

Charitable poker needs better rules

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Two things can be said about charity poker: It is a proven means of raising revenue for the non-profits it serves and the business that runs the games, and gambling, charitable or otherwise, requires careful regulation.

Maverick's Poker Palace and Saloon is an illustration. In November, the Michigan Gaming Control Board stopped approving licenses for charity poker games at the Port Huron business.

The state gaming board is investigating Maverick's and the Gloria Poker Palace in Burton, both owned by Al Crossnoe. The state banned the Burton poker room in October for requiring charities to kick back some of the poker proceeds to the poker room's owner.

Charity poker is a boon for groups in the Blue Water Area and the rest of the state eager to increase their coffers. Gambling is restricted in Michigan, but there is no shortage of people who want to play.

But charity poker's popularity also demands greater scrutiny. MGCB Executive Director Richard Kalm told the Times Herald in November that industry grew from about \$22 million in chip sales during 2002-04 to \$530 million in 2010-12.

By no means is Maverick's out of the woods, but state gaming officials have come up with a way to return it to charity poker. The gaming board proposes to let poker rooms operate four nights a week, or about 208 days a year.

That's a considerable increase from its original plan — to limit poker at a location to 30 nights a year. The board raised the cap to 120.

The MGCB also wants at least three workers from the charitable organization to manage the poker games, a compromise from the five workers it originally sought.

The alternatives are supposed to keep state Rep. Jeff Farrington, R-Utica, from pushing House Bill 4960, legislation that would relax the board's stricter regulations.

If the new MGCB regulations win approval, Maverick's and the charities that use it could apply for new licenses — a good deal for them and the charity poker industry.