

## News Article

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# Police group raises \$500,000 with video slot machines

by Justin D. Anderson, Daily Mail Staff

Print StoryEmail StoryIn an effort to end the old practice of calling up folks and asking for donations, a northern chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police has taken up a new means of fundraising: video lottery. The Fraternal Order of Police Mountaineer Lodge 78 in Nutter Fort just last year bought the lease for the building that recently housed Jim Reid's Restaurant, an abandoned but beloved seafood eatery in Clarksburg.

The lodge picked up where Jim Reid's left off serving food, but in a secluded lounge inside the restaurant the fraternal organization also installed 10 controversial video slot machines.

The slots have raked in more than a half-million dollars in revenue over the past year and a half, although much of that money has gone to the government.

Lt. Carl Springer, a Bridgeport officer who was president of the struggling lodge when the machines went in, said the group has been able to give about \$12,000 of its share to various charities and to two police officers whose homes burned down last year.

Since May 2005, players have pumped \$2.25 million into the machines. After the winnings were deducted, the lodge reported \$559,911 in gross revenues to the state Lottery Commission.

State law requires such organizations and other video lottery operators pay some of that money -- about 48 percent -- to state and local governments.

By the time the money is divvied between the state, county and cities and split between the lodge and the operator of the machines, Buck's Inc., Springer figures the police lodge pulls in an average \$1,000 per month.

"They seem to be doing pretty good," Springer said.

Just in the past two months, the lodge reported \$112,699 in gross revenue from the machines.

By next year, Springer said the group hopes it won't have to call and pester folks at home for donations anymore. That was one of the main reasons they got into the video slot business to begin with: People were complaining about the telemarketing.

As far as lottery officials know, the Mountaineer Lodge is the only Fraternal Order of Police chapter in the state to operate video slots.

State law allows fraternal organizations to have 10 machines on the premises while private retailers can only have five.

When the lodge announced last year they intended to put the machines into the renovated seafood restaurant, they got a lot of flack from some members of the public who questioned whether the practice was moral, Springer said.

But Springer said the nonprofit lodge was struggling just to stay afloat. Income from bingo was barely cutting the donation nut. Over three years time, the lodge was able to donate around \$35,000 from its bingo income.

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With the slots' revenue as a supplement to ventures that now include running the restaurant, the group hopes it will have enough money for donations and to buy a new lodge, Springer said.

The group sponsors youth football, baseball and t-ball as well as a baseball team for special needs athletes in the Challenge League.

The slot revenue is steady compared to the ups and downs of the monthly bingo nights, which could bring in as little as \$600, Springer said.

The chapter still has bingo, but the video slots have picked up the slack -- as has the growth of the lodge's membership over the last six years. Membership increased to 260 from 50, and each member pays \$25 in annual dues.

Between 10 percent and 15 percent of the lodge's share from the video slots goes toward helping run the new restaurant in the former Jim Reid's Restaurant, Springer said.

The popular Jim Reid's had been closed for quite a while when the FOP late last year leased the building, renovated it and has started serving up home-cooked meals. The machines are in a lounge inside the restaurant.

Business has been pretty good, Springer said. Customers love to stop in for a bite to eat and then try their luck on the machines.

Springer said the FOP's leadership debated adding the slots for a couple of years.

"Our biggest question was whether it was legal or not," Springer said.

The group also was well aware of the potential for criticism. And it came -- from competing slot parlors and officers within the ranks who objected to the idea of supporting gambling.

"We figured everybody else is making money off it, so we stuck our head out," Springer said. "Some people tried to chop it off. But we're police officers; We're used to being bad-mouthed."

Even with all the public criticism, the \$500 annual licensing fees just to have the machines and the state's fingers always in the honey pot, it's still been worth it, Springer said.

"Do we get a lot of money? No. But we are able to do a lot of charity work," Springer said.

"It's just like being a cop. We don't make a whole lot of money, but if you can help a couple of people, it pays for itself in the long run."

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