

From the Sheriff:

Gambling Chapter 945 of the State Statutes clearly outlines what type of gambling/gaming is legal and those that are illegal. With the exception of the Indian casinos, the state run lottery and licensed bingo premises, all other gaming is illegal. Now with that being said, don't expect your local Sheriff's Department to start arresting grandma and grandpa for their nickel and dime sheeps head and cribbage games! Oh, and what about that shake of the day at your local watering hole?

My philosophy in law enforcement starts with what laws society deems necessary to enforce and what is the priority. I then balance those priorities with my resources and what is reasonable. Personally I have two definitions of gaming. 1) Illegal but reasonable and 2) illegal and unreasonable. The difference between the two is the potential for someone to get hurt financially; wagers exceed an entertainment value, and the potential for violence. This has become an issue as of late as I have received anonymous calls regarding several county establishments that host Texas Hold'em card games. Are these games illegal yes they are! Are they causing conflict yes they are! Do I want to begin enforcement? Not necessarily.

Who is the enforcer? There are several layers of law enforcement. It could be at the local, county, state or federal. The Sheriff's Dept. may not bother with certain gaming events but the State may come right in and shut them down. Gambling is a class A Misdemeanor and is defined as anyone who makes a bet, enters or remains in a gambling place with intent to make a bet. Fines and forfeitures are high as well as the owner of the premises risks losing their property under State Statute 823 - Nuisances.

So what is reasonable? I like to play cards, have a few couples over for a friendly poker game. The dimes and quarters are flying around and regardless of the outcome everyone leaves smiling win or lose. The deer hunt is this weekend and I am sure my brothers and I may even find a dice box for a family game for a few bucks. Is it illegal? Yes. Will we end up in jail? Doubtful. The issue is when these games become high stakes. When the participants are gambling with money they don't have. When the game escalates to a level that the loser becomes upset and depressed about their losses, the game has now become unreasonable. It is these games that the losers call and report these games as illegal and seek enforcement action as a way to get back at the host business. It is for this reason we need these businesses to police themselves and maintain a standard a standard of reasonableness.

We are blessed to have a very responsible Tavern League of Dodge County. I work closely with their membership to ensure compliance and reasonableness in their businesses practices. It is incumbent upon their membership to ensure compliance with all laws as well as the reasonableness test. The current gaming climate is difficult for law enforcement. With so many legal venues, most say "well if the Indians can have it so can I." This is not the case and it is that attitude that will jeopardize our reasonableness standard. Like a bushel of apples, one bad apple will ruin the entire bushel.

For those participating in games that the wager would be considered unreasonable I would ask you to think twice about continuing. For those participating in reasonable games of entertainment, my stance is not the last and final opinion. The State, at anytime can come into Dodge County and begin strict enforcement. Bottom line, be reasonable and be discreet, if not, you are jeopardizing

more than you would ever gain from any game of stakes. Thanks for listening, I encourage your feedback. tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us.