

Gambling

# California's Own Type Of Gambling Takes Place In SC County

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"Gimme two," "Go for 20," "Fifty please," "Stack of yellows, Bob."

The sharp stab of yells to the dealer for more cards and to the manager for more chips punctuates the low-hum of conversation and the soft slap of pasteboard on felt. It is 2 p.m. and the day is just getting started at the J & J Card Room on Front Street. Around the cir-

cular table covered with a green felt top sit several retirees, a worker in overalls, a businessman and a bearded, hirsute young man wearing an earring.

They are playing "pan" - short for panguingue - which along with draw and lowball poker is one of the few card games involving gambling that is allowed in California. Blackjack, five-card stud and other games that the state believes require more luck than

skill are prohibited in public.

"It's mostly a passtime," explained Joe Caprini, 55, owner of the J & J. "Nobody wins or loses much money here. You've got to go over the hill to San Jose or to Nevada for that."

Bob Dawson, 65, manager of the room and a partner of Caprini's, described the action. "We have the only pan game in town. It costs \$5 for a stack of chips. Each chip is worth 12 and one-half cents. You can play a whole afternoon without win-

ning or losing more than \$20. The house takes two chips a game as its fee. The players bet against themselves, not the house."

Caprini is a local businessman and owns a liquor store and several apartment houses in addition to the J & J. The club has a friendly, open atmosphere. The top halves of the room's two dutch doors are open to the sunlight and the sounds of the passing traffic. The afternoon is a busy time for the club and it is filled with senior citizens, businessmen who have dropped in, and fishermen and painters who are enjoying a couple of games of pan or lowball on the sly. Dawson was hesitant to give any names or have any pictures taken. "Their wives would be over here having a fit if they found out," he laughed.

Sandwiched between two bars on south Pacific Avenue, the Local Club has a more murky atmosphere. Its large plate glass windows are covered from floor to ceiling with curtains and dilapidated furniture sits along the walls. It is frequented by the town's more serious gamblers and the action is heavier here than at J & J. The only game played here is low-ball. Manager Fred Kayoosi, 35, a native of Persia, says he used to gamble a lot, but not anymore. "It's like anything else. If you do it long enough, it gets boring."

The pace is considerably slower at the two rooms on the north edge of town, the Ace

Club, 2409 Mission and the Filipino Recreation Center, 2320 Mission St. A.H. "Red" Greve, 60, owner of the Ace and a former sheetrock hanger, said he can't always keep even one table going. He sat at one of the unused tables in his sparsely furnished room. "My wife made the cover," he said proudly. "She's a seamstress. She keeps us going. I've had the place a year and still haven't broken even yet."

The players, older Asian men, were absorbed in a game of rummy and spoke in short bursts of Spanish and Tagalog, a Filipino dialect. Greve had left them alone to run the game by themselves. "The house always gets its cut," he observed. "They're the most honest people in the world."

Across the street at the Filipino Recreation Center, manager Sidney Q. 67, a labor contractor during the harvest season, said his clientele was mostly Asian migrant workers. He added that the action was heaviest after the end of the brussel sprout harvest on Oct. 15. The recreation center has a

spartan interior with bare white walls and fold-up card tables substituted for the traditional round wooden ones.

Greg Johnson, 24, is the youngest card room owner in the area and his operation has a distinctively different look. Johnson was a slot machine repairman and a dealer in Nevada before setting up the card room, the Wheel Casino, six months ago.

Located in the second floor of a remodeled house next to the Grapesteak Restaurant in Soquel, the Wheel has a fancy, modern interior and soft rock music playing in the background. "We get a lot of college students here in the winter," he advised. "Now its mostly real estate men and construction workers."

The room has three tables and can generate a lot of action. "We had a \$1000 pot a few months ago. I won it," the young manager smiled. He hastened to add that it was illegal to have shills, dummies or house men - players who work for the owner.

The Wheel is in the unincorporated area and is subject to

county, and city, ordinances. Both prohibit alcoholic beverages and minors on the premises. The owners and employees of the card rooms are investigated by the sheriff in the county and the police if they are in the cities. In the City of Santa Cruz, card room employees must wear identification badges with photos, although this is not strictly enforced. In both the city and the county the rooms must close between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m.

Johnson has hired a lawyer and is trying to have the county ordinance changed so that he can stay open around the clock. "Now when we close at 2 a.m. all the players get up and drive over to San Jose where they can play all night," he complained. "I pay my taxes. My place doesn't give the cops any trouble. Why shouldn't I stay open all night?"

Dawson remembers a time 10 years ago when the clubs in the county were open all night. "Once we had a game that went nine days and nine nights," he recalled.

The clubs do not generate a lot of revenue for local government. The Wheel pays the county \$12 per year in fees for each of its three tables. The city charges its four rooms \$26.50 per table a year. It receives a grand total of \$212 per year for the eight tables in its boundaries.

"We haven't had any complaints about the rooms," said Donald Hollen, chief of the sup-

port services group of the Santa Cruz police. "They police themselves mostly." He said that plainclothes men check out the rooms a couple of times each week to make sure every thing is all right. Hollen added that one of the owners had been cited last week for not wearing his identification badge.

Despite the cheerful picture painted by the card room owners, there is another unpleasant side to gambling. "If you gamble, you're going to lose money. The player always loses," warned Bill Williamson, owner of the Dinette Restaurant, 111 Soquel Ave. The restaurant used to be The Antlers Club, a card room run by Williamson. He said that he gambled heavily for many years before becoming a Christian two years ago. Williamson termed gambling a "disease" and said "Its a sin to lose money that could be used for other purposes. He said that he still is friends with many of his old gambling buddies and that many of the players at the J & J - which is only a few yards away - come over to buy food and coffee.

Are the owners concerned about the welfare of their customers? "If a guy that I know is losing pretty heavily, I'll suggest that we go next door and have a drink," said Johnson. "But if I don't know the guy, then if he wants to lose all his money, I figure that's his business."



"Give me three." An afternoon game of "pan" at the J & J Club on Front Street, one of the spots in the county where people can take

their chances in one of the few card games involving gambling that is allowed in California.