

News Article

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Gambling parlors cater to women

Charleston attorney starts chain with two locations, plans more in coming months

By Jack Bailey

she took more of a gamble than most.

Sensing an opportunity, the Mingo County native earlier this year decided to dive head first into the state's growing video lottery industry by opening a string of her own gambling parlors. Dubbed Sassy's, VanMeter's company already sports two locations. And more are planned throughout the Kanawha Valley in the coming months.

"People are going to gamble, and they will continue to gamble," VanMeter said. "This way, the state controls and regulates 100 percent of what we do."

The first Sassy's opened July 9 in St. Albans. A Barboursville location opened July 19 in the space where Billy Bob's Wonderland used to operate. In addition to those two locations, VanMeter's company owns the five video lottery machines that operate in The Brass Tree Lounge in Williamson.

"There has already been good customer traffic," VanMeter said recently while sitting in the St. Albans Sassy's. "There are already some regulars."

Some people come in to play over their lunch hours, while others will drop by after work, she said. Sassy's provides a clean, casual atmosphere for those seeking to play video lottery machines. Each is decorated in similar colors -- khaki and blue -- and carries a theme. In St. Albans, the theme of the decorations is nautical. In Barboursville, it is horses.

"We are not a bar and don't want to be a bar," VanMeter said. "We don't want people to think that they are going to a dark, dank bar to gamble." VanMeter said Sassy's will cater to women.

"Demographics show the majority of players are women," VanMeter said. "We want to provide a place where they feel comfortable playing." The idea of building gambling parlors that cater to women isn't a new one. A chain operating under the name Mimi's has several locations in the region.

Attorney Susie Shepard is VanMeter's partner in the St. Albans Sassy's, which is located on Sixth Avenue. She says it is important to her that Sassy's maintain its atmosphere as a place where people feel comfortable to play or just spend time hanging out. The first weekend Sassy's was open, Shepard said, someone was stringing green beans while playing.

To add to the comfortable feel of the place, Shepard hopes to begin offering a daily lunch-and-soup special this fall at the St. Albans location. Sassy's already serves popcorn, hot dogs and soft drinks at both locations. And while VanMeter says Sassy's is not a bar, bottled beer is served.

Each location has five video lottery machines but also tables for people who are not playing to sit and talk.

"We just want to create a comfortable atmosphere," VanMeter said.

VanMeter is a native of Williamson. She earned her bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech and then graduated from the West Virginia University College of Law. She has been practicing in the Charleston area for the past eight years and maintains an office at Dudley Farms Plaza on Corridor G.

The Sassy's in St. Albans is open from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Thursday; from 10 a.m. to 1 a.m. Friday and Saturday and from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m. on Sunday. The Sassy's in Barboursville is open from 9 a.m. to 3:30 a.m. Monday through Saturday and from 1 p.m. to midnight on Sunday.

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