

The



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Special edition features inside

The Portland Observer 43

'City of Roses'



Volume XXXXII
Number 7



www.portlandobserver.com
Wednesday • February 20, 2013

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Oregon Lottery customers are glued to their video poker machines at a Lottery outlet in north Portland.

PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Head over Heels in Bets

Routing an escape from gambling madness

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

When Nathaniel Peterson got off work, he checked into his fantasy world.

Once in front of a video poker machine, he could forget reality—the shock of his father's death, his anger, loneliness and depression, all the burdening lies to his wife, family and friends, borrowing money and embezzling large sums of it from his work, the closing walls of shame and secrecy.

Another 10 bucks and it would all go away, "Just let me win, so I can sit here and keep playing," was his magical thinking.

For many people, gambling is recreational, but for some it can be life consuming. Three percent of the adult population has a problem or pathological gambling addiction, said Philip Yassenoff, program manager at Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare's gambling treatment program.

'I couldn't even look at myself in the mirror—I hated myself so much. I just wanted to get caught and finally, I did.'

—Nathaniel Peterson

Many gamblers are unaware that treatment services are free, paid fully by the state of Oregon. With several different locations, Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare is one of the Portland area providers that offer no-cost counseling and treatment programs to individuals and families affected by gambling.

When Peterson hit rock bottom he felt worthless. He couldn't eat or sleep, "I couldn't even look at myself in the mirror—I hated myself so much," said Peterson. Isolated from everyone close to him, he said, "I just wanted to get caught and finally, I did."

While recreational gamblers may enjoy the initial excitement of pulling a slot machine or can budget \$20 to spend before cashing in for the night, problem gamblers enter a warped state of mind.

"Gambling is a disease," said Yassenoff. Addiction is the result of altered brain chemistry. Often times a

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