

No safe bet for kids at racetrack: Authorities working together to prevent underage gambling

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Times Union, Albany.

July 17, 2010.

SARATOGA SPRINGS, NY -- Sure, bring your kids to Saratoga Race Course. Check out the horses and have a picnic on the lawn. When you want to bet, don't send Junior to the betting window.

On Friday, a week before the opening of the track, representatives from the gaming industry, addiction prevention agencies and district attorney's office met at the track and vowed to work together to prevent underage gambling.

"It is no surprise that adolescents are attracted to gambling, attracted to the thrill of the win," said Heather Kisselback, executive director of the Alcohol and Substance Abuse Council of Saratoga County.

More adolescents in Saratoga County -- 49 percent -- said they gambled in the past year than any other county, according a state statistics.

Introducing gambling to children increases the chance they will develop a problem at some point in their life, Kisselback said.

About 1 million New Yorkers have gambling problems, said Karen M. Carpenter-Palumbo, commissioner of the state Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. Of those, 250,000 are adolescents.

In previous years, security guards at the track evicted unsupervised teenagers caught betting.

But this year, Charles Wheeler, facilities manager of the race course, said the track will work with local groups to get those teens into programs designed to prevent gambling problems.

The New York Racing Association will also hang posters that remind parents to enjoy the family-friendly activities at the park while advising them that children can't gamble.

"Fun Times, Safe Times" says the headline on the poster showing a boy feeding grass to a horse

Leaders at Friday's event said they did not believe they were sending a mixed message.

"This is a family place," Carpenter-Palumbo said. "My own children love to see the horses, they are beautiful animals."

Saratoga County District Attorney Jim Murphy said "anyone who is caught gambling here who is less than 18 will be charged with trespass, they will be required to attend an anti-gambling course and they will learn about the dangers of gambling."

