

# Stakes high in Gamblers Anonymous groups

By Tom Hinrichs

Lincoln soon will have a chapter of Gamblers Anonymous, according to Howie Berger.

Berger was a member of Gamblers Anonymous in his home state of New York and is directing a radio, television and radio publicity campaign for the Gamblers Anonymous group he hopes to start here.

Two New York gamblers started Gamblers Anonymous in 1957 and since then the group has spread throughout the world, Berger said.

Gamblers Anonymous was formed to help the compulsive gambler rid himself of his addiction to gambling. Members attend weekly meetings where they tell how gambling has disrupted their lives. They help each other to quit betting, Berger said, and phone other members when they want to gamble.

The person who wants to bet calls another member who tries to discourage the bettor. Phone calls are made to fellow members until the urge to gamble subsides, Berger said.

#### Desire to quit

The only requirement for Gamblers Anonymous is a desire to quit gambling, Berger said. Gamblers Anonymous members come from all walks of life but

men far outnumber women, he said. About 80 per cent of Gamblers Anonymous members are men.

Berger said that 999 out of 1,000 Gamblers Anonymous members are gamblers who have lost money.

The compulsive gambler has a desire to lose, he said.

#### Curiosity

Berger pointed out the distinction between members of Gamblers Anonymous and people who come to a few meetings:

"Most people who attend the first meeting are coming out of curiosity. Some gamblers come with the idea of getting money to pay off debts or gamble with. Members don't receive any money from Gamblers Anonymous."

If a member has large debts, an official of Gamblers Anonymous will attempt to contact the person's creditors and help him set up a payment schedule.

The payments received by creditors are small, such as five dollars per week, no matter what the person's financial situation is. The debt is kept lingering intentionally, to remind the gambler of his weakness

and to reinforce his desire to quit gambling. Creditors usually accept the payments as they are offered, Berger explained.

#### Inability to set limits

Berger said the main problem with gambling is the inability of the person to set a limit for himself and stick to it. The amount of money bet can range from the weekly grocery money to millions of dollars, Berger said. When a person cannot walk away from the tables or the track he needs help, he said.

According to Berger, some members of Gamblers Anonymous, including himself, have undergone psychological treatment to help them stop betting. But, he said, Gamblers Anonymous is the only treatment that has proven effective in the treatment of compulsive gamblers.

Gamblers Anonymous is the only group that deals exclusively with problems of compulsive gamblers, he said.

Attending meetings does not guarantee a cure. About 20 per cent of the people who join Gamblers Anonymous quit during the first three or four months, Berger said. But he added they are always welcomed back if they choose to return.



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