



Arizona Department of Gaming

Douglas A. Ducey
Governor

Daniel H. Bergin
Director

1110 W. Washington St, Suite
450 Phoenix, Arizona 85007
Tel 602.771.4263 Fax
602.255.3883
www.azgaming.gov

News Release

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Media Contact: Courtney Coolidge
602-255-3887

State Officials Shut Down Illegal Gaming Cafes

(Phoenix)— The Arizona Department of Gaming teamed up with the Attorney General’s Office, the Phoenix Police Department and the Department of Public Safety to stop illegal gambling at establishments known as ‘sweepstakes cafes’. These ‘cafes’ pose as coffee shops offering Internet access but they are a disguise for illegal gambling operations.

The investigation began when the Arizona Department of Gaming learned of multiple ‘sweepstakes cafes’ where gambling was allegedly taking place. Undercover agents were dispatched to confirm that customers were gambling, although, not all knew they were engaging in illegal activity.

On January 13th, the agencies served warrants at six locations in Phoenix, including three businesses, two residences and a storage facility, in connection with the suspected gambling operation.

Agents seized more than 50 gambling devices, computers, televisions, weapons, surveillance equipment and vehicles including cars, motorcycles and ATV’s. They also confiscated more than \$20,000. Evidence gathered suggested violations including operating an illegal enterprise, money laundering and violating multiple gambling statutes. The Attorney General’s Office served a simultaneous seizure warrant for assets and froze bank accounts associated with the operation.

This is the second time owner Eric Stelljes has faced allegations of gambling violations in Arizona. Stelljes is already on pre-trial release and other charges will follow.

“We want to send a clear message to the operators of these shops that they are on our radar,” said Attorney General Mark Brnovich. “They will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

All charges are allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty. The investigation is ongoing.

“Dismantling unlawful gambling enterprises is a priority for this administration,” added Dan Bergin, Director of the Arizona Department of Gaming. “We will continue to work with our sister law enforcement agencies and prosecutorial authorities to protect our cities.”

To report suspected illegal gambling, contact your local police department or the Arizona Department of Gaming at 602-255-3888. For more information, email Courtney Coolidge at ccoolidge@azgaming.gov.

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