Casino's number one social priority. We've taken a number of steps at Potawatomi Bingo Casino to shed light on the issue, including the implementation of an eight-point plan designed to educate and train as well prevent problem gambling. "Make a sure bet –

know your limit" serves as the tagline for Potawatomi Bingo Casino's responsible gaming program. That message is included in much of our marketing material as well as our advertising.

Additionally, the casino serves as an integral partner and the largest private contributor to the Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling (WCPG). In 2009, we gave \$50,000 to the organization, funding WCPG's training efforts and its 24-hour helpline. We place WCPG helpline business cards in all of our restrooms, including those located back of house for our team members. We have dedicated a portion of our website to responsible gambling, support a self-restriction program for our guests and have a team representing departments across the casino that constantly reviews our efforts and looks for ways to improve. In our case, all of this is done voluntarily - without any requirements in our compact. Many other tribes across the country are making similar efforts. But for everyone, there is always more that can be done.

The National Council on Problem Gambling reaches out to all gaming operations – including Native American ones – and offers their resources to help build responsible gaming programs. "The National Council, as well as our state affiliates, serve as a tremendous resource for tribal casinos and can help them devise a comprehensive program for their employees, guests and community," said Keith Whyte, Executive Director of the National Council on Problem Gambling. "Our organization is neutral on legalized gambling, so we have many industry partners and supporters. We need more Native American casinos involved in what we're doing."

While a week of activities will do much to cast a light on problem gambling, the issue needs to be addressed on a year-round basis. A commitment needs to be made by those involved in Native American gaming to demonstrate its obligation to operating ethical and honorable businesses. Your guests and the communities you operate in will appreciate these efforts, contributing to a stronger bottom line for the long-term.

My tribe has done a tremendous amount to create jobs and improve communities. We value self-sufficiency and personal dignity. We do not want people to put themselves in an unhealthy situation. Gambling should be recreational, so if it becomes a problem we need to be there to help connect our guests to resources that can help. ♣

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