

DEC 3-13-04

Racino's links to lobbyist questioned

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ALBANY — A major hospital-ity company running the first "racino" in New York was ordered Friday by the state Lobbying Commission to explain an agreement that could provide "success fees" to a top Albany lobbyist, a possible violation of state law.

David Grandeau, executive director of the Lobbying Commission, said he wants answers from Delaware North Corp. and the lobbying firm headed by former state Republican Chairman William Powers.

"Contingency fees are illegal" under the state's lobbying law, Grandeau said.

"I think quite frankly, they were intending to do that ... If they ever agree on a contingency fee, it would be a misdemean-

or," Grandeau said after The Associated Press asked him about the wording in a \$10,000-a-month contract between Delaware North and the Albany-based Powers, Crane & Co. lobbying-consulting firm.

A contingency fee is a payment made based on the outcome of a project.

A lawyer for the Powers firm and a spokeswoman for Delaware North said the companies were doing nothing wrong and that they would cooperate fully with the Lobbying Commission.

James Crane, an Albany attorney representing the Powers firm, said no agreements for contingency fees had been reached and that any that were agreed to later would only be for nonlobbying activities.

Wendy Watkins, a spokeswoman for Delaware North, said

company lawyers had told her "they are very confident we are not in violation of any state lobbying law."

In late January, a "racino" with slot-machine-like video lottery terminals opened at the Saratoga Raceway, a harness track in Saratoga Springs north of Albany. The Delaware North-managed facility became the first of eight such sites authorized by the state last May. □

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SYRACUSE

Judge taking time on gaming ruling

The Seneca-Cayuga Tribe of Oklahoma will wait a little longer until a federal judge decides whether it can resume building a \$25 million gaming parlor on land it owns in up-state New York, a tribal spokesman said Friday.

"We understand that the judge is taking his time and if he errs, it will be on the side of caution," said Jay Whitecrow, a spokesman for the Oklahoma tribe.

The tribe last year started clearing 229 acres in the town of Aurelius for a gaming hall. However, town and county officials sought an injunction to stop it, arguing the tribe must follow local zoning and building regulations and obtain the required permits and licenses. The tribe filed a countersuit.

DEC 3-12-04

Problem gamblers

■ The state shares responsibility and must help provide treatment.

With no end in sight to New York's growing reliance on legalized gambling as a source of revenue, the state Legislature needs to pause and get a hold on reality.

At the very least, the state needs to make more money available to treat problem gamblers.

True, problem gamblers make up only about 7 percent of those who gamble. But look at their problems: suicides, bankruptcies and broken homes are common.

Already in New York there is the lottery, which last year generated \$5.4 billion to make it the most successful lottery in U.S. history.

There's also Quick Draw, which some call "video crack" because it's

highly addictive; casino gambling on American Indian reservations; and racinos, which feature slot-machine-like video lottery terminals.

Evidenced by the crowds at the new racino at Finger Lakes Gaming & Racetrack, more people are gambling in New York every day.

The state needs to start assuming more social responsibility.

The New York Council on Problem Gambling reported last year that 44 percent of 15,000 callers with problems attributed their compulsion to the lottery, up from 35 percent the previous year.

The \$1.5 million the council receives from the state to treat problem gamblers simply isn't enough.

Legalized gambling is escalating in New York.

So should state assistance to help gamblers who can't control themselves. □