

# Las Vegas-style casino opens in Broward

Charlie Smigrod made USD 560 during his lunch break Wednesday.

It wasn't from sealing a business deal or getting a bank loan.

He got lucky on a virgin 50-cent slot machine on opening day of Las Vegas-style gambling at Gulfstream Park Racing & Casino.

"I just decided to come over for lunch," Smigrod said, 59, who made his winnings after 15 minutes on the casino floor. „I just wanted to try my luck.“

Wednesday marked the debut of Class III slots – in which players compete against the house rather than against each other – in Florida after a long fight to get the issue on ballots in Broward and Miami-Dade counties.

Broward voters agreed more than a year ago to allow slot machines at parimutuel venues, but Miami-Dade voters defeated the measure.

"You may look inside and see slot machines," said state Sen. Steve Geller, a longtime gambling-expansion advocate. „I see machines generating revenue.“

Half of the revenue from slots will go toward education in Florida. Broward County, Hallandale Beach, Dania Beach and Pompano Beach will receive a portion of the profits.

## **Two-hour wait**

Minutes before the Hallandale Beach facility's noon opening, more than 200 people snaked behind the gold-colored casino doors.

Some had been there for hours, like Doris Keeps, who called in sick from work Wednesday to be among the first to try the slot machines, getting to Gulfstream Park about 10.

But a two-hour wait is nothing for Keeps, who once sat in line for 24 hours to be the first gambler through the door of a Detroit casino.

“I was sick when I got up,” said Keeps, 67. „I had a terrible headache; sometimes the slots make me feel better. The wider that door opens, the better I feel.“

Pulling her wallet from her purse, she said „I’ve got a pocketful of change I’ve been saving for this.“

Moments after the doors opened, Hallandale Beach Mayor Joy Cooper, Vice Mayor Bill Julian and Geller stood side by side at one of the first rows of slot machines.

Cooper put a dollar into the “Super Jackpot” machine, and the three pressed the button in tandem as Cooper danced along to the opening-gala music.

“It’s really great to see people here, the excitement and the people coming to the city,” Cooper said.

Just a few minutes after the opening, the stools in front of most of the 516 Las Vegas-style slots and video poker games were occupied.

Paul Micucci, the park’s president, was particularly pleased.

“We’re breathing a sigh of relief,” said Micucci, who has opened about two dozen casinos. „I think it’s great. We didn’t do a lot of advertising; we just wanted to open it. The place is full.“

Nick Metro, 70, who has been playing the horses for 53 years, figured he’d check out the slot machines this time.

## **Close to home**

Metro and his wife, Helen, spend half the year in New Jersey. While they're there, she gambles in Atlantic City a few times a month.

"I usually don't like to go to the racetrack," said Helen, 69. „When he goes to the race track, I stay home. I don't think I'll stay home anymore.“

Lyda Sanders, 64, of Hollywood said she had been going to Vegas since the 1970s, but "this is right in my backyard. I love the slots. I go to the [Seminole] Hard Rock, but I think I'll be coming here more often. I think my chances of winning are better," Sanders said.

But that might change soon. The U.S. Department of the Interior is considering whether to step in to allow Class III slots, like those at Gulfstream, at Indian tribe casinos.

The department said in September it could make the rules for the slot machines final by the end of November if the Seminoles don't reach a deal with the governor to allow the machines.

"We're still looking at the issues here, and the terms for the tribe and the state," said Nedra Darling, spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs. „It's still in the review process.“

Negotiations between the tribe and the governor are stalled, said Gary Bitner, a spokesman for the Seminole Tribe.