

# State gambles on future with del Lago

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Recovering compulsive gambler Carl DellFave, 59, said there is help and hope for those suffering from addiction. Shawn Dowd, Todd Clausen



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**STORY HIGHLIGHTS**

- State trades off gambling-related issues for upstate job creation with new casinos.
- The \$440 million del Lago Resort & Casino opens Wednesday in Seneca County.
- Will measures put in place to combat compulsive gambling be enough?

Efforts to spur the upstate economy with new casinos may pull dollars from other areas, fail to deliver widespread economic development and put the most vulnerable people at risk, according to extensive research on the issue.

Despite these warnings, the state has pushed all-in on casinos in efforts to create jobs, accelerate the economy north of Albany while fattening municipal and state budgets

The latest casino — **the \$440 million del Lago Resort & Casino** — opens at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday off Thruway Exit 41 in Seneca County.

"I'm not crazy about casinos, frankly," Gov. Andrew Cuomo said during a December stop in Rochester. "We're desperate for the creation of jobs in upstate New York and these casinos are going to do just that. They are very important to the state."

Seneca County and town of Tyre officials have lauded the addition of del Lago, which has brought thousands of construction and casino workers to

their area. Roughly 6 percent — or about 90 casino workers — are from Monroe County.

Critics claim the hedge on casinos is a sucker's bet that increases compulsive and problem gambling and lures many — particularly the poor — into financial ruin. They also say casinos don't add wealth, but pulls it from other areas.

"Whenever you increase access, you also increase problems," said Jennifer Faringer, director of DePaul's National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-Rochester area. "The immediate impact is jobs.

"The longer impact is the impact on the families and the community, and those folks that are attracted to this new place and losing money that they cannot necessarily afford to lose."

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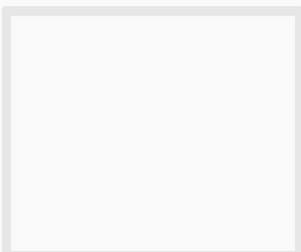
The state has led various efforts to expand gambling-related services by adding in-patient services at some treatment centers and requiring casinos to pay for treatment staff and more.

Other casino workers have been trained to spot and handle those who might have a problem.

"That will help identify somebody who is potentially going down a bad road — it will have to be something that is kind of blatant," said Jeff Babinski, del Lago general manager.



Carl DellFave talks about his gambling addiction Thursday, Jan. 26, 2017, over breakfast in Benfield. (Photo: SHAWN DOWD/@sdowdphoto/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)



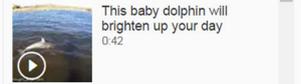
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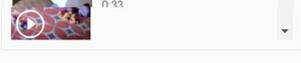
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Carl DelleFave started with the lottery and scratch-offs but by about 2000 was going to the casino by himself, eventually tapping mortgage money to escape the stress, boredom and loneliness in his life.

"I used gambling as kind of a medication to soothe over all the other problems I was having in my life that I couldn't deal with," the 59-year-old Walworth resident said. "It really started to get to the point where if I wasn't going to the casino, I was planning trips to the casino and I was ignoring a lot of other things in my life."

He couldn't turn it off.

But it wasn't until he blew about \$3,000 at Turning Stone Resort & Casino trying to win a few extra bucks to pay for a car for his son that he realized how big his problem had become.

"I will never forget for as long as I live the feeling I had when I put my hand on the doorknob and I had to walk in and tell my family and everyone what I had done," he said. "I don't have to ever feel that way again."

He had a friend bring him to his first Gambler's Anonymous meeting, a two-hour marathon that was full of tears. DelleFave began replacing trips to the casino with trips to those meetings. He began to chip away at his \$75,000 debt and destroyed his credit cards. He re-focused on his plumbing business.

Some gamblers, Faringer said, hide their losses from family by taking out multiple credit cards to transfer large balances. Others use a PO Box to conceal their bills.

"We call it the silent addiction because there are no obvious signs, instead what you jeopardize is a person's financial structure and all the things that go with that," she explained. "It becomes bigger and bigger and you (be)come more desperate to get a hold of funding."



Research varies on the exact number of problem gamblers across the country. Most seem to put it at roughly 5 percent of the population.

By comparison, nearly 27 percent of those 18 and older said they engaged in binge drinking, according to a report by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. In 2014, 31 percent of all driving fatalities were connected to the use of alcohol.

Research also points to how casinos successfully lure the most vulnerable people at rates higher than other groups.

Casinos collect roughly half of their revenues from pathological gamblers, according to widely cited studies collected by The Institute for American Values.

Also, researchers at the University of Buffalo found that problem gambling was twice as likely in neighborhoods with the highest levels of concentrated poverty. Those living close to a casino were more likely to have gambling issues as well.

Researchers added that other factors, along with casinos, contribute to compulsive gambling.

"We know that this is not simply an effect of poverty at the individual level," John Welte, a senior research scientist said, in the report. "Social and environmental influences on gambling behavior and pathology are interesting in themselves. Acceptance of gambling by family and friends, unrealistic expectations from gambling combined with a financial desperation, might be the explanation."

Critics have leaned on similar research to successfully block casinos from being developed in downtown Rochester as it works to transform its core.

In fact, Rochester mall mogul Thomas C. Wilmot first proposed a similar casino in the downtown area about 13 years ago.

"We didn't make up the rules for this procession dictating going to Seneca County but it worked out really," Wilmot said in a recent phone interview with the Democrat and Chronicle. "We have a large tract of property, which allows more flexibility than an urban design."

He added that del Lago will draw from a pool of about 1.5 million people within a 50-mile radius that includes Rochester, Syracuse and the Southern Tier.



A first inside look at the del Lago Resort & Casino, which opens to the public on Wednesday. Shawn Dowd

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## The cost

Those dealing with problem gambling say that the issue is underfunded with more work needed on the state level to determine the economic impact and identify the number of people with a problem.

"There is an endless amount of work that needs to be done in research, prevention and awareness raising to uncover the nature of, and address this problem in (the state)," said Michelle Hadden, a spokesperson for the New York Council on Problem Gambling. "We would expect to see at least an initial increase in problem gambling as a result of increased accessibility."

On a national level, researchers at University of Chicago put the cost of treating a pathological gambler at roughly \$1,700 in 2014.

[Rochester's Center for Governmental Research Inc.](#) put the potential cost of problem gambling in del Lago's market at about \$3.5 million annually in documents filed with the state on the casino.

"A casino located on the Thruway would likely double the prevalence of problem and pathological gambling in Seneca County," CGR noted.

However, casinos aren't the way gamblers fall into problems, according to a 2006 study by the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Services indicating that the state's lottery, scratch-offs — along with sports and other types of betting pose a greater risk.



Kayla Sciarabba, 20, of Geneva, was offered a job by del Lago Resort & Casino after going through a free dealer's program offered by the new Seneca County casino. Todd Clausen

Hadden said there are no state-funded out-patient centers in Monroe County to treat problem gambling, although there are several private practice clinicians trained to deal with the issue. [Gamblers Anonymous](#) also hosts several meetings.

The state gave permission last month for several treatment centers across the state, including the John L. Norris Addiction Treatment Center in Rochester, to add in-patient services for gambling addicts.

The [Seneca County Mental Health agency](#) will also assist with prevention, treatment and reporting of issues around the casino.

State regulations also require new casinos to open on-site centers on responsible gambling, pay for clinicians to treat related issues and post help hotlines and brochures throughout the facility and info on slot machines.

Del Lago is also required to pay \$500 annually per slot machine or table game for problem gambling programs.

Babinski said dealing with problem gambling is often best dealt with on the front lines inside the casino.

"You got to get to know the player," he said. "You want to be welcoming. You want our team members to be engaged. You want them to smile a lot. As you grow those relationships, you'll get to know that person a lot. Our team members have been trained and we are ready for them and have the resources. I feel good."