

Gambling addict risked it all — his freedom, future — and lost



**DAVID
HARRINGTON**
GUEST
ESSAYIST

The day in 1993 that Turning Stone Casino in Verona, Oneida County, opened, I robbed a bank so that I could attend and place bets. I never once thought about my wife, who was six months pregnant with our daughter. I love my children more than anything else in this whole world, but my need to gamble — my gambling addiction — was so intense that rational thinking was thrown aside.

Now, more than 10 years later, I am incarcerated in Groveland Correctional Facility, serving up to 13 years on burglary and robbery charges stemming from my gambling addiction.

The problem now is that Groveland offers no programs for problem gamblers even though it does offer help for drug and alcohol addiction and anger management.

However, I would like to tell my story to help others coping with a gambling problem. My addiction started out slowly. I went to bingo once a month, and then once a week. Soon I started to buy lottery tickets, and then I began playing the daily number game every day. Eventually, I was going to Off-Track Betting every chance I had. I became obsessed with the idea of “a dollar and a dream.” Unfortunately, my dream turned into a nightmare.

I neglected my wife, children and other family members. As I look back, I feel horrible for the time I did not spend with my children. Instead, I was betting on a horse or was at a blackjack table, placing this addiction ahead of them. This is time I can never get back and something I will regret forever.

I take full responsibility for my actions. However, while this addiction affects many people, like myself, the state downplays the dangers of gambling and instead plays up the large amounts of money to be reaped both by gamblers and the state. And I am reading more and more in the media about support for the construction of additional

casinos.

I feel the state downplays the impact and potential harm that can be caused by gambling and justifies it by the large amount of money that is generated. I see no safeguards discussed for individuals who could become addicted to gambling, just as they could to drugs and/or alcohol.

Before gambling becomes the next epidemic, I would like to propose that the whole scenario be reconsidered and looked at much more closely.

Casinos could create even more individuals like me and destroy many families and lives. The cost of not recognizing these problems is too high.

I do not blame the state for my actions, as I must and have taken full responsibility for my decisions. It is my hope that even one person reading this recognizes their problem before it gets out of control and gets help. Then writing this will have been worthwhile. □

Harrington is serving up to 13 years in Groveland Correctional Facility, Sonyea, Livingston County, for robbery and grand larceny. He is from Fairport.