

courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-hc-ct-offtrackbetting-0507.artmay07,0,6349128.story

Courant.com

Three Restaurants Planning To Add Off-Track Betting Stations

By JESSE LEAVENWORTH

The Hartford Courant

May 7, 2010

MANCHESTER—

The company that runs off-track betting in the state plans to open three gambling stations in restaurants and bars this year, part of an effort to shift the image of OTB from seedy storefronts and cheap stogies.

Autotote Enterprises won approval from the state legislature this week to simulcast events at restaurants and taverns in Manchester, New London and Windham. The bill awaits Gov. M. Jodi Rell's signature.

By "embedding" OTB facilities in places where a variety of people eat and drink, Autotote and the host establishments draw a wider customer base, company attorney William Sweeney said. Such "co-locations" are a national trend, Sweeney said, and Connecticut is late to the game.

"We're actually trying to catch up with the rest of the country," he said. "This is the modern OTB."

Autotote bought the Connecticut OTB system in 1993 and now runs 12 facilities, which are regulated by the state Division of Special Revenue and the Connecticut Gaming Policy Board. The three new stations would bring the total to 15, and Sweeney said that Autotote plans to open two more branches in restaurants/bars over the next two years. State law currently caps the number of branches at 18.

In Manchester, the "Winners" OTB branch will be installed in a 900-square-foot corner of Shea's American Bar & Grill on Tolland Turnpike. The area will include TV screens, a tellers' counter and self-service machines used to place bets electronically. Wagering will be limited to thoroughbred horse racing, harness racing, greyhound racing and jai alai.

The town's board of directors approved Shea's as "suitable" for a gambling station in April. Each town that hosts a branch shares in the annual revenue. By a conservative estimate, towns hosting the three new stations will receive \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year, Sweeney said.

Before they voted to allow the OTB branch at Shea's, the Manchester Board of Directors asked Police Chief Marc Montminy to review potential problems. Montminy said he called police administrators in other towns that host OTB facilities and they reported no troubles.

The owners of Shea's American Bar & Grill agreed to add the OTB branch, co-owner Jack Maloney said, as a way to boost business during the day. (OTB branches close on some days as early as 6 p.m.)

"Our lunch business has been our Achilles' heel," Maloney said.

He said a representative of J.D. Cooper's, a restaurant/tavern in Putnam that includes an OTB branch, told him that lunchtime business would improve, Maloney said.

But Marvin Steinberg, executive director of the Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling, said that he would rather see gambling facilities separated from other kinds of businesses.

"When gambling makes its way deeper into a community, it accesses more young people and more people who have a problem or have a potential problem," Steinberg said.

"They [gambling operators] want it embedded in the community so it becomes part of everyday life, and I don't think that's a good idea," he said.

The other places where Autotote plans to open branches are The Thirsty Frog, next to the famous Frog Bridge in Willimantic, and a restaurant called the Copperwood to be opened this year in downtown New London, Sweeney said.

Copyright © 2010, [The Hartford Courant](#)