

# METRICH targets video gaming spots

Larry Paone appreciated law enforcement cracking down on businesses with video gaming machines.

"All these places pay out money," he said Thursday night while peering inside the Boomtown Internet Cafe & Phone Center. "It's no secret."



Local and state law enforcement raided multiple establishments, including the Boomtown Internet Cafe & Phone Center, housing "skill games" Thursday evening in Richland County. / Jason J. Molyet/News Journal

The METRICH Enforcement Unit, with help from several local law enforcement agencies, raided 12 such businesses simultaneously. About five years ago, the state attorney general's office ruled video gaming machines illegal, saying they are not games of skill but are more like slot machines.

METRICH Commander Lt. Ken Coontz said such businesses also are not allowed to pay out money.

"In Ohio, you're allowed to get a \$10 gift payout, which would be a stuffed animal or a prize," he said. "(But) if that was the way it worked, why would you keep going back?"

Thursday's operation was the first of its kind locally in more than three years.

"We got a complaint from a local businessman, claiming he was losing business to these places," Coontz said.

METRICH did compliance checks and found the businesses were giving cash payouts, Coontz said.

"Our primary function is dealing with the drugs in our county," he said. "This was something we did in between investigations. It appeared to be just the right time."

The probe turned up a bit of irony as well.

"The guy who complained, sure enough, he was violating as well," Coontz said.

Authorities debriefed at METRICH, then fanned out to businesses in Mansfield, Shelby, Ontario and Lexington. METRICH Detective Steve Blust joked about the low-risk operation.

"Well, if I never see you again ...," he said to fellow METRICH Detective Dawn Brown.

Brown was a designated floater, going from place to place. The first place she hit was Mid-Ohio Skill Games on Park Avenue West. The business' window featured posters of a leprechaun and a pot of gold.

Benjamin Gaddy was the lone customer.

"I always come here to spend a little money," he said. "There's slot machines everywhere."

Gaddy, who moved here from Florida, said he has been going to Mid-Ohio Skill Games for a couple of months.

Brown next went to Boomtown Internet Cafe on Fourth Street. Paone came to see what was going on with all the police cars. He said his aunt is a big fan of such businesses.

"She's on disability and gets a monthly check," he said. "She'll blow it all at one place."

Munching on a candy bar, Gaddy showed up at Boomtown Internet Cafe. He didn't go inside.

One of Brown's last stops was Chances on U.S. 42. A roadside sign advertised the business' seven-year anniversary Oct. 13 and promised a \$1,000 giveaway.

Coontz was still compiling information late Thursday night. Authorities confiscated more than \$7,000 and removed [computers](#) from three Internet cafes. They left the skill-based games, but Coontz said he would seek a court order for forfeiture "to have them destroyed."

Brown said such businesses are closed for now.

"Whether they reopen is up to them, but they have to comply with the law," she said.

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