

A bus ride to the casino — the best bet in town

By KARIN LAUB
Associated Press Writer

CLARK, N.J. — As the bus begins its journey, Phyllis Gilrain, an unemployed machine operator, squeezes a pair of woolly trolis. She carries one in each pocket of her leather jacket for good luck.

A man with thinning long hair, denim vest and a tattoo of a flower on his arm, has taken a back seat. A couple dozen elderly women talk quietly to each other as they settle in.

Their destination is Atlantic City, 110 miles away. Their destiny is less certain.

They are aboard one of 18 buses that leave this New York City suburb each day and one

of 900 buses that daily carry about 30,000 casino-bound passengers from New Jersey and nearby New York and Philadelphia.

They are the well-to-do, the poor, the unemployed and especially during the week, predominantly elderly and female. For a \$16 ticket, they get a ride to Atlantic City, \$15 in chips and coupons, about six hours to gamble and a ride back.

On a recent Friday morning, the bus carrying Mrs. Gilrain and other would-be gamblers rumbled onto the Garden State Parkway, the main conduit to Atlantic City from the north.

Mrs. Gilrain, 49, and her husband Bob, 50, also unemployed, discussed how they would

spend their winnings: their three grandchildren — ages 1 month to 5 years — would definitely get some of the money.

Mrs. Gilrain, who took her first trip to Atlantic City three months ago, said she would try the slot machines first and then head for the blackjack table.

Don, a lab technician who visits the casinos six to eight times a year and who asked that his last name not be printed, sat nearby, telling two friends which games have the best odds. He recommended blackjack.

After two hours, the bus pulled up at the Golden Nugget Casino Hotel. The casino had been open about an hour, but already there was a long line at a booth where bus riders

pick up their coupons: \$12.50 for a roll of quarters to play the slot machines, \$2.50 toward lunch at a casino restaurant, two \$5 coupons to lure them back within the month.

Glenn Lillie, a spokesman for the Tropicana Casino Hotel, said bus patrons account for about a third of the total casino business, "obviously a key part of our market."

Several hours later, Don, 37, clutched a heavy paper cup filled with \$1 tokens. They are what is left of a \$100 slot machine jackpot.

"I want to show this to my friends," he said. "But I'm not going to play anymore." Delores Holler, 25, a bookkeeper from Clark, N.J., lost about \$100 in the quarter slot machines. "I definitely made my donation,"

Ms. Holler said. "But I'm prepared for it. It's what I would spend for a play and dinner."

There was still some time to kill before the 5 p.m. departure time. One of her friends found a roll of quarters in his pocket and gave it to Ms. Holler and her sister, Evelyn. They dashed off to the tables.

They made just enough to pay back the loan. On her way out of the casino, Evelyn found a coin on the floor. She took one more pull on the handle of the slot machine without luck.

On the ride home, Mrs. Gilrain didn't want to talk. "This is not my lucky day. I just about broke even," she said.

Las Vegas is home court for legal sports gambling

By SCOTT KRAFT
Associated Press Writer

LAS VEGAS — Like most other cities, Las Vegas has Little League baseball, Pop Warner football and co-ed softball.

But it also has the Super Bowl, the World Series and every other major sporting event.

Those contests aren't played here in the middle of the desert but are followed on big screens in air-conditioned casinos by players who have a lot more to win — and lose — than the players in uniforms.

Of all the forms of legal gambling in Las Vegas, none has grown as quickly as the sportsbook. Although illegal wagering on sporting events is widespread, Nevada is the only state in which a gambler can place a legal bet on such contests.

"It was so wild here the week before the Super Bowl you would have thought we were having it here," said Sonny Reizner, sportsbook director at the Castaways Hotel and Casino on the Las Vegas Strip. About \$75 million was bet on that game alone in Las Vegas' 22 sportsbook operations.

For the year ending last June, \$518 million was bet legally on sports in Nevada. Just seven years ago, that figure was \$123 million.

"It's just unbelievable what has happened here. There's no business or industry that has kept pace with sports betting," said Reizner, a top sports bookmaker in Vegas.

Reizner has seen the industry transformed. He arrived here 13 years ago, when there was one large sportsbook and three small ones. All 22 sportsbooks today are large. That



means a gambler can wager hundreds of thousands of dollars daily.

Betting on sports has lost much of the stigma it has had for the past two decades, he said. Television has helped. Wagers between friends and working associates, illegal everywhere but in Nevada, also have helped.

Gambling said to be addictive

By ROBERT WADE
Associated Press Writer

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — The symptoms include a general restlessness that often swells into cold sweats, head and stomach pains and even vomiting.

Only one short-term cure exists — find a game, or create one, and bet some money on the outcome.

It doesn't matter whether the bet is placed in an alley, at the corner delicatessen or in a plush casino. The cash can be hard-earned, borrowed or misbegotten.

To the sufferers, compulsive gamblers, the important thing is to put some money down, and — win, lose or draw — the symptoms begin to disappear.

The rolls of Gamblers Anonymous have doubled in recent years in some regions, mainly in the Northeast where about a fourth of the nation's population can reach Atlantic City's casinos on one tank of gas.

"We have an epidemic on our hands," said Arnold Wexler, vice president of the New York-based National Council on Compulsive Gambling.

In Nevada, gamblers say they have special problems in a state where gaming is the No. 1 industry. Bars, supermarkets and convenience stores are lined with slot machines. Many jobs are gaming-related. Even the ashtrays at the Gamblers Anonymous meeting bear the

names of Harrah's, Gold Dust and other local casinos.

"Everywhere you go there are slot machines," said Al Fialdini, founder of Reno's Gamblers Anonymous chapter. "It's impossible to get away from it."

Compulsive gamblers wager an average of \$20,000 every year and account for \$34 billion in legal and illegal bets made annually in this country, according to the Washington Center for Pathological Gambling in Rockville, Md.

Wexler once received a call on the council's hot line from a sobbing young bank teller who said that a \$20,000 weekend casino spree had left him without a quarter to pay the road toll home.

The young man described stealing his bank's money to gamble; he had planned to make a bundle and replace the money after he had won.

"I suggested he go turn himself in. I told him to call me again. He never called back," said Wexler.

Law enforcement officials say they fear that the more gambling is available, the greater will be the number of compulsive bettors and the risk of related thefts, family problems and suicides.

In a New Jersey courtroom earlier this year, a father of eight fatally shot himself as a judge was to sentence him for pilfering funds from two trucking companies to feed his gambling habit.

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