

THE FREE PRESS UP FRONT

Page A3

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PHONE 564-0005

Praise/Performance



Stephanie Rolf and Aimee Deorksen of Salmon Valley Elementary School demonstrate their science fair project. The details of the contraption are top secret but we're thinking the Vancouver Canucks might be interested in giving it a try. JOHN MCKENZIE/FREE PRESS

▼ Gaming forum

Jackpot of supporters

Participants at a public forum on gaming were willing to wager that gaming is a good bet for Prince George.

Wednesday evening's forum, sponsored by the Prince George Community Planning Council, asked its 75 participants to debate a question: What does expanded gaming mean for our community?

The response, from the majority of participants, was favourable. An exit poll revealed that 45 participants voted in favour of gaming, five were against gaming and one was undecided.

Most of the discussion at the forum revealed a similar attitude. Many of the participants said gaming is an essential source of revenue for charities, a way to create more jobs, that it allows money to stay in Prince George and has overall economic benefits such as increased tourism.

As well, some participants feel the social consequences of gaming are exaggerated and that people should be free to decide how to spend their money.

"As an adult I don't see the need for other people to legislate morality on me," says Scott Cramer, a local businessman. "I'll spend my money how I want to, that's my right. That's what a free country is all about. I don't need governments and the religious right telling me what to do."

Some people at the forum did offer reservations about gaming. One group says gaming erodes social values, increases crime and addiction and adds that charitable gaming removes the responsibility for social programs from government.

The dissenters were few. But some participants felt the majority at the forum doesn't represent the majority of Prince George. Jim Loughery notes that most of the forum attendees were charities that benefit from gaming revenue or casino/bingo hall workers.

"There are an awful lot of people here who have a vested financial interest in gaming," says Mr. Loughery. "It's unfortunate there wasn't another voice. I'm sad to say it's not as big an issue for people who oppose it as it is for the people who are making money on it."

The Community Planning Council will continue to accept submissions from the public on the subject for two weeks. They can be contacted at 562-2667.

Recallers should hire this woman

By MICHELLE LANG

Free Press staff writer

When Rita Christie battles the one armed bandit she wants to do it with space to spare.

So in an effort to find a larger location for Wagers Casino, Prince George's charity casino, she gathered 7,200 signatures on a petition to relocate it.

"I did lots of walking," says Ms. Christie. "I asked people if they supported gambling and if they would want to move the casino to a bigger location."

Ms. Christie collected her signatures by walking around most of Prince George and sitting in front of the bingo hall.

"I figure the money should stay in Prince

George to help seniors like myself. It could provide for more senior housing. This is what this money can do. If you don't want to gamble you don't have to."

She adds the current location in the Ramada is too smoky and there isn't enough seating.

While Ms. Christie plans to present her petition to council she may meet some

opposition in the process.

City Council has come out opposed to gaming and is even attempting to create a bylaw which would restrict any further expansion, especially of slot machines.

Administration is currently researching such a bylaw and will have report back to council in the near future.

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