

# Georgia Authorities Shut Down \$3 Million Online Gambling Operation

Internet cafes have become a popular target for authorities around the US over the past five years. The cafes usually allow customers to purchase time on calling cards, and then use the credit card-like cards to play slot games on computers located inside the business.

What was happening at seven Internet cafes in Georgia is something on a much larger scale of illegal Internet gambling, according to authorities. On Tuesday, investigators raided seven Big Dawg Calling Cards stores that spanned several counties in the state. The owner, James Kokott, was arrested and charged with two counts of racketeering.

The owners of the business apparently used the law to try and avoid capture of the illegal operation. When customers won large amounts of money playing the sweepstakes games on the computers, Marilyn Clemmons, who also was charged in the raids, would pay the customers in increments less than \$10,000. The \$10,000 is a number that by law, gamblers have to report when they win over the amount.

"These perpetrators lined their pockets with the hard-earned dollars of everyday citizens under the false pretense of a legitimate lottery and sweepstakes," said DeKalb County District Attorney Robert James, to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

The alleged parties had an operation that was moving more than \$3 million between the seven locations. It is a figure that even those in law enforcement found to be extraordinary.

"The amount of money that was funneled through this operation was definitely astounding," said DeKalb County Chief Assistant District attorney Nicole Marchand.

The investigation into the illegal gambling operation has been ongoing for six months leading up to the Tuesday raid. Undercover officers spent time in the establishments, racking up winnings and getting paid by cafe employees. The total amount of cash seized Tuesday totaled \$21,000.

The sweepstakes game servers are located outside of the state of Georgia, meaning that officials will likely have to work with federal authorities to figure out where the games were being hosted. While employees of the seven Big Dawg locations could be considered accomplices, authorities stated that they were only currently focused on the people who were in charge of the entire operation.

Kokott could be facing an uphill battle if he is to be exonerated on the charges. The Big Dawg owner was arrested in Florida for running an identical sweepstakes Internet cafe as the ones he ran in Georgia. The Florida case ended when Kokott paid a \$10,000 fine, but authorities in Georgia have vowed to make an example of the illegal gaming hall owner.