

## **A son's plea for gambling addicts**

By Eric Peterson

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ILLINOIS -- A Schaumburg man whose mother suffered a relapse of her gambling addiction asked the Illinois Gaming Board Tuesday for greater monitoring at casinos to make the state's self-exclusion program for addicts truly work.

Todd Ruder had testified in front of the board before about his mother's success in beating her addiction.

But after earning her one-year pin from Gambler's Anonymous in May, the 67-year-old woman went to the Hollywood Casino in Aurora again on Father's Day.

"She is so disgusted with herself, like I've never seen before," Ruder said.

This time, all his mother lost was a couple hundred dollars from her income tax refund. But in the past couple years, she's drained about \$160,000, most of it at Joliet's Empress Casino, he said.

He's asking the state to require the same ID check for all casino patrons that it already uses for people who appear to be under 30.

Only then, he believes, will the self-exclusion program be effective in helping addicts of all ages help themselves.

Self-exclusion works by threatening those who sign up for it with forfeiture of all money won if they're caught gambling. Trespassing charges can also be filed against those who violate the self-exclusion program.

It's supposed to remove all motivation to gamble, but an addict's mind doesn't operate so logically, said Ruder, who is a teacher at Maine West High School in Des Plaines.

Illinois Gaming Board member Eugene Winkler was responsive and sympathetic to the request, saying that it's seniors who need more help with compulsive gambling.

For many addicts, the problem first shows up between the ages of 45 and 65, Winkler said.

But as other members of the board agreed, its recommendations aren't often followed in Springfield.

Anita Bedell, executive director of the Springfield-based Illinois Church Action on Alcohol and Addiction, agreed that more pressure needs to be put on lawmakers to recognize the true nature of compulsive gaming.

"Legislators always want to expand gambling, but they never address the impact it has on families," Bedell said.

Ruder said his mother's road to addiction in the past couple of years was unexpected and largely invisible to the rest of the family until it was too late.

He believes her attempt to retire from nursing, coupled with her anxiety over watching her own parents decline in a nursing home in their 90s, fueled the addiction.

Before that, his mother, whom he asked not to be identified, never even bought lottery tickets or gambled while in a Las Vegas casino, Ruder said.

He and his family thought it funny when she first expressed an interest in joining them at the riverboats.

Then she was less than forthright with them about her reasons for wanting to sell her house and move in with her daughter in Hinsdale.

What she was really doing, Ruder said, was assembling all the cash she was going to throw into the casinos.

Now she's had to get a job again and give up retirement, working at night and relinquishing all access to her money and financial decisions to the daughter she lives with, Ruder said.