Gambling on Gaming, 1994

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Montana's Indian nations are gambling on their futures.

On four of the state's reservations, tribes and the state have agreed on how gaming will be conducted. The Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Fort Peck and Rocky Boy's reservations all have gambling and all hope it will provide the economic boost the tribes need to overcome decades of pervasive poverty among reservation residents.

The Flathead, Blackfeet and Fort Belknap reservations have nothing; each has been unable to come to terms with the state on the scope of gambling on Indian lands. Tribal leaders are gambling that the courts will find their sovereign status means they can have whatever gaming they desire.

The desire to help Montanans understand this volatile issue led journalism students at the University of Montana to examine the legal, social, economic and emotional aspects of Indian gaming in the state and present their findings in this special report.

Some observers argue that without the financial stability they believe gambling can provide, Montana's Indians have little chance to once more become strong, resourceful people. Others say gaming is just another crippling social problem that Indian people do not need. Tribal members, themselves, are divided on the issue.

These are issues that affect all Montanans. The stakes are high. And the outcome is a gamble.
The tribes on the Flathead Reservation lost their gambling operations after failing to reach an agreement with the State of Montana. The fight over control of Indian gaming continues on other reservations and may mean a choice between economic and political freedom.

TRIBES WAGER INDEPENDENCE IN THE PUSH FOR GAMING

It is only 9:30 a.m. and 76-year-old Marion "Smitty" Smith is already behind schedule. Downing the last of his beer, he scoops up the plastic envelopes carefully stacked on the bar in front of him, and heads outside where he eases into his bright red Jeep Cherokee and heads north. A half hour later, Smitty pulls up to the Proctor Store, just outside the Flathead Reservation Boundary.

The Proctor Store is like many small-town mercantiles - it serves as the town's grocery, gas station, video store, laundromat, deli and U.S. Post Office. Smitty throws the plastic envelopes on the counter and pulls a cold Budweiser from the cooler. Bunny Peterson, who owns the store along with her husband, Rod, begins unloading the cash from the envelopes. The Petersons love Smitty and his twice-a-week visits to their market. All the cash he carries in those little plastic envelopes is for lottery tickets, and Smitty buys somewhere between 600 and 1,000 tickets a week.

Only $5 worth of tickets are for Smitty himself, the rest are for his friends, and he has found a lot of friends since gambling was shut down on the Flathead Indian Reservation last year.

All Flathead gambling was halted after the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes were unable to reach an agreement on a gaming compact (an agreement between sovereigns) with the state, as required by federal law. The 1988 federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) says tribes and states, both recognized as sovereign governments by the Constitution, must enter into gaming compacts before tribes can open their reservations to "class III" gambling. That includes "Las Vegas style" games, such as video poker and keno, slot machines, roulette, and banked card games in which players wager against the house. While some class III gaming is allowed in Montana, the reservation has had no gambling since April of 1993; you can't even buy a lottery ticket, unless you drive off the reservation or find a ticket runner like Smitty to travel for you.

"I'm not that big a gambler," says Smitty, "but god damn, it's not right, not when they've got it everywhere else."

What's right, or even fair, seems to have had little to do with the dialogue between the state and the tribes. Conflicts over sovereignty and jurisdiction — both from the state's and tribe's perspective — have been a sticking point.

The seeds for these conflicts were sewn in the early 1980s after several Indian reservations in the nation began high stakes bingo games. States challenged in court the tribes' rights to run the games, but lost two important cases. Tribal bingo operations continued almost unrestricted.

The states subsequently increased pressure on Congress to pass a law that would permit some regulation of Indian gaming operations. When Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in 1988, it spelled out three purposes:

- to provide a basis in law for the operation by Indian tribes of gaming that would encourage tribal economic development and self-sufficiency,
- to provide a law for regulating gaming on reservations so that it is shielded from organized crime, conducted honestly and fairly, and has the tribe as the primary beneficiary;
- and to create the National Indian Gaming Commission, which has both regulatory and investigative authority over gaming on Indian lands. Nowhere are the state's interests mentioned. However, tribes must reach an agreement with the state about the scope of gaming and related issues.

The tribes argue that the relationship should be like that between two sovereign states. But the state argues that sovereignty is limited and that the state can assert its jurisdiction inside the reservation borders. In response to the IGRA, the Montana Legislature passed the Gambling Regulatory Control Act. What it did, Attorney General Joe Mazurek says, is give Montana the power to define what is legal gambling in this state, on or off the reservations.

Nationally, states also argued they had an interest in keeping out organized crime and in sovereignty and jurisdiction issues.

But Arizona Rep. Morris Udall saw it differently. "This debate is not based upon moral high ground, crime control and a level playing field," he told Congress. "It is, quite simply, about economics."

And the economic stakes are tremendous. Reports of total Indian gaming revenues vary widely, from $1.5 billion to as high as $7 billion yearly. In any case, the revenue is growing rapidly.
Since the passage of IGRA, the state of Montana has collected more than $125 million in non-tribal gaming taxes and fees, and many feel that the state sees tribal gambling as a threat to that income. As one bar owner said, “If there’s anyone in the state of Montana who’s addicted to gambling, it’s the state of Montana.”

Abstractions such as sovereignty, self-determination and jurisdiction become blurred when such vast amounts of money are introduced, and the issue becomes even cloudier considering the fact that there is little precedent for resolving conflicts between state and tribal rights.

Montana State University Professor Franke Wilmer notes in his study, “Indian Gaming: Players and Stakes,” that historically, tribes have rarely asserted their sovereignty, primarily because they have had nothing of consequence to gain from such assertions. As a result, he says states are not accustomed to dealing with the jurisdictional limits such assertions present.

But these jurisdictional and legal implications mean little to Smitty and the other residents of the Flathead Reservation, where gambling was once a significant element of the economic base. Many of the citizens on Montana’s seven reservations can’t understand why gambling was shut down in their communities when video poker machines still pay out in almost every bar across the state.

On the Flathead reservation, gambling continued for several years after the 1988 passage of IGRA. The act required tribes and states to agree on a compact before December 1991, and reservation casinos were allowed to remain open in the interim. After that deadline passed without an agreement, Congress amended IGRA to provide a one-year extension for Montana and Wisconsin. Four months into the extension the Fort Peck Reservation signed an agreement with the state.

Six months later, in June 1992, the U.S. Attorney’s

I’m not that big a gambler, but God damn it, it’s not right, not when they’ve got it everywhere else.

— Smitty
Office interrupted the extension, declaring class III reservation gambling illegal without a compact. Federal attorneys said that when approving the extension, they had overlooked the Johnson Act, a 1951 federal law prohibiting gambling on all Indian reservations. Until a compact was signed, they said, the Johnson Act would supersede the more recent IGRA.

The machines on the Flathead and other reservations disappeared overnight, leaving most folks wondering just what had happened. That was when Smitty made his first run to the Proctor Store to buy some lottery tickets for himself, and his friends asked if he would pick them up a few as long as he was going that way.

The tribes and reservation casino owners immediately petitioned Congress for another extension; the confusion could be sorted out. Congress delayed, but in October finally approved a six-month extension to allow the tribes and the state time to return to negotiations. Once again the machines were dusted off and owners swamped state and city government offices with requests for gambling licenses.

During the six-month extension, both the Crow and Northern Cheyenne tribes succeeded in negotiating interim compacts, but the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation remained at loggerheads with the state over the scope of gaming. The CS&K Tribes were asking for a full-blown Las Vegas-style casino, while the state was sticking to its policy that tribes would be allowed no greater scope of gaming than the state already had, in effect testing the extent of tribal sovereignty.

The six months passed and the April 1993 deadline came and went without a compact on the Flathead Reservation. Once again the machines were pulled, and Smitty resumed his twice-a-week trips to Proctor.

The IGRA drafters had foreseen such impasses, and not wanting to give the states too much leverage over tribal sovereignty, they provided the tribes with a safety valve. Because the purpose of the act was to assist the tribes rather than the states, a clause was written into IGRA allowing the tribes to sue the states if it was felt that the states were not negotiating in good faith. If no agreement was reached during the litigation process, a court-appointed mediator would be named to decide the issue. The mediator would examine proposals from both sides, choosing one or the other with no room for compromise. This all-or-nothing approach was designed to compel each side to put reasonable propositions on the table.

The tribes on the Blackfeet and Fort Belknap Reservations had already initiated bad faith suits, but the motions had been thrown out when the state claimed 11th Amendment immunity. The 11th Amendment protects states from civil suits, and although the IGRA's language had specifically provided for the bad faith lawsuits, a U.S. District Court judge in Montana held that the 11th Amendment defense was valid.

The CS&K Tribes, not wanting their scenario to play out like that of the Blackfeet and Fort Belknap Indians, repeatedly asked the state to agree to a mediator who would decide the issue without the expense of a lawsuit. The state declined, and in July of 1993 the tribes announced their upcoming bad faith suit against the state. The suit was filed in November, and in January a U.S. District Court judge in Missoula dismissed the action, citing the 11th Amendment. An appeal is pending in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.\n
Meanwhile, Smitty will continue to make his twice-weekly trips to Proctor, squeezing them in between his early morning beer and his mid-afternoon card game at the bar, where a few dollars make the rounds between friends. He doesn't care who wins the battle for reservation gambling, doesn't understand tribal sovereignty and doesn't care to; he just wants to stop putting all those useless miles on his Jeep. Smitty figures both sides are being somewhat unreasonable at the negotiation table, and mostly feels sorry for folks who are accustomed to having gambling and now have to drive off the reservation to wager.

"I'm just helping out where I can," says Smitty. "Gambling's a big temptation, and after all, what are you going to do once you've got the bug?"

Written by Michael Jamison
Photographed by Tim Thompson
While the state and the Flathead tribe fight about the scope of gambling, bar owners, both white and Native American, who live within the reservation borders are losing revenue they can't afford to lose.

Meanwhile those who have gaming establishments just off the reservation are doing a booming business.

**The Flathead Reservation: A Hot Bed of Resentment**

For 13 years Gene Watne owned four bars on the Flathead Indian Reservation. In recent years each bar had 10 video gambling machines and two or three employees. Business was good until April 1993. That's when the Flathead tribes and the state failed to reach an agreement on how gaming would be conducted on this northwestern Montana reservation. And that's when the state ordered a halt to all reservation gaming.

When those machines went out the door, about 70 percent of Watne's business followed.

He sold one bar and closed two others. His employees are gone, and Watne himself works eight shifts a week in his only remaining tavern.

A few miles away, just across the reservation boundary, bartender Judy Hutchins says business has doubled at the Windjammer bar.

"The machines pay for everything now, including all of our overhead," says Hutchins. "The liquor is just a courtesy."

Many reservation bar owners, most of them not tribal members, are feeling the same sting Watne felt when gambling was shut down. Ty Campbell spent more than $300,000 turning a battered Polson hotel into Nickel Charlies restaurant, bar and casino. Campbell had gambling for just two weeks before the state ordered the shutdown. Four of his original 25 employees have been let go, yet he is still losing an estimated $100,000 a year.

Campbell owns a similar business off the reservation in Kalispell, where he makes approximately $200,000 a year. He thinks his Polson business would bring a similar amount if gambling were returned. Had he known what the future held for reservation gambling, Campbell says he would have started his operation somewhere else.

It's not just the bar owners who are suffering financially from the gambling shutdown. According to a 1993 study conducted by Bob Pierce, president of the Lake County Tavern Association, the city of Polson has lost $102,000 in annual income due to the loss of gambling, reducing the city's total budget by 14.5 percent.

Pierce also found that many bar owners scrapped plans to expand their operations. Postponed business improvements average $36,114 per operator, he says. Pierce stresses that deferred business improvements represent a loss of profit and employment to local goods and services contractors.

"The results of this survey are very clear: state, tribal and federal officials must make acceptable compromises to protect the communities and businesses in this area and do so in the shortest time possible," Pierce concludes.

But at least for now, the compromise Pierce and others are looking for seems a long way off. Some blame the state while others criticize the tribes, and the two sides have dug their respective heels in, dragging the gambling issue and the livelihoods of many machine operators through the courts.

The state is firm in its stance that tribes will be granted no greater scope of gaming than is currently allowed across Montana.

According to Montana State Attorney General Joe Mazurek, "The Flathead would rather have nothing than for everyone to have the same while it goes through the courts." Mazurek says the tribes have taken the attitude, "If we can't have it all now we'll make everybody suffer."

Dan Belcourt, attorney for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, says it's "ridiculous" to think that the tribes would want anyone to suffer.

"It's not the intent to deprive non-tribal operators or anyone else from gambling revenue," he says. "It's an issue of sovereignty; we want a level playing field between governments, not between our government and the private operators. Mazurek's right when he says we'd prefer to have nothing rather than have a level playing field with private operators. Rather than compromise our rights, we'd elect to have no gaming whatsoever."

With the two sides nowhere near a settlement, the future looks bleak for Flathead gambling, and worse still for the operators caught in the battle between governments.
FROM TRIBAL MEMBER KAY JONES' PERSPECTIVE, THE GAMING STRUGGLE IS FOR MORE THAN SIMPLY LOST REVENUE. "YES, WE'RE FIGHTING FOR ECONOMICS AND JURISDICTION," SHE SAID, "BUT REALLY FOR THE TRIBE'S SURVIVAL. SOVEREIGNTY AND SELF-DETERMINATION MEAN NOTHING IF YOU HAVE NOTHING TO GOVERN OVER."

GAMING WAS THE MAIN SOURCE OF CASH FLOW AT HER MIDNIGHT MARKET IN RONAN. SHE OWNED 30 MACHINES AND LEASED A FEW MORE, TURNING ENOUGH PROFIT THAT TWO YEARS AGO SHE AND HER HUSBAND WERE ABLE TO BUILD A MASSIVE ADDITION ONTO THE STORE WITHOUT EVER GOING TO THE BANK. THEN THE MACHINES DISAPPEARED, THE RESTAURANT THEY HAD ANTICIPATED WAS PUT ON HOLD, THE ADDITION REMAINS EMPTY AND SHE HAS HAD TO TURN TO THE BANK FOR LOANS.

SHE SAYS THE STATE HAS PULLED THE RUG OUT FROM UNDER HER, AND SHE WANTS THE POLITICIANS OUT OF THE FREE-MARKET PROCESS.

JONES SAYS MONTANA HAS ALWAYS BEEN ANTI-GAMING.

"IF I DREW A CARTOON, I WOULD DRAW A GIANT GOLDEN GOOSE FLYING INTO MONTANA AND ALL THE POLITICIANS LINE UP WITH THEIR GUNS TO SHOOT IT DOWN BEFORE IT LANDS."

ON THE FLATHEAD, NOBODY PLAYS AND EVERYBODY LOSES

POLSON CITY COUNCILMAN TOM JONES IS ALSO THE OWNER OF THE PONDERA BAR AND RESTAURANT, WHERE HE HAD 13 VIDEO GAMBLING MACHINES. HIS FATHER, JIM, WHO RAN THE BAR FOR YEARS BEFORE TOM TOOK OVER, IS A FORMER MAYOR OF POLSON. COROLATORY LOSSES TIED TO GAMING AT THE PONDERA HAVE REDUCED BAR INCOME BY ABOUT 25 PERCENT.

"I DON'T PICTURE MYSELF AS BEING ON THE RESERVATION," SAYS JONES. "I'M JUST BORDERED BY INDIAN COUNTRY. WE'RE BEING HELD HOSTAGE BY THE TRIBE, BUT THEY CAN ARGUE SOVEREIGNTY UNTIL HELL FREEZES OVER BECAUSE THE STATE'S IN THE RIGHT AND THEY'RE NOT GOING TO BACK DOWN."

MARK GILROY AND HIS WIFE, KATHY, HAD ALWAYS PLANNED TO PUT THEIR Daughters THROUGH COLLEGE, BUT NOW THE GIRLS ARE SCRAMBLING FOR SCHOLARSHIPS AND LOANS. EACH SUMMER THEY LEAVE SCHOOL AND RETURN TO POLSON TO HELP OUT AT THEIR PARENTS' RESTAURANT. THE GILROYS OWN THE JACKPOT, WHERE THEY ESTIMATE THEIR GAMBLING-RELATED LOSSES AT BETWEEN 25 AND 30 PERCENT. THEY SAY THEY HAVE GONE FROM 22 EMPLOYEES TO 10 SINCE GAMING LEFT THE RESERVATION.

KATHY GILROY FEELS CHEATED AFTER HAVING HAD GAMBLING FOR SEVERAL YEARS. "IT'S LIKE THEY SAID, 'THAT'S WHAT YOU COULD'VE HAD; HOPE YOU ENJOYED IT.' THE STATE SHOULD TREAT ME LIKE A CITIZEN OF MONTANA OR ELSE GIVE ME MY MONEY BACK."


ROD SMART NEVER RELIED MUCH ON GAMBLING AS A MONEY-MAKER WHEN IT WAS LEGAL, BUT HE DOES MISS THE $800 PER MONTH IT GENERATED FOR HIS 2ND CHANCE BAR IN RONAN. HIS BIGGEST LOSS HAS BEEN THE VALUE OF HIS LIQUOR LICENSE; he was offered $125,000 for the license a few years ago and says he couldn't get $30,000 for it today. He questions the actual economic impact the return of gambling would have for reservation communities.

"A LOT OF FOLKS SEE INDIAN GAMBLING AS THE RETURN OF THE BUFFALO," SAYS SMART. "THEY THINK THAT IF WE GET IT BACK, THERE'LL NEVER BE ANOTHER SOCIAL ILL. BUT THIS AIN'T NEVADA. WHY HELL, THIS WHOLE RESERVATION GAMBLING PROJECT COULD FIT INTO ONE OF DONALD TRUMP'S TOILETS. THE ONLY THING THAT'S HAPPENED IS THAT THIS FIGHT HAS SET BACK RELATIONS ON THE RESERVATION BY 50 YEARS, AND I'M REAL SORRY TO SEE THAT HAPPEN."
Gambling on Gaming

With 70 percent unemployment on the Fort Belknap Reservation, the gaming business was big business for those employed at the Bingo Hall. So a year ago, when the tribe failed to come to an agreement with the state, gaming machines were shut down.

**UNPLUGGED AND UNEMPLOYED**

When the electronic gambling machines were unplugged at the Bingo Hall in Fort Belknap Agency a year ago, Beverly Gardipee lost more than a pleasant way to spend her free time. She lost more than half her paycheck.

Gardipee had worked 40 hours a week as a cook in the small kitchen at the Bingo Hall on the Fort Belknap Reservation east of Havre. But with the lost revenue from the poker and keno machines, her hours were cut to 19.

And that’s a big cut when you’re supporting five grandchildren, two sons, one daughter and a disabled husband.

All 33 gambling machines on the reservation were shut down April 28, 1993, after the tribal council and Montana state negotiators failed to reach an agreement about the scope and operation of gambling on the reservation. After more than a year, negotiations are ongoing, but without an agreement the machines stay in storage.

Gardipee now takes home $139 a week instead of the $300 she earned for a 40-hour week. Nearly half her paycheck goes for gas to make the 60-mile roundtrip daily from her home in Hays. With what remains she must pay for food and rent and an occasional “extra” that off the reservation would seem a necessity of life. The family gets monthly assistance from the tribe and federal government, but Gardipee says it is still tough to make ends meet with so many mouths to feed.

The kitchen where Gardipee works is open only on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, the days the hall opens its door for bingo.

“If we had our machines we would be open all week,” the 62-year old grandmother says.

On a reservation with 70 percent unemployment, Gardipee isn’t about to give up her job to look for another. Neither does she have high hopes about her children finding a job.

“The gold mines are hiring but they haven’t heard anything yet,” Gardipee says, referring to the nearby operations at Zortman and Landusky. “I hang onto my job...
because I need it."

And it is because of this unemployment that the tribal council wants to reach a gambling compact with the state so it can build its dream: a hotel and casino on Highway 2, across from the Fort Belknap Kwik Stop, an operation that could employ as many as 100 people.

Tribal vice chairman Tracey Charles King says higher stakes gambling on the reservation would attract tourists who would provide the money the tribe needs to start investing in other tribal businesses.

"We could start supporting ourselves more, taking some of the burden off the state," King says. "It's more than just those 100 jobs."

But state Attorney General Joe Mazurek says that higher stakes gambling on the reservation would put pressure on the state to raise payouts in casinos off the reservations. The result would be "a never-ending ratcheting effect," Mazurek said. "We fear we could not hold it back."

Mazurek concedes that tribes across the nation have made economic strides through gambling. And while he acknowledges that Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act to foster economic development on Indian reservations, he says Montana state officials are "not particularly excited about choosing this horse to ride in terms of economic development." He believes it has no long-term future because "you can't have Las Vegas-style gambling in every state and expect it to last." He also contends that Montanans made it clear in 1972 when they voted against wide-open gambling that the citizens do not want it here.

But Fort Belknap leaders believe gambling can help their reservation. And they're willing to take any gains, even if short-term.

King says the tribe, which takes 20 percent of the total gambling receipts on the reservation, wants to use the money to build a rest home because the one in Harlem closed recently. More money for low interest loans to tribal members would also be available. The money might help "high potential kids" with education loans so they could return to the reservation with much-needed specialized skills, like medicine.

Rosie L.K. Main, who manages Fort Belknap Bingo Enterprises, the tribally owned business that runs reservation gambling, says the business is losing $126,000 in gambling machine profits each year by the gaming shut-down. The machines brought in more than $1 million but that was whittled down by $688,000 in payouts and $109,000 in tribal taxes, and money for salaries and overhead. The operation also realized money from 11 rented machines scattered around the reservation, but the 22 machines at the Bingo Hall were the main money source. Now bingo is the breadwinner, earning the business $215,000 a year.

But, the lost profits means Main has fewer hours for fewer employees, including her brother-in-law, Billy Main.

Billy Main repaired the machines before they were shut off in April 1993. He subsequently applied for unemployment benefits, but his eligibility ends in July.

"I don't know what I'll do when the unemployment runs out," Main says.

Main says the 23 hours he works weekly in his bingo job don't earn him enough even to cover his car payments, payments he started before the machines were unplugged. Main used to work a total of 50 hours a week with the two jobs.

If the unemployment benefits aren't renewed and the machines remain unplugged, Main says he will leave the Bingo Hall to look for full-time work.

The unplugged machines have affected others, too, including floorwalker Byard Lame Bull, whose hours were cut from 40 to 20 a week.

Lame Bull recently got a $500 tribal loan to help make ends meet.

"I used it to try to keep up on the heating bill this winter," he says.

But, Lame Bull, who earns $6 an hour plus a two-cent commission for each special bingo game he sells, will have to get another loan right after he pays the first one off. Nearly all 16 employees at the Bingo Hall get tribal loans.

Lame Bull, who has worked at the hall for three years, says he really hopes the machines start up again so he can resume working full time.

"We had a lot of people coming in to play machines all day," Lame Bull says. "That meant we worked more."

The Fort Belknap Indian Reservation is isolated in north-central Montana between the cities of Havre and Glasgow. Billy Main repaired the poker and keno machines before they were shut off in April 1993. Main went from working 50 hours a week to 23 hours.

Written by Joe Paisley
Photographed by Kort Duce
UM student Gene Shopteese didn't just lose his shirt gambling, he also lost his family. But once he realized how much his addiction was going to cost him, he got help, got back his family, and started a new life.

**Kicking the Machine Habit**

Even when he studies until the early hours of morning, University of Montana student Gene Shopteese won't let himself enjoy one of the staples of college life: a steaming cup of coffee. He's afraid he'll get addicted.

Shopteese says he knows he has an addictive nature. Drinking coffee often enough, he says, will lead to a dependance he can't help. "If I do something often enough I'll be addicted," the freshman in pre-physical therapy says. "I could get addicted to M&M's."

Shopteese knows a lot about addiction. In November 1989 he injured the tendons in both arms while working as a track welder for the Burlington Northern Railroad. The injury and hospital stay started him on the road to a gambling addiction, he says.

"I was grieving for my lost job," Shopteese says. "But I internalized it and it started eating me inside. What gambling did was help me to not think. It's easy to sit up there and push buttons."

That meant a lot of time and money spent sitting at an electronic poker machine. "Sometimes I would sit there all day long from 8 in the morning to 8 at night," Shopteese says.

Shopteese got $20,000 from BN in compensation for his injuries. It was gone in about two months. "I have nothing to show for it," he says. "But it nearly cost me my family."

Shopteese's wife, Gloria, left him in 1990, taking their son Shawn with her. Gloria Shopteese says constant lies about money forced her to leave. "When I saw my little boy getting caught up in it I knew it was time to get out," she says. "I knew that as long as he was caught up in the disease there was no relationship."

Shopteese says without his wife's threat of divorce, he would still be gambling. "I reached a jumping off place," Shopteese says. "It's where most people who commit suicide don't stop. The only alternative was to seek treatment. Thank God I made the right choice."

Shopteese got help during a 30-day stay at the Rimrock Foundation in Billings. The family got back together in 1991.

Finding a balance between studies and family while talking to each other has helped Shopteese and his wife keep the marriage going despite a tumultuous move from Fort Belknap, where they lived for 20 years, to Missoula. Gene Shopteese is a Standing Rock Sioux originally from North Dakota while Gloria Shopteese is a Gros Ventre from Fort Belknap. She is majoring in social work at UM.

"We basically unplugged ourselves and moved up here," Shopteese says. "We're just now getting into the flow of the university."

Shopteese has had trouble adapting to UM's curriculum after two years at the Fort Belknap Community College, having to retake a few classes while hiring a tutor.

"We've balanced our family and studies to where we are not so edgy and jumpy," Shopteese says. "It's taken two semesters."

But the move from the Fort Belknap to Missoula has helped the couple deal with day-to-day life with addiction, Gloria Shopteese says.

"It has made us a lot closer," she says. "We had no friends here to talk to."

Shopteese still goes to Alcoholics Anonymous on campus. He went through alcoholism treatment in 1985 after that addiction split his family. "It's sort of a cycle," Shopteese says. "Without those two spiritual journeys I wouldn't be here today."
Shopteese, who follows a very disciplined schedule, studies for his mathematics class in the early afternoon before his children return home from school.

Shopteese reads over material before doing his homework. After cleaning his apartment and before studying, he relaxes.

I reached a jumping off place. It's where most people who commit suicide don't stop. The only alternative was to seek treatment. Thank God I made the right choice.

— Gene Shopteese

Shopteese says he releases stress by taking a softball class at the University of Montana. Before class he shares a laugh with classmates.
Carl Venne, a firm believer in the need for private enterprise on the reservation, is a member of the Crow management team and worked with Yellowhammer on opening the casino. He sees the casino as a first step toward tribal economic independence.

**LEGAL BATTLE AT THE LITTLE BIGHORN**

A decision by the State of Montana and a failed joint venture mean a smaller casino and a huge debt for the Crow Tribe.

For years it lay, for the most part, abandoned and forgotten. A dilapidated old structure of peeling yellowish paint left to molder in the hot southeastern Montana sun.

It was once called the Sun Lodge Motel. And it came to represent just another failed business venture on the Crow Indian Reservation.

Today it is a totally renovated building. It wears a new coat of blue paint. The two-story-high neon sign out front flashes its new name: Little Bighorn Casino and Restaurant.

Inside lie the hopes of the Crow Nation for economic revitalization and development.

On a recent warm Saturday afternoon the parking lot of the Little Bighorn Casino is crowded with cars, many with Wyoming license plates.

Patrons enter the casino through double doors into a room crowded with people and noise.

The atmosphere is alive with an undercurrent of beeping and booping, punctuated by a syncopated din of bells and clanging.

Directly ahead is a video poker machine with a view screen so big it looks as if it would be more suited to show-casing Monday Night Football.

There are machines to the left, machines to the right. A double row of machines behind the large poker machine extends across the room where they explode into a horizon of more machines. A cacophony of noise and flashing bright lights come from the 100 gaming machines. And if that’s not enough, there are another 100 machines upstairs, which, a few weeks after this visit, the tribe replaced with a bingo operation.

The upstairs casino also features a 100-seat restaurant. To the left of the restaurant is a live poker room which at this hour is an oasis of quiet. By 11 p.m. the two poker tables will be enshrouded in cigarette smoke as players hunch over their cards and chips hoping to win a $1,000 pot. They are serious gamblers — and their game will stretch into the early morning hours — long after the video machines have closed down for the night.

But this is Saturday afternoon at the Little Bighorn Casino — the largest casino in Montana — and almost every gambling machine is occupied.

Gamblers choose between video poker and video keno and use either quarters or nickels.

And unlike off-reservation casinos, payouts are not printed on a ticket that cashed in at a window. The video gambling machines here at the Little Bighorn Casino spit out winnings in coins, just like Las Vegas slot machines. So when you win here, you really know it.

In fact most of the casino knows it. A royal flush in poker yields as much as $1,000. Not only does the machine kick into hyper-drive in the beeping and flashing departments, it also delivers winnings by clanging quarters or nickels into a metal tray.

For Carl Venne, a Crow Tribal member, the noise of the casino represents the start of economic independence for his people. Venne is a member of the casino management committee. He functions as the liaison officer between the tribe and Yellowhammer Inc., a national Indian gaming management company that, until early May, assisted the Crow Tribe in developing gaming on the reservation.

The opening of the Little Bighorn Casino cost Yellowhammer a reported $3.1 million, an amount the tribe has agreed to reimburse Yellowhammer now that the company has withdrawn its management.
agreement with the tribe. In early May Yellowhammer agreed to remove itself from managing any Indian gaming, a move that came before the National Indian Gaming Commission had completed its review of the contract the Crow Tribe had with Yellowhammer.

Yellowhammer, an Appleton, Wis., firm, has come under fire from some tribes for allegations that it charges exorbitant management fees and runs up construction costs. Yellowhammer officials have denied those charges in interviews with the Billings Gazette, but the 1993 Audit of Indian Gaming by the U.S. Office of Inspector General lists Yellowhammer as among 17 firms its says charge unreasonable management fees.

Under the agreement made with the Crow Tribe, Yellowhammer was to fund, plan and develop the tribe's gaming. Yellowhammer was also to assist Absaloka Casino Enterprises (ACE), a tribal corporation that is managing the Little Bighorn Casino. The agreement also stipulated that Yellowhammer was to build or contract the construction of a motel, cafe and truck stop near the casino.

Now that the Crow Tribe and Yellowhammer have severed ties, the tribe has agreed to reimburse Yellowhammer $3.1 million, plus 10 percent interest, in monthly installments. Yellowhammer says it spent about $1.1 million in renovation costs and $2 million for equipment, training, marketing, insurance and other costs.

The tribe is not now looking for another management firm.

The casino opened on Jan. 17 during the slow tourist season. This gave managers enough time to train the staff in casino operation. The casino employs primarily tribal members and the majority of them are young. Venne believes that the casino gives many of them a sense of pride and hope for the future.

The operation presently employ 110 tribal members and Venne says they expect to hire another 30-40 seasonal workers in the summer. The recent addition of bingo could also mean more jobs. Venne estimates that between opening day and mid-March the casino had grossed about $350,000 and had paid out $200,000 in salaries.

Gambling revenue will be used to strengthen tribal programs in education, economic development, and health and social services, Venne says.

Venne says locating the casino in Crow Agency, rather than elsewhere on the reservation, is to the tribe's benefit. The state, at the behest of Gov. Marc Racicot, insisted on that site, according to Attorney General Joe Mazurek. That sparked criticism that Racicot wanted to protect Billings businesses from competition. The Crow Reservation's northwest boundary is at the edge of Billings, but Crow Agency is 60 miles from Montana's largest city. But Venne says most tribal members live at or near Crow Agency and would find it difficult to commute to Billings for work. Locating the casino at Crow Agency enables the tribe to provide much needed jobs for its own people, Venne believes.

Crow Agency is also an area of projected future growth. The casino is located at the crossroads of the Little Bighorn Battlefield and the major interstate from Sheridan to Billings. Venne says there are plans to build an Indian artifacts museum in the area and that Time-Warner is considering building a theme park nearby.

According to Venne, roughly 85 percent of the casino's customers are from Sheridan, Wyo. That's because Sheridan is fewer than 100 miles from Crow Agency and is in a state that bans all forms of gambling. Absaloka Casino Enterprises promotes the casino in Sheridan newspapers. Customers present their promotional coupons and receive a reduced rate on a steak dinner and $5 extra in coins when purchasing $15 in quarters or nickels for the gambling machines. Eventually Little Bighorn Casino hopes to offer bus trips that will pick up and customers in Sheridan or Billings and deliver them to the door.

Venne says that the casino is just the beginning of economic revitalization for the Crow Tribe. He feels that the tribe must take advantage of its location and Montana's tourism industry. He hopes to see the area grow with the addition of an entertainment complex, motel and truck stop.

"You know, it was significant that we opened on Martin Luther King Day," Venne says. "Dr. King had a dream. Well, we also have a dream — and we call this our first step into private enterprise."
You know, it was significant that we opened on Martin Luther King Day. Dr. King had a dream. Well, we also have a dream — and we call this our first step into private enterprise. — Carl Venne
Three weeks after the Crow tribe opened its casino, the tribe and the state were at odds over interpretations of the compact. Then the disagreements escalated.

**STATE SEIZES SLOT MACHINES**

On Jan. 17, the Crow Tribe's Little Bighorn Casino opened its doors for the first time. The opening was a festive occasion on this 2.2 million-acre reservation just east of Billings. For the 7,000-member Crow Tribe it also opened the doors to a promise of economic prosperity and self-sufficiency.

But three weeks later that promise paled as the tribe found itself in a standoff with the State of Montana over whether the casino had twice the number of video gaming machines as allowed in its compact with the state. The state gave the tribe 90 days to remove 100 of its 200 machines or face termination of the compact, which would end gaming on the reservation.

- On May 6, a day before the deadline, the deadlock ended. The tribe removed 100 of the machines and took steps to replace them with a bingo operation.
- On June 18, state and federal officials seized 100 slot machines in an early morning raid.

The Crow Tribal Gaming Commission says the slot machines are legal under the tribal/state compact definition of a lottery. The state disagrees.

So does a U.S. Magistrate from Billings who ruled on June 21 that the manager of the casino, Ed Hamilton, be bound over for trial on a charge of possessing and operating illegal gaming devices. Slot machines are illegal in Montana.

The tribes would like the issue to be solved as a contract (compact) dispute, not a criminal matter, according to a story published in the Billings Gazette. But Assistant U.S. Attorney Bernie Huhley maintains that "this is a violation of criminal law for an event taking place outside the compact."

Hamilton was charged under The Johnson Act which prohibits slot machines on Indian Reservations. There is an exception to the Johnson Act, according to Huhley, if slot machines are authorized under the compact formed by the state and the tribe. He says the exception doesn’t exist in this case because the compact didn’t contemplate slot machines on the Crow Reservation.

The tribe, on the other hand, contends that the compact makes no explicit reference to slot machines and that the broad definition of lotteries within the compact includes them.

The first disagreement with the state arose over 200 video gaming machines at the Little Bighorn Casino. On the first floor are 100 keno and poker machines. A carpeted stairway leads to a second floor where there is a restaurant, and, up until May 7, another 100 machines. The casino is owned by the Crow Tribe, but operated by Absaloka Enterprises (ACE). Carl Venne, a member of the casino's management committee, said the state's interpretation was wrong. He said Little Bighorn Casino is really two different premises, under the language set out in the compact. At issue are definitions of what defines a "common wall," and other lawyer-like provisions.

The upshot, according to Assistant Attorney General Deanne Sandholm's interpretation, was that the casino is a single premise and thus cannot have more than 100 machines.

The state gave the casino operators 90 days to either block off the stairwell or remove 100 machines. Sandholm said that the state would have canceled the compact if the tribe had not complied.

Arlo Dawes, administrative assistant to Nomee, told the Billings Gazette that there has been a constant consumer demand for bingo and that the 100 machines upstairs did not draw as many customers as the downstairs machines.

Casino managers told the Gazette that the tribe does not plan to operate the 100 pulled machines again but will store them and eventually put them up for sale.

Venne contends that the state did not follow the rules. The compact says the Tribal Gaming Agency, an administrative arm of the Tribal Council, shall investigate violations of the compact and determine what corrective actions are needed.

The language of the compact makes it clear, Venne said, that if the state or anyone else has a complaint about the casino, the complaint must be directed to the Tribal Gaming Agency, also called the Crow Gaming Commission, which has sole jurisdiction over gaming on the reservation.

"In turn," Venne said, "the Tribal Gaming Agency will contact us here at ACE and say that something is wrong here and they will investigate. If they investigate and find that something is wrong, we are required to change it or get it out of here. And that is what the state is supposed to do and they jumped over the process."

But while Sandholm said the compact does not extend to interpretation of the compact provisions, Sandholm said, "That needs to be resolved by the two parties to the agreement, not the Crow Gaming Commission."

"The dispute is between the two parties over the interpretation of the compact provisions," Sandholm said. "There's a time in your life when you have to stand up for your rights." Venne said, "Coming from an Indian standpoint, it all comes down to the legality of what is rightfully ours - our sovereignty."

Although the standoff over the number of machines has ended the debate over the state-tribal compact drags on. No one knows how the latest disagreement between the state and the tribe will turn out. The slot machines are gone. But the state and the tribe still haven’t found much common ground.
Every morning Louis Killsnight, manager of the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Gaming Hall, makes an accounting of every poker and keno machine to see how much money went in and out of the machine the previous day. The newer machines that the tribe hopes to get will automatically print out tickets, making the accounting more efficient.

Northern Cheyenne tribal leaders are certain they can make a profit from the reservation's gaming, but mismanagement and inexperience in running a gaming operation have left the chances of winning big with long odds.

HOPING TO HIT THE JACKPOT

The only gaming machines on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation line one wall of a former chapel, on space that is supposed to be part of an adjacent youth center.

Duct tape is wrapped around the tops of several of the 14 aging screens, and two don't work. The makeshift casino has no sign outside; so it's hard to find, even on Lame Deer's main street.

Tribal officials are eager to cash in on reservation gamblers, by taking advantage of a compact with the state allowing 100 machines per casino. But the tribe's inexperience with management has made running gambling here a struggle.

The Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council took over gaming operations for the first time in August, after newly elected Tribal Council members accused the gaming hall's former private manager, James Robinson, of keeping too much money for himself.

"We were not getting a fair cut," said Council Vice President William Walksalong, a main opponent of Robinson.

James Robinson was paying the tribe 30 percent of his gross profits — about $40,000 to $50,000 a year — gained from gaming in the small room the tribe now uses, plus bingo in the attached gymnasium. The Tribal Council paid utilities and leased the building to Robinson for $1 a year.

Although the council halted bingo in August, opting instead to give the gym space back to area youth, its profits have greatly exceeded the income it realized from Robinson's operation. In seven months, with the same machines in a fraction of the space and with no bingo, the tribe has taken in $142,000, according to Alec Sand Crane, a tribal councilman and the acting gaming commissioner.

The council passed an ordinance giving the tribe the exclusive right to regulate gambling on the reservation in December of 1993. Between then and August, the gaming hall was closed while the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and then the FBI, investigated Robinson's management. Neither office took criminal action against him.

Robinson refused to comment on the allegations and hung up on a reporter seeking comment.

"I really don't have any comment," he said. "I don't really want to get in on their game down there (at the tribal office)."

His wife, Jackie Robinson, said his removal was strictly political, and that he wouldn't cheat the tribe.

"He's not that kind of person," she said. "He's a very fair man. He's an honest man."

Martin Wilkie, senior criminal investigator for the BIA in Lame Deer, refused to comment on specifics relating to the investigation. He did confirm that after the casino closed, Robinson and someone else backed a truck up to the building one night and tried to take the machines. Robinson left after failing to prove he owned them, Wilkie said. While arguing with BIA police about the machines, Robinson threw one off the truck, smashing it, said Rick Robinson, a former Council member opposed to gaming, who is James Robinson's nephew.

After finding that the BIA was investigating, two other people who had tried to claim the machines didn't give proof they owned them either, Wilkie said, since the machines as equipped weren't legal in Montana.

Montana law requires that video gambling machines have mechanical counters to record money put in and paid out. It also requires machines to have two rolls of paper that record the transactions, one for record keeping and one as a receipt for winning customers. The antiquated machines had neither. Before the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was passed in 1988, there were no guidelines for machines on reservations.

Monitoring and challenging James Robinson's management was difficult. Robinson's son, Ernie Robinson, was an influential tribal council member at the time, making it hard to take any action unfavorable to James Robinson, said Eugene Limpy, who was a councilman at the same time as Ernie Robinson. Limpy said he was stonewalled every time he would try to check James Robinson's financial credibility.

The old council also voted to exempt the casino from its routine auditing of all tribal agencies, Councilman Walksalong said.
William Walksalong, vice president of the Tribal Council, said that gaming on the reservation will never be a big operation like the Las Vegas style of gambling that has been successful with some other tribes.

Record keeping was incomplete too. Since the machines had no print reels inside to record transactions, after a win a player had to signal the game attendant, who recorded the win, paid the player and reset the machine. Since there was no record, it was impossible to verify how much went in and out.

The contract with James Robinson was ambiguous also. Robinson had only a verbal agreement with the tribe in which he agreed to lease the machines to the tribe for $2,800 each per year, Councilman Walksalong said. Now the tribe has purchased newer machines for just over $800 each, Walksalong said.

Lewando "Cowboy" Fisher, chairman of the Tribal Council, said the tribe wanted proof that Robinson had a rental agreement with a company that owned the machines. When the casino was closed for investigation, the Council tried to pay rent on the machines, he said, but found that the Billings company that was supposed to own them had sold out to a company in Miles City, and there was no record that the Billings company owned them.

"There was a big accountability problem," Councilman Walksalong said. "The bottom line is there was no accountability."

So the Tribal Council passed the ordinance that gave it sole ownership rights to all gambling on the reservation. But their struggle didn't end there.

When the Council took over in August, it hired Raymond King as gaming commissioner. But he was suspended by the council this spring, then fired by Chairman Fisher, after he went to Minnesota to buy newer machines and came back with models as obsolete as the old ones.

The council gave King $49,000 to buy 60 1992 poker and keno machines, but he came back in March with only 25 poker machines, mostly 1981 and 1982 models, Councilman Walksalong said. He also spent $2,000 more than he was allocated.

King also surprised the council by going to Minnesota to buy machines from a man he met when he lived there, because council members thought the machines were to come from a vendor in Great Falls.

An internal investigation was made to see if there was any wrongdoing on King's part, but poor dealing was more to blame than dishonesty, Walksalong said.

Sand Crane, who took King's place as acting gaming commissioner when King was suspended, said it appears that King was just trying to get a good deal, not realizing the machines were so old.

"From what it looks like, it's just a mix up," Sand Crane said. "We didn't notice that they were '81 machines until we unloaded them."

The tribe's goal is to get things running smoothly, in a way that can be easily monitored and audited, before summer.

Mechanical counters were already awkwardly fitted to the old machines in August to record money put in and paid out. New machines, if they can be obtained, will have the paper tapes inside that accurately record each transaction, required under the tribe's compact with the state as well as state law.

And the ordinance giving the tribe authority over gaming is likely to be revised to give less autonomy to the gaming commission, Walksalong said. That way, if things aren't to the tribe's liking, or if it isn't getting enough...
information on what is happening, it can act sooner to change it. Right now, he said, the well-being of the gaming hall depends on who is running it, and the tribe has little power to intervene.

Over the long term, the tribe must find a new home for gambling. When Rick Robinson was in the Council, he worked unsuccessfully against the majority in the old council to get James Robinson out of the gambling business. Now he runs the youth center, and he wants gambling moved to a different building, away from the children.

"I despise gambling," he said. "It contradicts what we're trying to do here. What I don't like is that we want our kids to be able to grow, be healthy, to go after challenges. We want them to do all these wonderful things, but to me gambling kills creativity. There's nothing creative about it."

Councilman Fisher wants the gambling moved also, so that the 58 percent of the reservation population that is under age 18 has a place to go that is free of the negative influence of gambling.

"We need to get gambling away from the youth center," he said. The entrance to the youth center is the same as for the casino. Rules prohibit children from entering the casino side, but they can be seen going in and out all day, to visit with people who are playing the machines.

It is unclear where and when a new facility will be built. Some want a new casino along Highway 212, to attract whatever tourist dollars come through. Others would like it in town, where it would be more convenient. Judy Littlebird comes in regularly to play the machines, watch other people play, and just socialize. She says most of the regulars rely on the gaming hall as a social outlet, since there aren't really any other places to go in Lame Deer. The reservation bans the sale of alcohol, so there are no bars where adults can meet.

The tribe doesn't have the money to buy land and build a new facility on its own, but Walksalong says he has had 40 or 50 inquiries from potential investors.

It is unlikely that gaming will get as big on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation as in other places, simply because there isn't the economy to support it. Most gamblers are from within the reservation, and don't have much money. Highway 212, a primitive, two-lane road is the only one going through the reservation.

"We just can't go big time because we're not gonna draw the people," Fisher said.

After the replacement building for the youth-center casino is built, Sand Crane said, he'd like to see a casino built on the Tongue River Reservoir, where the tribe recently got some land through a water-rights agreement. That location, near Wyoming, Sand Crane said, would be attractive to tribal officials on this economically troubled reservation.

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But Viola Washington says she wishes the tribe had located a casino along Highway 212, so that "we could have a casino on the reservation, and don't have much money. Highway 212, a primitive, two-lane road is the only one going through the reservation."}

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Traditional handgames keep Vann Ryan, a Northern Cheyenne Indian, and his family playing and staying together. Kids grow up with the magic of the game embedded in their souls.

The Ryan’s and Bearcbum’s travel together to Crow handgames almost weekly during May and June.

**STICKS AND BONES: A FAMILY GAME**

The ‘face off’ is a technique of hide and seek during the stick games. Players will call out you there is more than meets the eye here—there is traditional and cultural meaning as a part of the game.

The face off is a technique of hide and seek during the stick games. Players will call out that non-Indians sometimes use when they mutter the words in frustration.

But they don’t stop at the Little Bighorn Casino. The tribe’s interest is now focused on Rehber, who plans to hide the bones when he gets to know them.

All of our kids are what we call ‘handgame babies,” she says. “Hopefully, when they have children, they will teach them.”

At the tournament, bands of “handgame babies” meet around the outside of the arena, and men from other tribes fill in for missing gameens from the Northern Cheyenne team.

Vann Jr. is the medicine man and Vann handled the head ponies. Three of his daughters hide bones for the team.

“Get to know us there is more than meets the eye here—there is traditional and cultural meaning as a part of the game.”

The image depicts a group of men sitting behind the men on a three-level Cheyenne for most of the weekend, gathering all 14 sticks. Each team gets one. To win, a team must sign and cheap ribs. Wyoming with the lure of a flashing gambler from homes in Montana and two elk teeth in the hands of the team. The entry fee for the weekend tournament at Crow was $75 per team, with满脸 painted out to the four trouser legs. A snapshot of the Northern Cheyenne team playing is something like a family portrait. The family’s women fill out the short sleeves behind them. The Ryan’s and Bearcbum’s travel together to Crow handgames almost weekly during May and June.

The team faces each other to play, but they are the center stage it is a round mouth that doesn’t open, you need an interest.

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R o se Bearcbum, Vann Ryan’s sister-in-law, reflects on the handgame tradition in her family. “All of our children are what we call handgame babies,” she says. “Hopefully, when they have children, they will teach them.”

Before handing them out. GAMBLING on handgame tradition means waiting for them to guess correctly. As the game begins, the players pick up two cards and cut to one side of a partner. Three of his daughters hide bones for the team. The Ryan’s and Bearcbum’s travel together to Crow handgames almost weekly during May and June.

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The team faces each other to play, but they are the center stage it is a round mouth that doesn’t open, you need an interest.
Georgia Burns figured it was getting bad when she'd come home penniless on payday from the Our Place Casino in Lame Deer. The owner, who is her daughter, would simply pay Burns in quarters and watch the wages slide right out of her hands and back into the joint's machines, one quarter at a time.

"I have a real problem with it, but I've been working on it," Burns says, a tired look of worry etched into her face. "You hock things, you neglect your kids. You always have a feeling that you're going to win." But she didn't win, and her losing didn't stop even after she realized she needed help. And, like Indians nationwide who are left in gambling's wake as their tribes try to turn machines into jobs and benefits, she realized she had nowhere to turn.

The Indian Health Service, the federal government agency that helps pay for a broken leg, flu shots, and even alcoholism treatment, won't help pay to treat compulsive gambling. The IHS dollar can only stretch so thin, says Dennis Ling, director of family services at the IHS clinic in Lame Deer.

"There's a limited number of dollars out there for health care," he says. "Treatment for gambling is like icing on the cake.

The nearest in-patient, private treatment program is 105 miles away at the Rimrock Foundation in Billings, but Burns says she couldn't afford its prices.

"I checked into going to Rimrock," says Burns, who is also recovering a alcoholic. "They said I needed to have $3,000 or so.

So Burns tried to battle the gambling herself. She talked to addiction counselors at the tribal health office. She and her now ex-husband Buford Curley started a Gambler's Anonymous program with the help of a Billings GA chapter. Burns put up signs advertising the meetings all over town — including in the Our Place Casino, where daughter Stacie Joiner got mad at her.

"We've had words about that," Burns says with a chuckle. "I would put signs up in her casino. 'You're gonna take all my customers away,' she would say."

Burns' experience battling gambling addiction gives what the reservation's addiction experts find every day. It's a reservation that denies that gambling addiction even exists, or sees it only as an indulgence, not a disease, says David Tompkins, an instructor in Alcohol and Drug Studies at Lame Deer's Dull Knife Memorial College. When he put on a workshop called "Win Some — Lose A Lot," three years ago, the signs advertising it were ripped down.

"When we put this one on, there was a feeling that people didn't want to hear about it," he says. Posters advertising other workshops had never been ripped down before, even when the workshops tackled issues as touchy as sexual abuse and AIDS.

The two-day workshop covering how to spot an addict, what to do to intervene and how to deal with compulsive gambling was attended mostly by people who knew they needed help or by people who knew the problem existed, he says.

"There were people that were there because they knew they had some issue with gambling," he says. "It drew people who knew enough to be there."

Many addicts simply replace one compulsion with another, he says, substituting bouts of drinking with hours of poker. He calls it Bingo Maintenance — the compulsion is the same, only the form has changed.

There is a group of people who are addicted to alcohol, who substitute for alcohol," he says. "Gambling becomes the new agent for addiction. They put the plug in the jug and start putting the quarters in the machines."

The reservation needs its own program, he says. But gambling programs aren't cheap, says Charles Bearcomesout, director of the Northern Cheyenne Recovery Center. Right now, Cheyenne addicts can get minimal help from his program, but it's tailored mostly for alcohol and drug treatment, not gambling.

"The only thing we pay for is chemical dependenc-
Mary Lodgepole lives a simple, yet happy life on her reservation. While she would like life to improve for her people, she doesn’t believe gambling is the answer because of the danger it poses to keeping Indian traditions in the Indian community.

**FAITH VS. FORTUNE**

Many of the 2,500 residents of Rocky Boy’s Reservation in northcentral Montana say expanded gambling is the economic panacea this tiny reservation needs. Then there are people like Mary Lodgepole.

As did her grandfather, Lodgepole, a 72-year-old Chippewa Cree, disapproves of gaming because it clashes with her traditional beliefs.

“The old people didn’t like hand games and card games,” she says of the games that have a long tradition in the tribe, but are controversial nonetheless. “My grandpa didn’t allow these cards in his tent. They used to live right alongside the river in Great Falls then. That’s his cards,” he used to say. “That’s the other god’s cards.” He meant the devil.

Lodgepole now lives on the 100,000-acre reservation where a small casino, owned by a Chippewa Cree tribal corporation, houses 32 electronic keno and poker machines. Although part of the proceeds from the machines goes to support the needy on the reservation, Lodgepole condemns the atmosphere her grandchildren are growing up in — one of liquor, drugs and gambling. Others, however, see reservation gaming as the answer to the tribe’s economic woes, which include an unemployment rate of around 75 percent.

Kenny Blatt is the manager of the reservation’s 4C’s Casino. The building is unimpressive, about the size of a large convenience store. It also holds a cafe and video games and rentals. Attached is a community hall where the tribe’s powwow committee holds bingo games twice a week. The casino takes in roughly $250,000 a year. In return, the tribe receives $72,000 for the general fund and $24,000 for the Senior Citizens Center. Blatt says money goes for a variety of projects that help children, families and the elderly with such things as food, clothing and money.

“I think that everyone has been helped by it,” he says. “I can’t think of a person who hasn’t been helped.”

In fact, Lodgepole is surprised to hear that the firewood in her stove is bought in part with casino proceeds.

“That’s nice if they can do that and help out poor people,” she says.
Mary Lodgepole, a 72-year-old Chippewa Cree, disapproves of gaming because it clashes with her traditional beliefs. "It's really terrible the way some of these people use up their money in gambling. Sometimes the kids don't have anything when they get through."

Blatt says he would like to see the state grant the tribe a more generous compact. The current interim compact, which will be renegotiated in November 1995, permits 100 machines with $1,000 payouts and live poker. Blatt and other tribal members who support expansion want blackjack, roulette and unlimited payouts. Blatt talks of moving the casino to Box Elder to be near the busy highway, or out to the tribe's small ski area near Mount Baldy, where he could also develop a golf course and a water slide. He says there used to be a bar at the ski hill, but it burned down because of faulty wiring.

"People thought it was a kind of a blessing," he says, adding that his expansion plans don't include bringing alcohol back to the reservation.

In the 4C's, the drug of choice seems to be nicotine. People perch on barstools and gaze hopefully into the screens through a haze of cigarette smoke. Most nights, the room is fairly quiet, five to 10 players at a time. On bingo nights, Blatt says sometimes there's a wait for a machine. He employs 10 people, but says he could employ more.

"If we get the kind of compact we want, instead of having 75 percent unemployment, we'd employ 100 or 200 people here," Blatt says, but he adds that that won't happen until Gov. Marc Racicot is voted out of office.

Racicot's got his opinion, and that's it," he says. "This guy is anti-gaming. If you go to church every Sunday, he'd love you to death. I guess that's good, but you've got to look at the economics of things."

Blatt says he doesn't see gambling addictions as a big problem on the reservation.

"I don't think there's anybody up here with enough money to become addicted," he says.

But Clayton Gardipee, a dispatcher at the jail, laughs at that notion.

"They stay open all night. Sometimes till 3 or 4 in the morning there's cars in the parking lot," Gardipee says of the casino.

Lodgepole doesn't go to the 4C's Casino, but she knows lots of people who do. The casino's clientele is almost exclusively tribal members.

"It's really terrible the way some of these people use up their money in gambling," she says. "Sometimes the kids don't have anything when they get through."

She thinks that type of behavior leads children down the wrong path.

"What they see their parents doing, they do that too. I know a lot of parents that drink, and their children do that too."

Lodgepole has 11 children and "a bunch" of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, more than 100, she thinks. Some of her children live near her and when one daughter stops by during the interview, she speaks to her mother in Cree. She switches to English to tell a reporter that all of her mother's 11 children are educated.

"They all understand Cree," Lodgepole says of her children, "but none of the grandchildren speak it."

She says that is because their parents don't speak it at home, and she worries about the traditional ways dying. "I didn't even speak a word of English when I started school," she says. "They never let us talk Cree. When they'd catch us in school, they'd keep us at recess. They'd make soap and they'd put that in our mouths. If I could have only spoke English then, I'd report how mean they were to us."

Lodgepole lives in a house she calls "my little shack." It is roughly constructed, with no ceiling to hide the nails that hold down the particleboard roof or the electrical cables running to bare bulbs. But it is clean. She's just finished sweeping out the dust tracked in by some of her grandchildren, who are out playing in the spring mud. It is a chilly morning and the wood stove makes the room smell good and feel warm enough to prompt her to leave the door open.

Two metal bowls sit atop the stove, warming dishwater that she's hauled from a tank next door. A string of venison jerky hangs above the stove, drying.

A member of the Native American Church, Lodgepole participates in ceremonies that include the use of peyote. She says she first attended a ceremony when she was 14, and she remembers being welcomed warmly by the elders. She passes that feeling on to children who attend ceremonies with her now.

"I'm always glad when young people come to the ceremonies," she says. "There's got to be young people that remember how they do the ceremony."

Uncan Standingrock, a member of the Chippewa Cree Tribal Council, sits with Lodgepole's sentiments about gambling among his people. He says he opposes gaming on the reservation out of respect for the religious beliefs of the elders. He says that has to do with the fact that the Rocky Boy's Reservation was created in 1916 through executive order, not by treaty. The land was given to bands of Chippewa and Cree after they spent many years wandering from place to place, scorned and mistreated by community leaders, searching and praying for land to call home.

"It is the belief of the elders that it is through prayer that they got this land," Standingrock says. "The elders consider this to be sacred. To bring in gambling is like hauling all of this — machines, cards — into the ceremonial lodge. It's undermining our religious beliefs."

Standingrock doesn't participate in the ceremonies, but he says that there's a conflict between the ceremonies and gaming events.

"With a game of chance, if it's held when there's a ceremony, hardly anyone goes to the ceremony," he says.
The sun warms Lodgepole’s hands as it does most afternoons while she sews. This is one of several quilts that she will donate to a bazaar.

Lodgepole, who serves on the Cultural Commission, says conflict also arises when someone dies on the reservation.

“When there’s a death, the gaming should be stopped,” she says. “Lately that hasn’t been followed. The ceremonial way of our wake is to stay up all night. It’s the passing on of information from the elders.”

Stump says the commission plans to write a letter to the council to remind it of the wake traditions. She worries too about where the money is coming from that goes into the machines.

“I hear they’re really into it, some people, and it’s really hurting their families,” she says.

The Rocky Boy’s Reservation sits at the edge of the Bears Paw Mountains, an area of endless clusters of small peaks. A few of these rise behind Lodgepole’s house, speckled with pines. The Native American Church is not a building, and ceremonies are held in various places.

“My son has a hogan on his place,” she says. “That’s where they’ve been having the ceremonies, but in the summer they have them anywhere they want.”

She feels blessed to live in such beautiful surroundings.

“God has been kind to us to give us a place like this to raise our children.”

But she doesn’t forget the hollow promises made to her parents when the reservation was formed.

“Our parents told us that when the white people came, they told them they were going to support us better than God did,” she says, laughing. “I haven’t seen that. And I don’t think I will. Look at my little shack. If they kept their word, they’d come and give me a nice place to live.”

Lodgepole says many of the problems children face are caused by the failure of their parents to talk to them.

“I guess they haven’t heard older people talk about what’s going to happen, what they should be scared of, what they need to do to take care of themselves,” she says, adding that this would help keep Chippewa Cree traditions alive too. She used to talk about those at the grade school in Rocky Boy.

“They used to ask me to go and talk to the younger children,” she says, “but they haven’t asked me for a while.”

“Those people who said they’d treat us better than God?” she says. “I wish they’d wake up and come and help us not to use the needle and other drugs. It makes it miserable for us older people. The only thing I can do is keep on praying, praying, asking the Almighty for help.”

“Aladdin” is one of Ravin (left), Christopher and Blaze’s favorite movies to watch at grandma’s house. Lodgepole watches the kids but not the movie. “I’m saving my eyes for the sewing.”
On Rocky Boy's reservation gaming revenue helps the tribe's general fund pay for firewood, schooling and, in some cases, medical expenses

BETTING ON BEATING CANCER

The Boy adheres religiously to the treatments offered by modern medicine, but that doesn't negate her belief in the spiritual side of her heritage. She recently returned from seeing a Lakota Sioux medicine man in South Dakota.

"He is a Sun Dance Maker," she says, then hesitates before she says more. "He used herbs and we went into a sweat lodge, and that's all I can say."

Gas money for that trip and a forthcoming visit to a Cree medicine man in Alberta was also provided by the tribe. The Boy says her husband, who is Gros Ventre, is skeptical about spiritual healing.

"He respects it, but he doesn't believe it," she says.

Ramona Parisian, financial officer for the tribe, is in charge of getting the money in the tribe's general fund to the families that need it. It wasn't long ago when one of those families was hers.

"My house burned down last December and we lost everything," she says. "The tribe bought clothes for my kids."

Soon after that, Parisian's daughter was crossing the highway on a three-wheeler and was hit by a pickup truck. She lost her leg in the accident and spent two months in the hospital in Great Falls. Parisian received money from the fund once again so she could afford to stay by her daughter's side.

The money in the general fund isn't all from the gaming operation. In the last year, the tribe has paid out more than $100,000 for various social services. Of that, $72,000 came from the 4C's Casino. The rest came from businesses owned by the tribe. Other uses for the money include funeral expenses, firewood for the tribe's elders, trips for students to learn about tribal governments, trips to participate in the National Indian Rodeo, scholarships and holiday food baskets.

The Boy says the fact that she doesn't gamble has nothing to do with her being against it. She says she even played bingo once, and grins when she tells of the results.

"I won $500 and I quit."
"I didn't want to rely on painkillers," says The Boy. "But it's getting to where I have to. I woke up at 4 this morning. The pain was so bad I couldn't sleep."

"When asked what she would do without the tribal money, Faith The Boy is silent for a moment. "I don't know," she says quietly."

Much of The Boy's time at home is spent keeping an eye on her grandchildren Elliot, Jesse, and Paul. Here she doles out Easter candy to Elliot (left) and Jesse, whom she adopted.

Sitting below one of Vernon The Boy's murals, Faith and Vernon share a quiet moment.

Written by Deborah Malarek
Photographed by Ann Arbor Miller
STERLING ODDS

Wolf Point residents flock to the Silverwolf Casino on the Fort Peck Reservation, seeking instant wealth or at least steady work. Many say gambling can pull the community out of an economic slump. But where the money goes remains a puzzle.

With ears laid back and muzzle pointed skyward, the wolf seems to howl a beckoning call from his incandescent perch atop a warehouse.

This Saturday night the call to the Silverwolf Casino in Wolf Point is answered by a steady stream of headlights that meander into a dusty parking lot.

Flanked by a tall, flashing sign bearing its lupine trademark, this casino has a slight cosmopolitan flair. It looks strangely foreign in this sleepy Northeastern Montana town located on the southern edge of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation.

Among the seven Montana reservations, the Silverwolf Casino is unique. While most Indian casinos are owned by the tribe, Silverwolf is independently owned and operated by the Wolf Point Community Organization, a "political subdivision" of the tribes. All profits go solely to the Wolf Point Indian community.

On this Saturday evening people file into the long, steel warehouse to get a choice seat for tonight's $1,000-jackpot bingo or otherwise try for instant wealth at any of the 100 poker and keno machines.

Inside, Oliver Archdale, one of Silverwolf's assistant managers, handles a line of patrons at the bingo wicket, then scrambles to refill a poker machine that has just coughed up a $250 win. A dozen employees, each wearing a red polo shirt like Archdale's, are busy dispensing rolls of coins, serving up nachos and burgers, selling pull-tabs and emptying garbage cans and ashtrays. Looking out among the crowd of bingo players, many of whom have a dauber clutched in one hand and a cigarette in the other, Archdale says, "A lot of them are regulars, been coming here since day one. These people out here are like our big family."

For Archdale and the casino's current two dozen other employees, Silverwolf has meant having a steady, pleasant job on a reservation where unemployment reaches 80 percent and the average median income is 46 percent below the national poverty level.

"The casino offers job security; it's a secure paycheck every Wednesday," says Archdale. 38, a former promoter for bars and pool tournaments who joined Silverwolf four years ago. Even bingo floor walkers who hock tickets between games can, with commission and tips, earn up to $14 an hour.

But this bingo hall and casino, which also houses an adjacent manufacturing plant, was built, in 1984, as a means to an end much more extensive than job cre-
Gambling is not a cure, but it's enabled us to take a whack at the unemployment rate and raise our social status.

—George Redstone

For four years their hopes languished and the warehouse sat empty. Then, in late 1986, Redstone says “some elderly ladies in the community” thought of using it for a bingo hall. It opened as a high-stakes bingo/pull-tab operation on July 4, 1987.

“All members of the community own this place,” Redstone says proudly. “It’s like a workers’ cooperative.”

The operation was a huge success, employing nearly 50 people and grossing $2.5 million in the first year. Patrons were photographed with their shiny new vans and cars, some of the $1.1 million in prizes Silverwolf handed out back then. The rest of the money went to salaries ($250,000), loan payments ($95,000) and operational costs ($295,000).

Bolstered by that success, in 1989 WPCO took out another bank loan and purchased Great Divide Manufacturing, a small-scale factory, and located it in a separate section of the Silverwolf facility, in hopes of attracting industry to the area.

“We're looking at alternatives so we don't put all our eggs in one basket” with the casino, says Redstone.

As confident as Redstone, Archdale and other WPCO members are about bringing Wolf Point out of its economic slump, there is little interaction or consensus between it and the Fort Peck Tribal Council.
In the back office, Archdale tallies the night's income from bingo and the video machines. The casino closes at midnight, and Archdale usually works until 2 a.m., when he makes the "final drop" of money in the floor safe.

Headlights streak as cars leave the casino parking lot after the last bingo session is over. About 100 people showed up at the casino, which is an average night for bingo.

Redstone says the council tried to interfere with WPCO's casino project and tried to take control of it. Last fall, the tribe attempted to enact a resolution that would require Silverwolf to pay 60 percent of its income to the Fort Peck tribes. The National Indian Gaming Regulation Act does require that 60 percent of gambling profits earned on a reservation be set aside for the tribe. However, the WPCO board collected about 400 names on a petition, organized a rally in front of the tribal council office, and managed to get the tribal council to back down. "The tribe would have taken us over and then people would have to go and brown-nose for jobs," says Redstone. WPCO's only authority in tribal government is to make recommendations to the Fort Peck Tribal Council Executive Board. Neither Tribal Council Chairman Caleb Shields nor Eugene Colbertson, chairman of reservation development, would comment on WPCO or its casino operation.

However, Redstone is not reticent in commenting on the tribe's plan to build a $6 million casino complex in Poplar, which unlike Silverwolf, would sell alcohol. "In my personal opinion, the tribe's been making decisions based on politics, not business," Redstone says. "The last place I'd put a destination casino is in Poplar. It's had such bad press because of its high crime rate."

Archdale echoes Redstone's sentiments. "I don't think it'll get off the ground," he says. "Right now it's political propaganda, a pipe dream." Archdale says he's proud of the success WPCO has had with Silverwolf, especially considering only one or two of the initial staff had any casino experience. He also speaks with pride of the establishment's measures to prevent problems not uncommon in gambling venues.

For one, Silverwolf is dry and Archdale says there's no plan to sell alcohol. And while minors aren't allowed in the casino, he says there hasn't been a problem with kids left in cars or wandering around outside.

"There's a rule here," says Archdale. "No one can come here and leave their kids in the car; everyone knows that. If kids are found outside, their parents are reported."

There is also a ban on soliciting, asking for credit or trying to sell merchandise for gambling money. Employees are not allowed to play bingo and may only use video gambling machines on days off.

As for people using their paycheck or welfare money to gamble, Archdale admits he sometimes "feels bad" when he cashes a welfare check but as he glances toward the crowded bingo tables, he says, "Most people who are out there are workers or retired people. There's an old Indian saying I grew up with, 'Whatever a person chooses to do is up to them.'"

As for the chastising WPCO sometimes gets for operating a casino, independent from the rest of the tribe, Archdale feels no guilt.

"No one should be able to come in here and say, 'You owe us,'" he says. "It was our money; other communities (that got money from the land claims settlement) squandered theirs."
Eugene Culbertson hopes to corral the tourist traffic along Highway 2 with a casino just east of Poplar on the Fort Peck Reservation.

Eugene Culbertson, a Fort Peck tribal councilman, hopes to put a $6-million casino on a vacant reservation lot. He dreams of economic freedom, but he must fight adamant opponents: state officials and tribal members who fear gaming's addictive lure.

An eerie calm envelops the factory that sits near the railroad tracks in Poplar's industrial park and bears the name, in huge bold letters, A & S Tribal Industries.

A weather-beaten sign at the parking lot entrance boasts, "One of Montana's largest employers." In the 1980s this munitions plant, which relies on contracts from the U.S. Department of Defense, employed as many as 500 people on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in northeastern Montana.

The slogan might have been a bit of an exaggeration even then. Today, it's a misnomer. Massive layoffs due to government spending cuts in recent years have pared the operation to a bare-bones staff of about 60 workers. Once a flagship for the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes, A & S has become another symbol of a stagnant economy where typical unemployment rates of 50 and 60 percent have soared to 80 percent.

Eugene Culbertson, a Fort Peck Tribal councilman, is all too familiar with the negative cycle joblessness perpetuates among the 6,000 inhabitants of the reservation. "The percentage of people employed in any community have decent lifestyles," says Culbertson, who is also chairman of the Reservation Development Committee. "It's with the unemployed where you find the disabling social ills - alcohol, drugs, molestation."

Yet Culbertson has a vision, a plan he shares with tribal leaders here and across Montana, to revive a stagnant economy and lead Indian people toward self-sufficiency.

Today, he talks about that dream. About six miles east of Poplar, just off of Highway 2, Culbertson points to a prairie sea where the stillness is broken only by an occasional passing car or by the wind as it sends billowy waves through the tall grasses.

At the height of operation, A&S Tribal Industries employed more than 500 people.

It is here that the Fort Peck Tribe plans to build a $6-million casino the tribe hopes will attract visitors from Canada and the Dakotas, and eventually create up to 500 jobs. When completed, the gambling complex may also include a hotel, restaurant and adjacent golf course.

"It would be an economic stepping stone for other development," says Culbertson. "We want long-term jobs. We want to get people off welfare."

But the quest for a casino won't be easy for the tribe. The first shovelful of dirt is still a long way from being overturned. Problems finding an acceptable gaming management firm, discord within the tribe, and dead-end negotiations with a state government that opposes expanded gambling on reservations, have stymied the project which tribal leaders hoped would start in April. Currently, gambling at Fort Peck consists of nightly bingos throughout the reservation's six communities, an alcohol-free casino that has 100 video poker machines and a large bingo area owned and operated by the Wolf Point community, and about 90 tribal-owned poker machines in the few Indian-owned restaurants and convenience stores.

But the tribal council wants its casino to offer more than the Class III gaming the state permits under the 1988 National Indian Regulatory Act. Fort Peck was the first reservation to negoti-
ate a compact with the state. Under this agreement reached in April 1992, the tribe is allowed to have video poker and keno machines, live poker and keno and simulcast horse racing. State negotiators will not budge on expanding the scope of gaming, but have negotiated with tribes on number of video gambling machines allowed and amount of payouts.

Though Fort Peck wants more, the state says its hands are tied. Attorney General Joe Mazurek says the Montana Legislature passed the Gambling Regulatory Control Act in 1989 that outlined what gaming is permitted in the state. If a form of gaming isn't in that law, Mazurek says, it isn't legal anywhere inside the state.

To jump that legal hurdle, the Fort Peck tribes got a bill introduced into the state legislature last session that would have allowed expanded gambling on Montana’s reservations. It failed to pass.

Mazurek says attempts to amend the gambling act have failed because the government fears wide-open gaming would cause social upheaval on the reservations.

“The state feels wide-open gambling on Montana’s seven reservations would get out of control,” Mazurek says.

But Culbertson scoffs at that concern. “We’re saying we’re already at 80 percent unemployment and our social structure is already shot to hell,” he says. “We’ve tried to pull people out of their hopelessness with industries, but they turned out to be repetitive ‘sweat jobs’ with no security.”

And Culbertson and other council members fear that unless state legislators ease up, Fort Peck will be unable to compete with neighboring North and South Dakota, which have full “Las Vegas-style” gambling - slot machines, blackjack, roulette and craps.

The year-old Four Bears Casino, located in Newtown, N.D., just 140 miles from Fort Peck, offers all of the above plus slot machines, blackjack, roulette and craps.

Sharing Culbertson’s fear of competition from states with less restrictive gaming laws, Ray Eder, tribal council vice chairman, says the Poplar casino would have to be a “destination” facility in order to survive.

“If they don’t allow it, (expanded gaming) it’ll be a flop,” Eder says. “If we had to depend on local clientele, we’d starve.”

The tribal council has also had trouble finding a management company for its gaming operations. Agreements with two management companies had already fallen by the wayside when strike three came the first week of May, making casino plans even more tenuous.

The Tribal Executive Board dropped its management agreement with Syntech Casinos Inc. in May when the company, which was reorganizing, failed to meet deadlines set by the tribal council.

While these companies have had their own internal problems - one of them failed a background check - Culbertson says he feels Montana’s restrictions are scaring off investors.

But he adds that he’s not ready to give up on the state.

“When the 1995 legislative session starts, we’ll be back in with another bill,” says Culbertson.

However, the state is not alone in its concern over possible ill effects of bringing gambling onto a reservation already rife with social problems like alcohol addiction and poverty.

John Pipe, another member of the Fort Peck Tribal Council, has been an adamant opponent of the casino from day one. Pipe says he not only doubts a casino would draw gamblers from across the borders, he considers gambling another vice that would escalate social strife on the reservation.

“There’s a high poverty level on this reservation already,” says Pipe. “Parents are already selling food commodities and food stamps to go to bingo. And who suffers? The children.”

Rena Comeslast, 78, thinks gambling will increase crime and child neglect.

“There’ll be a lot of food stamps for sale this week,” she says, referring to the first of the month when welfare and child aid checks are received on the reservation.

Vermae Taylor, who operates the Feedlot Cafe in Poplar with her husband Bill while raising her grandson Robert Stensland, opposes the proposed casino but says she needs gaming machines in order for the business to survive.

John Pipe says, “Parents are already selling food commodities and food stamps to go to bingo. And who suffers? The children.”

Pipe, a born-again Christian for the past five years, says he used to drink, play bingo and buy lottery tickets until he joined his religion.

Gambling “took away food from the table for my family,” he says, adding that now, he won’t even buy raffle tickets.

Pipe says that last year when the tribal council considered whether to sell alcohol at the proposed casino, he was one of two council members who fought strongly to defeat it. A 6-6 tie was broken in favor of having alcohol by tribal chairman Caleb Shields.

Pipe calls the move hypocritical. “A few years back, the tribe, through a resolution, declared war on alcohol and drugs,” he says. “So they were being contradictory.”

Pipe says he can recall tragedies on the reservation that were related to gambling.

“A few years ago, there was a fire in a house in
Taylor, a recovering alcoholic who opened the cafe late last year, says she initially opposed the casino, but finds she has to join the gambling trend to keep her business afloat. She plans to install about 15 leased poker machines in the rear of the cafe. "I didn't want to contribute to problems that already exist," she says, "but I have to put machines in here to compete."

Even if the tribe didn't have gambling, Taylor says there would still be the "other" addictions. "Native Americans are so susceptible to addictions," she says, "they're side-effects from generations past. If not gambling, you've got alcohol and drug abuse."

Despite this apprehension, voiced by people like Pipe, Comeslast and Taylor during informal chat-ups, representatives of various tribal social agencies appeared less concerned about negative repercussions from increased gambling. Mary Schoppert, a tribal social worker, says most of the cases of neglect she deals with are alcohol-related.

"Usually, when one's a gambler, they're not a drinker," she says. "Most people who go to bingo get a babysitter."

Fellow social worker Vicky Azure says their office is concerned that many of its low-income clients are hooked on bingo, but adds she believes it's mostly "people who work" who abuse poker machines. Both Schoppert and Azure looked forward to the employment a new casino would create.

Law enforcement officers Charles Four Bear and Steve Greyhawk Sr., also agreed the casino would have more pluses than minuses. As for increasing crime on the reservation, Four Bear, a patrolman with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, says, "It can't get any worse. Hopefully, they'll have a policy not to serve people who are already intoxicated."

Greyhawk, chief of police in Poplar, says he's confident the police force could handle any extra problems, but adds, "They'd better have their own security because the B.I.A. can't be there all the time."

I t some of the locals seem lackadaisical about the impact an alcohol-licensed gambling complex could have on their community and their lives, hundreds of unemployed tribal members have placed high hopes on it. On the southern end of Poplar, amid a cluster of government buildings, Denver Atkinson sits in the Tribal Employment Rights Office, and shows visitors a cardboard box that's overflowing with bright multi-colored forms: casino employment applications.

Atkinson, the tribe's personnel officer, has received about 600 of the forms since Feb. 7, when under advisement from the tribal council, he coordinated casino job fairs in each of the reservation's communities. He says his phone still rings off the hook daily as these and other job hopefuls inquire about the status of the casino.

"With A & S going down, it's been the pits," says Atkinson, who is non-Indian but married to a tribal member. "Everyday, someone's looking for work."

People turned out in droves at the job fair after reading in the tribal newspaper that the tribe had successfully negotiated an agreement with a gaming management company and would soon have lots of high-paying jobs up for grabs. There is even an artist's conception of the high-tech casino tacked on the wall in Atkinson's office.

Atkinson says at the time of the job fair, he thought the tribal council was jumping the gun. "I thought it was premature," he says. "They had no building or plan. Nothing. We've kind of been left dangling."

Distributed at the fair, along with the applications, were 12-page job compendiums featuring dozens of jobs to choose from, ranging from dealers, gift shop clerks and change makers who would make about $5,50 per hour, to sales and office managers who would get annual salaries of $24,000 to $28,000.

Nancy Nordwick, a former data controller whose seven-year career at A & S ended with a layoff in January, was one of the applicants looking forward to a $24,000-a-year position at the casino.

Nordwick says she and many other people she knows were lifted out of the unemployment blues when news of the casino hit. "It really brought peoples' hopes up," she says. "Everyone I know applied. We thought we'd be working again by April."

Her enthusiasm started to deflate at the job fair, which Nordwick says was a farce. "They advertised it in the paper. I expected to see booths and displays," she says, "but we just went into this back room and Denver and his secretary came in with this big pile of applications. Now, she's simply fed up.

"I don't look forward to working there anymore," she says. "It's built up too many hopes and just shattered them."
Andrea Gopher, six, and her seven-year-old brother, Shaylen, sleep through the loud singing and drumming at a stick game in Browning. The games, often family outings, are known for running into the early morning hours.
BETTING ON TRADITION IN BROWNING

Cultural roots run deep in the stick game where luck and cash are small parts of the gamble.

Gambling on GAMING

Lynn Santio spins a drumstick while watching the other team hiding the bones. His daughter Charity, 12, has been playing the games since she was nine. Kids often get their own game going on the sidelines while their parents play for larger stakes.

In a dingy warehouse on the outskirts of town, Lynn Santio gambles his faith, not just his pocketful of cash. Santio won't wager on a roll of the dice or a spin of the wheel. Instead, he'll bet on his instincts in an ancient Indian game of guessing.

On the Blackfeet Reservation, the stick game is played with 10 foot-long sticks, two "bones" and two teams of any size. Each team gets five sticks. A player conceals in his hands the two small wooden or bone cylinders, one plain and one painted or carved. Opponents guess in which hand the unmarked bone is hidden. If they guess right, they get a stick from the other team. If they miss, they give the other team a stick. The first team to collect all 10 sticks wins.

Santio isn't sure where the stick game originated — he just knows his father and mother taught him how to play.

"I think I must have been a year old and my parents put me right behind them when they were playing," says Santio as he unfolds a lawn chair onto the cold floor of the warehouse. "I couldn't move. I'd stay there with them."

And though Santio's parents are dead, he keeps them alive by playing the stick game.

"When my father died, I thought there was no need in me playing anymore. I just quit," Santio says, his voice quivering. "Then my mother died and I figured it was time for me to carry on our family tradition. This is our game."

Today, a glimpse of Santio playing the game is like a snapshot of his past. Flanked by his wife and two daughters, Santio carefully explains the logistics of the traditional game to his girls, ages 10 and 12, the way his father did for him when he was a child. The real reason he and his family head to the aged building every weekend to gamble on a game of chance is left out of his explanation. That, he says, will come with time.

"I don't teach them the religion part. It just comes as you play," Santio says. "My girls, all they really know is it's just a game."

But after studying Santio play, it's hard to believe the spiritual side doesn't affect them.

Before settling into a game, Santio picks his spot carefully. He places his lawn chair in a dark corner of the warehouse, but within seconds grabs his chair and family and migrates to the opposite side of the large building. "I don't know," is the only explanation he offers for his indecisiveness.

His clasped hands are illuminated by a fluorescent light above that sways to the thunderous beat of drums and stick game songs. Santio's broad cowboy hat conceals his dark eyes as he prays.

"Before my family plays, we burn sweet grass and pray that nobody can hurt us," Santio says. "He could get you really sick and hurt your body, you know."

When asked who "He" is, Santio is silent for a moment. Then, glancing upwards to the rows of flickering lights, he replies, "More or less God himself."

As five opponents take their place across from Santio and his family, Santio vigorously, yet cautiously, rubs his sticks. These particular bright blue sticks are special to him.

"I've never lost with these," he says hunching over the sticks almost protectively. "The sticks represent my family colors. We are called the Blue Sky People."

A crack in the concrete floor, zigzagging its way through chip bags, pop cans and hundreds of dollars laid out in bets, separates the Santio family members from their opponents.

Santio and his wife, Rena, slap down a wad of bills, contributing to the already-camouflaged floor. The stakes vary - some families bet hundreds of dollars on a game, others only a couple of bucks. The Santio family is somewhere in the middle.
Montana's Indians

A lifetime of experience in the stick game guides 23-year-old Steve Racine in guessing for bones. Drums are an integral part of the traditions surrounding the game.

Santio says: "This game is sometimes magic. Sometimes the bones will switch in your hands when you're hiding. It's kind of a funny feeling. You open your hands and the bones are switched."

The singing begins and Santio wiggles to the beat. His oldest daughter, Charity, mirrors his movements.

Santio slowly lifts his head and tries to uncover the unmarked bone hidden in an opponent's hand. He misses and a single stick somersaults across the floor to the other team.

As Santio peers through the cigarette smoke that clouds the warehouse, he seems focused, yet distant. Maybe he's remembering the days his father's father played the game, when a teepee pole—not a crack in the cement floor—separated opposing teams.

Now it's the Santio family's turn to hide the bones and maybe win back a stick. Ten-year-old Philisha Santio is doing the hiding. Her family bellows out a song as she rubs the bones in her small hands.

Suddenly, Lynn Santio uncoils a rubber snake from his left boot and shakes it at his opponents as if to curse them. He insists the snake is just a lucky charm.

Soon, the game is over.

The opponents scoop up the cash piled in front of the Santios. The family's hunt runs deeper than the loss of money.

Rena Santio, her hands clasping her face, can't explain what happened. "We just lost," she says softly.

Lynn Santio, however, has an explanation for their loss.

"The ones who have the power can do things to you," he says. The second he opened his drum bag, Santio says he found a set of bones he had never seen before. He then knew why his family lost. He says the other team "cursed" him.

"The bones were just there and my wife or kids never put them there," Santio says, exasperated. "I had never seen them before. They (the opposing team) were just trying to hurt us and make us lose."

And though Santio says his opponents may have been successful once in preventing his family from winning, they won't get him.

"We told them we don't want to see those bones in Browning again," Santio says. "They said 'okay.'"

But Santio says the magic of the stick game can go beyond some bones found, mysteriously, in a bag.

During a trip to Washington for a stick game tournament, Santio says his family found out exactly how much further.

The tournament was going well, Santio recalls. So well that he and his wife began betting close to $1,000 on a single game, and winning.

"Then it felt like someone shot me in the jaw with something, but I didn't know what it was," he says.

Santio immediately rounded up his family and headed home to Browning.

"As we were coming home, my jaw started hurting more and more," he explains. "I couldn't open it."

The next day, Santio went to the hospital to have a doctor take a look. "They didn't find anything wrong with me," he says. "But the pain lasted for four months."

Santio won't speculate on why his jaw ached or why he found bones in his drum bag. It's just a part of playing the game, he says.

"This game is sometimes magic," he says grinning. "Sometimes the bones will switch in your hands when you're hiding. It's kind of a funny feeling. You open your hands and the bones are switched."

Santio says he doesn't ask for divine help to win a match.

"I try to leave God out of the game," he says. "But He can hear me whenever I'm hiding and I'm asking for my family to be safe."

Santio isn't sure how much money he lost playing the stick game that day in the warehouse. He only knows he never lost his faith.

"I know no one can beat me in a fair game," he says.

Written by Kimberly Benn
Photographed by Jay Schweitzer
The Montana Casino had to put away its 20 poker and keno machines last April 24 when the Blackfeet Tribe failed to negotiate a compact with the state, but even before that, the owner was fighting federal charges of illegal gambling.

**ALLEGATIONS OF ILLEGAL GAMING CLOUD KIPP’S PAST**

When the telephone rings at Carl Kipp’s restaurant on the town’s main street, employees answer with a cheery “Hello, Montana Casino.”

It’s a curious response considering the small cafe on the Blackfeet Reservation is void of any bling since April 24, 1993.

In fact, Kipp’s restaurant has been without gambling since April 24, 1993.

After Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in 1988, tribes had to sign an agreement, called a compact, with the state to legally have gambling on the reservations. But the state and the Blackfeet Tribe have failed to come to terms.

The tribe wanted more than the state would allow: full-blown “Las Vegas” style gambling. The state refuses to permit any tribe to have more gambling than is allowed off the reservation, though it does permit more machines and bigger payouts. The Blackfeet refuse to sign.

That stalemate meant gambling ended a year ago on this reservation that is nestled just east of Glacier National Park.

On April 24 of last year, Kipp picked up his mail and found out the 20 poker and keno machines in his restaurant had to go.

“We ran it like a Ma and Pa operation,” Kipp says with obvious disgruntlement. “This parking lot used to be filled all the time,” he adds pointing to the half-paved, half-gravel lot.

Kipp’s folksy characterization belies what some authorities have claimed was the nature of his business.

On June 2, 1988, only a year after Kipp opened the Montana Restaurant and Casino, state and federal officials raided his business on suspicion of illegal gambling. In court documents, a Kalispell man described as a “front man” for the Mafia was alleged to have an undisclosed interest in Kipp’s casino. Kipp says federal officials also alleged he had Mafia ties and was skimming profits from the bar’s poker and keno machines.

Kipp has vehemently denied the charges and the federal case isn’t yet settled but Kipp says a case in tribal court concluded with a ruling that he, not the Kalispell man, owns the casino.

Although Kipp has tried to put that incident behind him, controversy continues to swirl around the cafe.

From November 1992 to April 1993, Kipp was required to pay the tribe 15 percent of the gross profits from his machines every month. Tribal officials insist he has not come through.

“Carl refused to pay,” says Jim Kennedy, the tribe’s revenue director. “He figured he didn’t have to pay since he is a tribal member.”

The tribe received about $45,000 from Kipp in that six-month period. Kipp says he didn’t pay the full 15 percent every month because other casinos on the reservation were not being forced to pay.

Kennedy, however, says that was not the case.

“I did have to fight everyone to get the money,” he concedes. “But at Carl’s place, we had no way to read the meter on the machines and couldn’t tell how much was being made. Machines were literally disappearing.”

Tribal Council member Don Magee agrees with Kennedy, charging that Kipp would often switch machines before a reading was taken so there wouldn’t be as much cash in it.

“We were getting short changed because there would be a completely different machine in place when we came in to take a reading,” Magee says.

“We would say, ‘Where’s the machine?’ and they would say, ‘Oh, it broke down.’ They would push the machine in the back room and bring in another one.”

Kipp denies the charges and agrees that the tribe should get a cut of his gambling profits. He just wants everyone to pay, he says. Currently, the tribe and Kipp are negotiating over the money.

When Kipp had the machines in his restaurant, he employed about 30 people. Now, with his machines sitting in a trailer behind his business, his staff has been pared to 12.

“We used to be open 24 hours a day when we had the machines,” Kipp says. “But we can’t afford to do that anymore.”

Kipp says he may put the machines back in his restaurant before the busy tourist season starts. The machines won’t pay out any money; patrons will play for fun only.

“I’ll get nothing out of it,” he says. “It will be a game of skill, an amusement only type of thing.”

**Gambling on Gaming**

Carl Kipp, owner of the Montana Casino, says that federal charges against him of illegal gaming and ties to the Mafia are false.

Written by Kimberly Benn
Photographed by Jay Schweitzer
For many tribes self-sufficiency died with the buffalo. Some Indian leaders see gaming as their people’s new buffalo.

GAMING AN ECONOMIC SALVATION FOR SOME RESERVATIONS

For decades, life on America’s Indian reservations has been characterized by poverty, high unemployment, poor health care and inadequate social programs. And for years, tribes have struggled unsuccessfully to realize economic independence.

Since Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in 1988 conditions have improved on many reservations. Tribes involved in gaming are riding the crest of an economic boom. For these tribes, Indian gaming has become the “new buffalo” and is seen as the key to economic revitalization for America’s native people.

Today there are 150 tribes in 23 states involved in gaming. An industry trade magazine, Gaming and Wagering, estimates that Indian gaming had a gross revenue of $6 billion for 1993. While that seems a lot by anybody’s estimate, it’s only a fraction of the legal revenue of $6 billion for 1992. Indian gaming also generated $49.5 million in taxes for the State of Wisconsin in 1992.tribes have yet to see substantial results from gaming revenue. But in several states it is a different story.

The National Indian Policy Center estimates that tribal gaming has directly provided 15,900 jobs in the United States and another 22,000 jobs indirectly. Tribes, such as the Mille Lacs Chipewas of Minnesota, which long had high unemployment, now have jobless rates of 0.0 percent.

In many states Indian gaming not only produces jobs, it has also reduces welfare and saves taxpayers money. A recent study conducted by the University of Wisconsin shows that Indian gaming in Wisconsin has moved 1,400 off unemployment line and $20 off the welfare rolls, reducing welfare costs by $2.2 million for 1992. Indian gaming also generated $49.5 million in taxes for the State of Wisconsin in 1992.

In Minnesota the scenario is much the same. A state study reveals that the 10 counties with tribal gaming have had almost twice the economic growth as the rest of the state. These counties have reduced their welfare rolls while Indian gaming has provided more than 10,000 people with jobs, 7,000 of whom are non-Indian. Tribal gaming is one of the largest providers of jobs in Minnesota.

In the 1970s the Oneida Tribe near Green Bay, Wisc., had only four tribal governmental employees. The unemployment rate was near 80 percent and many living on the Oneida reservation were without running water.

Wapato says that the Oneidas today are the second largest employer in the Green Bay area. Oneida gaming brings more money to the local economy than does the Green Bay Packers football team.

Rick Hill, chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association and a former chairman for the Oneida Tribe, says that the Oneidas have been able to diversify and invest in business ventures for the future. The tribe owns a hotel, an industrial park, a cattle-breeding operation and an environmental-testing laboratory.

In some tribes, enrolled members see direct benefits. For example, every member of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux will receive an estimated $500,000 this year. That’s their share of the Minnesota tribe’s $97 million profit last year from its Mystic Lake Casino.

Wapato said that this self-sufficiency brought about by gaming has sparked a new pride in many Indians. He feels that it has led to a rebirth of interest in native culture and that many Indians are coming back to their roots, wanting to sustain the tribal way of life.

“The dreams and visions of tribal leaders of 200 years are now coming true,” he said.

I n Montana, that has not happened. Attorney General Joe Mazurek concedes that several tribes elsewhere have made economic strides through gambling. Be he doesn’t think it is the answer here.

“We’re not particularly excited about choosing this horse to ride in terms of economic development,” he says.

Mazurek says the economic boom brought by gambling won’t last long because there’s not enough money to support Las Vegas-style gaming in every

state whose tribes want it.

Indian gaming has been a controversial subject for tribal and state governments since the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was passed.

Wapato says the IGRA works in states like Wisconsin and Minnesota because both parties are willing to negotiate and approach each other in good faith.

But in some states reaching an agreement has not been easy. These states, like Montana, use a “cookie cutter” approach to negotiating compacts, Wapato explains. They negotiate a compact with one tribe and expect the other tribes to agree to the same compact, he says. Wapato likens this to “economic blackmail.” He says that most tribes would rather take nothing than surrender any of their sovereignty.

Tribal gaming has also been under attack by commercial gaming magnates. Billionaire Donald Trump has alleged that the tribal operations are infected with organized crime.

But since October 1992 the FBI has testified three times at Congressional hearings that there is no evidence of mob activity within Indian gaming.

In fact, Indian gaming is regulated far more extensively than commercial gaming. Four levels of oversight exist: tribal governments, state governments, the National Commission on Indian Gaming and federal agencies such as the FBI and Internal Revenue Service.

“We love Trump because his assertions are so wild, it’s easy to refute them,” Wapato says. “We couldn’t buy that kind of publicity.”

Wapato fears now that the tribes have revitalized their economies by means of the “new buffalo,” outsiders will try to destroy the new Indian economy.

“The whites realized they had to destroy the Indian economy before they could control the Indian,” Wapato says. “The buffalo was destroyed for that very reason. Gaming is the only economic development that has worked across the board for the Indian people since the Europeans came over. And now, other people are coming in once again and are trying to destroy the Indian economy.”