

Youngstown news, Casino tax revenue up slightly

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COLUMBUS

Second-quarter casino tax revenues for Ohio's counties and major cities, including Youngstown, were slightly higher this year than in the same quarter of last year, according to the Ohio Department of Taxation.

However, they were substantially below that quarter's peak in 2013.

The second quarter of 2013 reflected activity in the first full quarter during which all four Ohio casinos were open.

The Cleveland and Toledo casinos opened in May 2012, with the Columbus casino opening in October of that year and the Cincinnati casino opening March 4, 2013.

"The second quarter of 2013 was right after Cincinnati opened," observed Jessica Franks, communications director for the Ohio Casino Control Commission, which regulates the state's casinos.

"It was new. People were going to check it out," she said of casino gambling early in 2013, adding that its novelty may have contributed to the strong second quarter that year.

The drop in second-quarter revenue in 2014 and 2015 may have been due to the gradual

opening of Ohio's seven racinos, which compete with the four casinos, she said.

The first racino to open was Scioto Downs in Columbus on June 1, 2012, and the last was Hollywood Gaming at Mahoning Valley Race Course in Austintown on Sept. 17, 2014.

"The market in Ohio has been relatively stable," since the fall of 2014, Franks said of Ohio's gambling industry.

Mahoning County Commissioner Carol Rimedio-Righetti noted that gambling also competes with many other recreational opportunities.

"There are so many other things going on," and gambling isn't a priority when family budgets are limited, she said.

"People aren't going to go spend money on gambling if they're going to take their children on a vacation," she added.

Rimedio-Righetti said she, too, believes the strong second-quarter casino performance in 2013 was due to the novelty of casino gambling in Ohio at that time.

The Austintown racino, which features a horse race track, appeals to Mahoning Valley residents because of its proximity to them, she noted.

"You're hoping that it goes up, so that we get more revenue from that, but you can't predict gambling" activity, she said.

"People look at their money a little differently today and what they need to save because the cost of everything is going up, and the wages stay the same," for many workers, she observed.

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For the period between April 1 and June 30, Mahoning County and Youngstown are each getting \$332,580 for 2016; compared with \$329,316 in 2015; \$351,454 in 2014; and the peak for that quarter of \$366,941 in 2013.

In counties with a major city, the major city and county government share equally in the county's casino-tax revenue.

In Trumbull County, the second-quarter revenues were \$584,420 for 2016; \$579,470 in 2015; \$620,474 in 2014 and \$647,310 in 2013.

In Columbiana County, the second quarter revenues were \$300,615 in 2016; \$298,486 in 2015; \$318,268 in 2014 and \$332,406 in 2013.

Ohio's casinos pay a 33 percent tax on gross revenues; and tax distributions from that collection go quarterly to Ohio's 88 counties and eight major cities, including Youngstown.

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