



Public servants are big fish in gambling blacklist net

THIS YEAR, MISSOURI CAUGHT AND BARRED THREE IN KEY SERVICE JOBS.

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Wellsville, MO. • For years, the crimes that barred gamblers from Missouri casinos read like Mafia movie plots.

Men with ties to Kansas City's notorious La Cosa Nostra ran illegal betting rings, threatened witnesses and skimmed money from Las Vegas casinos, according to FBI testimony. And the state, seeking a Mob-free gambling industry, banned each from Missouri's riverboats.

But that was more than 10 years ago. The blacklist is dealing from a new deck, and blackballing a different kind of professional: the public servant.

In the last year, four Missourians were barred from casinos for crimes of "moral turpitude," bringing the list to 17. Three were civil servants. Authorities say they fed gambling habits with embezzled tax dollars.

A St. Louis County school superintendent funneled district money to his personal life insurance fund, while often gambling 20 days or more a month.

A Kansas City-area elected administrator siphoned at least \$118,000 from disabled clients' Social Security accounts, then used it, authorities said, as a "frequent customer of the area's casinos."

And a grandmother here in Wellsville stole from her community's only public school.

This town in the fields northwest of Warrenton was stunned to learn that local school bookkeeper Carolyn Yelton had admitted writing herself at least 88 district checks for about \$200,000 over five years.

"I can't think of a time anyone's been caught for stealing money here," lifelong resident Chuck Jennings, 66, said at the time.

Yelton, who pleaded guilty in April and is now at the Greenville federal prison in mid-Illinois, declined an interview request for this story. Authorities said she had placed more than \$1 million in play at area casinos over the same period.

"There should be a sanction against people like that," said Gene McNary, executive director of the Missouri Gaming Commission and former St. Louis County prosecutor. "Those people should be kept out of the casinos for life."

But commission leaders say they didn't intend to double down on civil administrators, specifically.

Mob roots

Missouri's blacklisting process, they said, has no mechanism for identifying gamblers among the thousands of criminals prosecuted each year, unless the crime is gambling-related.

So the commission relies on referrals. And those come only as parole officers, police, state workers and others run across something that reveals a criminal's motivations.

Often, leaders said, it's just a story in the morning paper.

And sometimes it's the criminals themselves, fresh from court, telling the commission that a judge has ordered them banned.

Which is a far break from Missouri's — and the country's — blacklist roots.

Nevada's now infamous "black book" began in 1960. After well-publicized congressional hearings on organized crime, the state grew concerned about the image of its largest industry and the possibility of incoming FBI investigations. The blackbook quickly gained 11 profiles, all alleged mafiosi, complete with pictures, rap sheets and FBI file numbers.

In the coming years, as casinos opened from New Jersey to Illinois, state commissions worked to prove that organized crime wasn't on their game floors.

So when Missouri's blacklist started, in 1994, suspected Kansas City mobsters were the first to make it on, and still occupy five slots on the list.

Their files inside the Missouri Gaming Commission's Jefferson City offices are often several inches thick, filled with appeals. And they tell stories — such as that of William D. Cammisano Jr. — ready-made for television.

Cammisano, son of alleged Kansas City boss Willie "the Rat" Cammisano, was arrested after one of his "financial backers" was found with seven bullets in his head. Cammisano, 38 at the time, denied involvement and was never tied to the crime.

But the FBI had a card up its sleeve. It caught him on wiretap intimidating his teenage girlfriend, a potential witness. He was convicted of obstruction of justice in 1989, and banned from casinos five years later. Five others with Mob ties were blacklisted after that. And then, for about 10 years, the list went unused. It's unclear why.

'a proctological procedure'

But in 2006, the state gambling commission got a new director, McNary, who told his staff to find a use for the list. And, over the next four years, the state added an assortment of criminals.

Many of the first few, most of them banned in 2006 and 2007, were thieves, such as Kathleen Edwards of Nevada, Mo. Over 19 months, Edwards cashed \$421,000 in 79 unauthorized checks from the furniture shop where she worked, because, she told law enforcement, she was mad she hadn't gotten a raise, and needed "to pay for an online gambling addiction."

The next group, barred in late 2007 and 2008, were gamblers caught cheating, who, according to state law, had to be blacklisted.

Ellis Quinn Jr. was the Royal Flush arrest for authorities. Commission records say he distracted craps dealers in the Midwest and South so he could sneak bets onto tables after the dice had stopped rolling. He was so successful that Missouri troopers copied the security video depicting Quinn's fraud to train their officers.

And that leaves a new group blackballed last year. Outside of one, charged with armored car robbery after an early conviction for illegal gambling, all are public servants:

Former Riverview Gardens School District Superintendent Henry P. Williams was convicted of theft and tax fraud.

Bonnie Sue Lawson, a Buchanan County elected official, stole from the Social Security accounts of the disabled adults she was supposed to tend.

And Y elton, known as Kay, dutifully kept the books for Wellsville-Middletown schools until she quit in 2007, whispers of her crime already running through town.

Now, many of the original gangsters on the country's first blacklists are dead. But the remnants still guide the system. Rules remain strict. Casinos get fined tens of thousands of dollars for such sins as serving underage patrons, allowing excessive intoxication and breaking rules made to ensure fair games.

And gambling commissions across the country still investigate everyone involved in casinos, pulling criminal records, checking bank statements and even visiting homes to make sure lifestyles fit the paychecks.

"I've heard it compared to a proctological procedure," said David Schwartz, director of the Center for Gaming Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. "They go into everything."

And even when such actions are not well-received, commission leaders say, they stick to their bets.

A playing card business came up for license renewal in Missouri last year. But the United States Playing Card Company, which distributes Bee, Bicycle and Hoyle cards, is owned by the publicly traded Jarden Corp. So Missouri began its investigation into all company directors.

A few of the conglomerate's top dogs were insulted, McNary said, and wouldn't consent to the

search. Which ended the state's investigation.

The kicker? The card company, McNary said, won't be licensed this year to deal in Missouri casinos.

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Tags Kansas City, Mafia, Mob, La Cosa Nostra, Missouri Casinos, Gamble, Gambling Industry, Carolyn Yelton, Henry Williams, Bonnie Sue Lawson, David Hunn, St. Louis, Public Servant, Blacklist, Willie "the Rat" Cammisano, Blackballed, Riverboat Casino, Fbi, William D. Cammisano Jr., Missouri Gaming Commission

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