

100 MOMENTS

SPECIAL ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS BUREAU 2021

By David Jobes (1993-current)



The Division of Criminal Investigation Special Enforcement Operations Bureau, formerly known as the Gaming Bureau was formed in 1989 to ensure public confidence and trust in Iowa's expanding gaming industry. Iowa took the first steps to legalized gambling in 1983 by authorizing pari-mutuel wagering, followed by the Lottery in 1985 and ultimately casino style riverboat gambling in 1989. In the early days, DCI Special Agents staffed the casinos whenever they were open for business and were tasked with nearly every duty needed to provide oversight of the budding gaming industry; from conducting thorough background investigations to inspecting gambling machines to providing law enforcement in the casinos.

Over the years, the industry has seen significant changes. When Riverboat Gambling began, the operators were required to cruise and even when they couldn't cruise, all customers still had to be

cleared from the boat and re-board for the next "cruise". This was done to comply with the \$200 per cruise loss limit when gamblers had to tear off scrip every time they bought gambling chips or tokens in \$20 increments. If they lost their full \$200 during a cruise, they had to wait until the next cruise to obtain more scrip so they could buy in again. It didn't take long for both the loss limits and the cruising requirements to go away, allowing Iowans greater opportunities to gamble and the industry the opportunity to increase their profits. As the industry grew, casino operators began looking to new locations away from the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. However, operators still needed to comply with the riverboat gambling theme that brought casino gaming to Iowa. This led to some innovative construction practices such as putting a boat on an underwater track or installing a large water bladder under the casino floor. After a few more years, those requirements went away leading to the land based casinos we see around the state today. From 1989 to 2015, the casino industry grew to

include 19 licensed casinos in all corners of the State.

The expansion of the industry required the DCI to expand as well. In 1992, the DCI put the first Gaming Enforcement Officer (GEO) through the DPS Academy, Karen Hopewell. GEOs were added as a new sworn position to address law enforcement needs in the casino environment 24/7. In the years that followed, the DCI continued to add Special Agents and GEOs at a rapid pace to keep up with the expansion of gambling. At its peak, the Gaming Bureau staffed 2 Special Agents and either 4 or 5 Gaming Enforcement Officers at every



Riverboat Casino, depending upon patron capacity. The pari-mutuel locations never had GEOs, instead they had

2 Special Agents until slot machines were allowed and then they were staffed with 3 Special Agents.

The SA/GEO staffing model continued until 2013 when the legislature passed a gaming reorganization bill. Under this legislation, the DCI was required to eliminate the GEO (Special Agent 1) position over the course of 3 fiscal years and allowed to add 1 Special Agent 2 to each riverboat casino. This new staffing model meant significantly fewer DCI Agents would be working in the casino environment and we needed to adjust the Agent's duties. We moved away from providing 24/7 coverage and provided less and less front line policing service

through the course of reorganization. As the DCI changed the staffing model and priorities of the Gaming Bureau, it was appropriate to rebrand the Bureau as well. In 2013, the Gaming



Bureau became the Special Enforcement Operations Bureau to better reflect the broad

range of responsibilities within the Bureau. DCI Agents in the casino environment do far more than gaming enforcement and background investigations; Agents regularly conduct investigations concerning theft, fraud, embezzlement, money laundering, narcotics, prostitution, assault and any other criminal activity with a nexus to the casino industry. On an almost daily basis, SEOB Agents assist our law enforcement partners at the federal, state and local level with their investigations by gathering and providing information concerning individuals who frequent casinos.

In 2019, legislation was passed authorizing sports betting and fantasy sports contests to be conducted in Iowa. In the months that followed, the SEOB Agents conducted in-depth background investigations on 19 companies and 25 key individuals entering the Iowa market for sports betting and fantasy sports. Sports betting and fantasy sports contests have proven to be extremely popular with Iowa gamblers. In the 18 months after the first sports betting operator went live in August 2019, the two industries have seen over \$1 billion in wagering activity. The sports betting industry continues to grow with

approximately 10 additional companies seeking licenses to enter the Iowa market.

Today the Special Enforcement Operations Bureau consists of 58 Special Agent 2s, 1 Special Agent 1, 5 Special Agents in Charge and 1 Assistant Director. In the years to come, gambling will undoubtedly continue to grow and evolve as

technology takes on a greater role in the industry.



Internet gaming and E-Sports are already

on the horizon, poised to become a part of the legalized gambling industry in Iowa. As this industry grows, the dedicated men and women of the DCI will undoubtedly rise to the challenge by embracing new technology and developing methods to provide the investigative expertise required to continue the charge of ensuring public trust and confidence in the gaming industry.

As part of the reorganization legislation passed in 2013, the DCI was required to conduct a review and file a report with the legislature by July 1, 2020. The report was to detail the findings of a review of the number of special agents permitted for each gambling structure and their activities.