

## News Article

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# Video lottery players are average citizens

By Evan Bevins

*PARKERSBURG - Video lottery players are average citizens participating in an activity that benefits the community, spokesmen with the West Virginia Amusement & Limited Video Lottery Operators Association said Monday.*

*"My company provides a service to our community, a service that many of your friends and neighbors participate in," said association President Thomas Fittro, a Wood County resident. "They see the games we operate as entertainment."*

*Fittro and Executive Director Patricia Rouse Pope spoke at a Parkersburg Rotary Club luncheon. Fittro is the managing member of Trans-Allegheny Enterprises, a local company that operates video lottery terminals at locations throughout the state.*

*The association wants to debunk what it calls myths about the limited video lottery industry.*

*Two myths are most players are senior citizens or have low incomes, said Andy Malinoski with Maple Creative, a firm handling the association's public relations and awareness campaign.*

*Malinoski presented a survey conducted by the Marshall University Center for Business and Economic Research that said 38 percent of players are ages 35-49, 26 percent are 21-34 and 24 percent are 50-64. As for incomes, 35 percent make \$20,000 to \$40,000 a year, 24 percent make less than \$20,000, 19 percent make \$40,000 to \$80,000 and 4 percent make more than \$80,000. Eighteen percent of survey respondents refused to answer the question.*

*The perception video lottery is linked to increases in crime and bad checks isn't true, Malinoski said. Less than 3 percent of bad check warrants in Wood County involved checks written to video lottery establishments, he said.*

*Parkersburg police Chief Robert Newell said he believed the statistic, but the numbers do not tell the whole story.*

*"The part that's going to be hard to determine in any kind of research is why are the bad checks being written?" Newell said. "We definitely have had certain crimes defendants attribute to that."*

*Malinoski said the association was studying other data to provide more details on the subject of crime and video lottery.*

*Since the 2001 Limited Video Lottery Act legalized the previously unregulated "gray machines" on a limited basis, the number of machines has decreased 31 percent from the March 2000 level, Pope said.*

*People think there are more machines because of the limit of five machines per location imposed by the state, Fittro said. Retailers who want more machines must open new stores, he said.*

*Pope said the Limited Video Lottery Act also harnessed the machines' revenue and put it to use for the state.*

*"Every citizen benefits from the limited video lottery revenue, whether they play the games or not," she said.*

*Pope said video lottery provided more than \$400 million in revenue to the state in 2003 and 2004, including funding the PROMISE Scholarship program.*

*The West Virginia Problem Gamblers Help Network also receives \$1 million a year in video lottery revenue, said Pope, a member of the West Virginia Council on Problem Gambling.*

*Malinoski said the lottery accounts for a third of the state's operating revenue.*

*"That's a reality that we cannot ignore," Malinoski said.*

**Thomas Fittro**  
President

**Anthony "Herk" Sparachane**  
Vice President

**Lee Wesson**  
Treasurer

**Patricia Rouse Pope**  
Executive Director

**West Virginia Amusement  
& Limited Video Lottery  
OPERATORS ASSOCIATION**

PO Box 2549  
Charleston, WV 25329

**WVALVLOA@aol.com**

304.342.1737 phone  
304.342.1737 fax

**WVA & LVLOA**

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*The Marshall survey said two out of three West Virginians are not willing to pay more taxes to replace the revenue that would be lost if video lottery was removed. It also said 64 percent of West Virginians would not support a political candidate who would vote to reduce their ability to play video lottery.*

*Rotarian Debbie Rogers said she occasionally plays.*

*"It's just for entertainment purposes. I think it's good for the state," she said.*

*Rotarian Doug Kreinik said his wife is a teacher and has seen children negatively affected by their parents' gambling problems. He also questioned the state's reliance on gambling money.*

*"I think there's too much gambling in this state," Kreinik said. "I think it sends the wrong message out, especially to young people."*

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