

## A Million Stories

### Tearing holes in the fabric of space-time

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**O**N SUNDAY, CBS' *60 MINUTES* AIRED A 13-MINUTE NEWS SEGMENT TITLED "**THE BIG GAMBLE**," which posed a rather timely question: Is the proliferation of local slots casinos across America merely diverting people who'd be gambling anyway, or are the machines themselves **creating (or, as *60 Minutes* put it, addicting) new gamblers?**

Outgoing Gov. Ed Rendell, who presided over the legalization and establishment of legalized slots in Pennsylvania, has **made his opinion on the matter abundantly clear.**

"Some people lose their paychecks," Rendell conceded to *60 Minutes* correspondent Lesley Stahl, but "these people were losing their paychecks in Atlantic City, in Delaware at the racetracks, or in West Virginia." When pressed by Stahl, Rendell blew his top: "Those people would lose that money anyway. ... **You're simpletons! You're idiots** if you don't get that!"

But who's the simpleton? Had Stahl been able to **tear a little hole in the fabric of space-time** and pull out this week's *City Paper*, she might have pointed out to Rendell that a mounting body of evidence — **and a healthy dose of, like, looking around** — suggests the opposite: The sudden proximity of slot machines to communities is, in fact, breeding new gamblers.

As far back as 1999, the federally mandated National Gambling Impact Study Commission found that "the presence of a gambling facility within 50 miles **roughly doubles the prevalence of problem and pathological gamblers.**" A 2005 study by the University at Buffalo's Research Institute on Addictions found that a casino within 10 miles of home was associated with a **90 percent increased risk** of someone being a pathological or problem gambler. And a chart of slot revenue published in the *Gaming Industry Observer*, a trade publication, last year shows that while Atlantic City revenue did drop as Pennsylvania's casinos opened up, **Pennsylvania's revenues rose far above Atlantic City's losses**, and continued to rise as the latter's revenue stabilized.

But who needs numbers when the best evidence is just blocks away? During [CP's 24-hour visit to SugarHouse Casino](#), we found many patrons who lived nearby, one cab driver telling us, "I would say 90 percent of the people I take live **less than eight blocks away.**"

Would all of those people — on a Wednesday night, no less — have gone to Atlantic City, that night, instead? **We'll bet not.**

And speaking of SugarHouse ...

—Isaiah Thompson

## Wing-a-ding-ding

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History was made this week when SugarHouse Casino hosted the first ever "**SugarHouse Wing-Off**," in which more than 70 contestants willingly competed to eat the most Buffalo wings and thus gain a spot at the **holiest of Philadelphia ceremonies: The Wing Bowl**. *City Paper* thought the occasion called for a follow-up to last year's cover story ["**24-Hour Party People**," **Nov. 18, 2010**], in which three reporters spent 24 hours in the casino.

**8:30 p.m.:** A few recent changes at SugarHouse: There are two new **Sugar Express** routes (for South Philly and the Northeast) and something called "**SugarHouse Ale**," which is brewed by Yards. It tastes **suspiciously like Philadelphia Pale Ale**.

**8:50 p.m.:** CP can't find one gambler who's competing in or watching the contest. Instead, the crowd is **composed largely of SugarHouse employees**, pro competitive eaters and friends. Randi Beck, V.P. of operations, confirms that at least 14 of the Wing-Off contestants are employees.

**8:55 p.m.:** A gray-haired dealer yells to one of his friends in the race: "I've got \$100 on you!" Later, he explains **he was kidding**: "I couldn't place a bet if I wanted to."

**10:13 p.m.:** Hosts **Marc Farzetta** of WIP and former Philadelphia Eagle **Hugh Douglas** tease all contestants, but especially the (few) lady participants. "**Put the meat in your mouth!**" **says Douglas to "Ghetto Farm Girl"** and then: "Suck the meat off the bone!"

**10:45 p.m.:** Farzetta asks "Beast from the East," a young Asian woman, if her stage name is a reference to the Great Northeast. She explains that **it's a nod to China**. Farzetta pauses and asks her, "**You like calculus?**" Then, cheering for another female contestant: "Let's hear it for her plunging neckline!"

**11:30 p.m.:** "Christina Kick-Ass" and "Tsunami" are in the final round. "She's got a little onion on her," says Douglas of the former's butt. Then, to "Tsunami": "**Keep that meat in your mouth!**"

**11:45 p.m.:** Though the crowd was pulling for "Tsunami," she won't be heading to the 19th annual Wing Bowl. The hosts announce that "**Gentleman Joe**" won. He ate **35 wings in 10 minutes**.

**11:46 p.m.:** The crowd thins. A young blond man remarks, "After you've seen it twice, you're pretty much done."

—Holly Otterbein

## Hocus Pocus

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There's public relations, and then there's **magic**. And the **Marcellus Shale Coalition**, the industry trade group that constitutes the public face of Pennsylvania's **exploding — we mean burgeoning, of course — gas industry** practices the latter.

This week, the industry magically defended itself against a potentially damaging news story by the Associated Press about the interesting fact that Pennsylvania is one of very few places in America that allows toxic drilling wastewater to be **put back into waterways** — you know, **those things we get drinking water from**. It further asserted that despite new regulations, about one-fifth of the wastewater generated in Pennsylvania **couldn't be accounted for** and that Cabot Oil & Gas — the company state officials say contaminated the drinking water of Dimock, Pa. — **improperly disposed of 44,000 gallons of waste**. Oh, and that towns downstream of gas wastewater facilities are **struggling to stay below federal limits** for certain carcinogens.

The Marcellus Shale Coalition called the article a "hit piece" and said that wastewater must be treated according to tight regulations — a point echoed by **Department of Environmental Protection Secretary John Hanger**, who accused the piece of downplaying new, much stricter regulations he rammed through Harrisburg. What the MSCoalition *didn't* mention was that it had **fought those very regulations tooth and nail** — or, as Hanger told the Central Pennsylvania Business Journal: "**The industry opposed us at every step of the way.**"

—Isaiah Thompson

## Help

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On Monday afternoon, a five-alarm fire broke out at a large apartment building at 48th and Walnut streets in West Philadelphia. **The blaze drew 160 firefighters and took five hours to bring under control.** By Monday night, nearly 100 residents, including children and seniors, had lost their homes. The **Salvation Army** is accepting non-furniture donations for the residents (**5501 Market St., Mon.-Fri., 9 a.m.-4 p.m., 215-474-1010**, employees recommend taking donations to the building's Arch Street entrance).

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