

# Underage Gambling: A Bet Greater than You Can Afford to Lose

BY BRIDGET WALLER '09

Across the country, high school and college students risk arrest, imprisonment, fines, and criminal records when caught in casinos under the legal gambling age of 21.

To fully understand the ramifications of underage gambling, take the case of a Diamond Bill. He is a freshman in college and started playing cards while in high school. Like most college students, he has easy access to cash, both from his parents and from student loans. Flooded with credit card offers, he has recently signed up for several, as a parent has not been required to co-sign. Looking for a taste of thrill and risk, he and a friend look forward to playing dice aboard one of Missouri's riverboat casinos on a Friday night with their fake I.D.s in hand.

Diamond Bill's desire to gamble on a casino floor is far from unique. According to a 1997 study by Harvard Medical School's Division on Addictions, about half of the college students surveyed in the United States and Canada said they had gambled at a casino during the previous year. During 2003 in Detroit, Michigan, 4,822 minors were denied entry into the MotorCity Casino. Moreover, a represen-

tative of the National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA] recently testified before Congress that gambling is becoming an unmanageable problem among college students, including athletes. It is a fact that gambling addictions among college students are growing at three times the rate of the adult population.

At the doors of a casino, Diamond Bill takes out his fake I.D. and manages to make it into the building. As he steps out on the floor, he remains unaware of what close call his admittance was. In reality, casinos themselves risk fines and even revocation of gaming licenses by permitting underage gambling. In hopes of creating a corporate culture that does not tolerate underage gambling, casinos implement policies that include training programs that teach employees how to identify and intervene with suspected underage gamers. In addition, an employee's record of intervention with suspected minors is one area in which a casino employee is evaluated. The Missouri Gaming Association and the Missouri Gaming Commission's efforts to deter minors from entering casinos include front and back-of-house signage and detailed employee training on the cues for

identifying minors.

In the noisy, brightly colored rooms of the casino, Diamond Bill hits up a couple of slot machines before he is noticed by a security official and asked to show proof of his age. The official identifies the illegal I.D. and the police are notified. According to the security office at Lumière Palace on the St. Louis Riverfront, upon seeing a teenager on the floor, employees immediately notify state police. At Harrah's Casino in St. Charles County, employees are trained both to card individuals who appear to be below the age of 30 and to detect invalid identification. If a minor tries to gamble under false identification, security officers will intervene and contact outside law enforcement. Those under age 21 are either physically escorted from the casino premises or taken into custody by law enforcement agents. Diamond Bill is no exception and is at risk of arrest, imprisonment, fines, and criminal records when caught.

Missouri's age limit of 21 for legal gambling is not a suggestion, a mere recommendation, or even a request. It is the law. Located in Chapter 313 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri: A person under

twenty-one years of age shall not make a wager on an excursion gambling boat and shall not be allowed in the area of the excursion boat where gambling is being conducted. Additionally, it is unlawful for a person to present false identification to a licensee or a gaming agent in order to gain entrance to an excursion gambling boat. After Diamond Bill's unsuccessful excursion to the casino, he will have to list a class B misdemeanor for his first offense and a class A misdemeanor for any second and subsequent offenses on all his future graduate school and applications. Beyond just legal ramifications, Diamond Bill realizes the "something-for-nothing" craving which gambling stimulates undermines his character. He comes to the conclusion that gambling appeals to the weakness of his personal integrity. The hope of winning a fortune caused him to foolishly spend college savings and job earnings for a gambling stake.

By betting they will not get caught, those under age 21 risk much more than the coins they have dropped in a slot machine or the chips they have laid on a blackjack table. They risk their integrity.