

# Low-tax cigarettes in Tulsa

By Clifton Adcock  
Tulsa World

TULSA, O.K. — Cigarette purchases by the Tulsa World at several tribal smoke shops show that cheap cigarettes appear to be available in the Tulsa area, even though the state has taken action to bar such sales.

But Cherokee Nation retailers that had been selling low-tax, border-area cigarettes appear to have stopped the practice.

The purchases, made the past two weeks at six smoke shops licensed by the Cherokees and five smoke shops licensed by the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, show that while almost all of the Cherokee stores sell cigarettes with the correct tax stamp, most of the Creek Nation stores sell cigarettes bearing stamps reserved for border areas of the state.

Some Oklahoma tribes and the state have been at odds for years regarding tobacco compacts, several of which were renegotiated just prior to a 2004 cigarette tax increase that voters approved.

Under the new compacts, most tribes can sell cigarettes with an 86-cent tax stamp, but tribal stores in certain border areas can sell cigarettes bearing a 6-cent stamp. Nontribal retailers must sell cigarettes bearing a \$1.03 stamp.

However, after the state moved from a sales and excise tax to a full excise tax, cheap border-area cigarettes began to be funneled into tribal smoke shops in the Tulsa area by a few border-area retailers reselling the cigarettes to retailers outside the border area.

In the case of one store that sold cigarettes to other retailers, allocations of cigarettes went from about 35,000 cartons per year to around 1.2 million annually, a Tulsa World investigation found.

The matter went to arbitration between the state and the Cherokee Nation. In March, the arbitration panel ruled mostly in favor of the state, saying that retail-to-retail sales to move cheap cigarettes out of border areas violated the compact.

Since that ruling, the Cherokee Nation's tax commission has inspected tribally licensed stores and prohibited any retail-to-retail sales.

During last week's cigarette purchases, only one 6-cent stamp was found in Cherokee-licensed stores outside the border areas; two other packs of brand-name cigarettes were stamped correctly.

The tribe's tax commission verified that the low-tax pack, not a name brand, was part of old inventory and was bought by the smoke shop prior to the arbitration ruling, said Cherokee Nation spokesman Mike Miller.

Meanwhile, the Creek Nation, which does not have a compact with the state, continues to sell cigarettes with 6-cent stamps in the Tulsa area. Of 15 packs purchased, only two packs of Marlboros bore the correct 77-cent noncompact stamp; the rest had 6-cent border stamps.

The tribe's Trade and Commerce Authority did not respond to Tulsa World questions about the situation. In March and April, tribal officials said they were having problems obtaining low-tax Marlboros because the manufacturer, Philip Morris USA, told wholesalers their allocations could be cut if they sell to stores that resell to other retailers.

# Blackjack dealers get training & ace their tests

By Nick Sortal  
South Florida Sun-Sentinel

HOLLYWOOD, Fla. — "I can set all of the policies I want, but if you're a player and the interaction isn't what you expect, then you're not coming back," said Joe Giaimo, the Seminole's regional VP of table games.

That includes always talking them through the hand, keeping players interested in the game.

Six and an eight, 14. You

want a hit? Whoops, too many. Sorry.

Nine and six, 15. Hit? A six, 21. Very nice!

Anthony Mercurio, who came here from Atlantic City, politely explains why it takes three weeks to review something he's done for 28 years.

"There's little things that vary between casinos," he said, including where to place cards on the table so surveillance cameras can pick them up. "And we're getting to know each other."

Mercurio rented an apartment two blocks from Fort Lauderdale beach, and has bonded with other new staff, inviting them to dinner. But his digs are temporary: His wife and three children will move down soon.

"We wanted to come for the sunshine," he said. "Why not?"

That's what most of the dealers said, according to Giaimo.

"I was surprised at the ease in which people were willing

to come here," Giaimo said. "Everyone wants to come to Florida."

The building's parking lot — 2 miles southwest of the Hard Rock — tips off how the casino assembled its staff, with auto tags from Mississippi, Louisiana, Nevada and New Jersey — all casino destinations and markets the Hard Rock hopes to pull gamblers from. They also recruited from cruise ships and the Bahamas. But there's also Nova Southeastern nursing

student Anya Reyngold, 31, who dealt at New York New York Hotel in Las Vegas and at Foxwoods Resort Casino in Connecticut.

"It's like riding a bike, you don't forget," she said. The training is the most detailed she's seen, she said, especially when it came to perfecting games other than blackjack (the Hard Rock will have baccarat, mini-baccarat, Pai Gow poker, Let it Ride and three-card poker).

"At other casinos, if you hadn't dealt one of those games, you learned it on your break," she said. Not this time.

The Seminole Tribe has exclusive rights to table games in Florida, in exchange for giving the state a minimum of \$100 million a year.

When the games start on Sunday, the dealers will work eight-hour shifts — one hour dealing, then a 20-minute break — and make about \$6 an hour, industry experts say. Their real money comes from tips, as much as \$50 an hour. Sometimes players put an extra \$5 chip on the table for the dealer — if the player wins the hand, the \$5 tip becomes \$10.

"At a time when not many people are hiring in South Florida, we're having the economic impact of 800 people moving here, spending money in the area, renting apartments and eating at South Florida restaurants," Tribe spokesman Gary Bitner said.

The Seminoles will employ 3,650 dealers and staff when blackjack eventually comes to all seven Seminole casinos, including Coconut Creek and Hollywood, Bitner said.

Nora Andraos worked for 13 years at the Tropicana and the Borgata in Atlantic City, before moving to Wellington with her family three years ago.

She had been working in a bank, but will be a floor supervisor once again.

"I really missed seeing people have fun," she said. "When we moved down here, I didn't dream I'd be able to



Associated Press

Seminole Tribe medicine man Bobby Henry, left, plays as dealer Phillip Moss deals blackjack, Sunday, at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, Fla. The casino became the first venue in Florida to offer table games.

# Woman weathers tough times to earn degree

By Noel Lyn Smith  
Seattle Post-Intelligencer

SEATTLE, Wash. — A blue and white tassel hangs off the corner of a picture in Mary Platero's West Seattle living room. Nearby lies a blue graduation cap.

They could be mementos from one of Platero's children. Instead, Platero wore the cap and tassel at her June 12 graduation from South Seattle Community College.

At 47, this single mother of three daughters and one son lived through domestic violence, a failed marriage, years of financial assistance and reliance on public assistance to get her associate degree.

"I see it as the beginning to an end ... it helped give me a voice," she said.

Platero, a member of the Omaha and Kiowa tribes, and her children moved from Albuquerque, N.M., to Seattle in 1997. Since then, the family has been on some form of public assistance.

"Mary's graduation was a major event for all of us,"

said her father, the Rev. Frank Love, who was visiting from Eastern Washington.

In 2005, Platero enrolled in South Seattle Community College after working five years at a company that specialized in time sharing for employees.

"I just felt like I couldn't go past \$12 an hour," she said. "I knew there was something else better."

She also watched her oldest daughter, Rachel Love, earn an associate degree and transfer to a bachelor's program at the University of Washington.

"I'm glad she was ready to take that step," said Love, who will graduate in 2009.

Since they are both students and mothers -- Love has two sons -- the dynamics of their relationship have changed.

"She's not my mom, but my best friend, and I saw her go through that life change," Love said.

Platero relied on financial aid and scholarships, including ones from the South Seat-

tle Community College Foundation and the Kiowa Indian Tribe of Oklahoma, to pay her tuition.

This fall, Platero will start working on her bachelor's degree at Heritage University, one of South Seattle Community College's four-year university partners. She plans to graduate in 2010 then continue to a master's degree.

"That sounds so far away," she said with a chuckle.

Throughout the years, she had been interested in returning to school, but the priority was raising her children, and her domestic situation in New Mexico was unhealthy.

She met her now-ex-husband in 1983, a relationship that ended in 1997 after years of domestic violence.

"I look back at my life and think, 'I'm glad I'm not there anymore,'" she said. "I'm not under someone's control anymore, that I'm doing what I want."

When Platero and her children relocated to Seattle, they lived with her father, then in Greenwood, for a year. She

already attempted college twice, once at Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute in New Mexico and at North Seattle Community College in 1998.

"I thought it was a step forward, considering she had four little kids," her father said.

Platero was a welfare recipient at the time, and one of the requirements was that she worked at least 20 hours a week. Her job made it difficult to juggle school, work and family.

By the time she enrolled in South Seattle Community College, which is closer to the family's home, the children were older and her personal life was stable. "I felt like it was the right time," she said. "Even though I was older."

Platero was born in 1960 in Michigan. She was 4 when the family moved to south-central New Mexico, where her father did missionary work on the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation.

They moved to Macy, Neb., on the Omaha Indian

Reservation when she was in fourth grade. She quit her junior year of high school and received a GED in 1978.

Sitting on the entertainment center in Platero's apartment is a black and white family portrait, taken in the 1970s. In it, Patricia Love, Platero's mother, has eyes that sparkle as she stands with her husband, three sons and four daughters.

Love died of breast cancer in 1997, a loss that made Platero realize her strength to change her life. "I think her motivation to go through things, no matter what comes her way, really encouraged me," she said.

Students were allowed three tickets for commencement. Platero's father and two oldest children attended the ceremony while additional family members watched it by video.

"I originally wasn't going to walk," she said. "I thought, 'It's just my A.A., I'll walk for my bachelor's,' but everyone wanted to come -- I'm glad I did."

# Event to pay tribute to man killed on I-10

By Betty Reid  
The Arizona Republic

PHOENIX — Brenda Yellowhair can't talk without tears of grief.

It's the reason she won't speak at a 10 a.m. memorial today at Arizona State University for her son Byron Ray Yellowhair, who would have turned 25 today.

At the campus event, the Yellowhair family, friends and the university's American Indian community will mourn the 24-year-old Navajo who walked onto Interstate 10 near 24th Street in central Phoenix in the early morning of May 29 and

was killed after being struck multiple times by vehicles.

Byron's mother and his friends say Byron's life goes beyond that reported after his death. He was described as struggling with alcohol and anger issues. He had at least one arrest for driving under the influence and had been placed on probation for two separate convictions of aggravated assault on a police officer, according to court records.

But that was not the son his mother remembers, and she doesn't understand the disconnect between those run-ins with the law in Phoenix and the boy she raised in Kayenta

on the Navajo Nation.

She saw her son as a reserved, humble, spiritual, studious college student who aspired to become a psychiatrist or lawyer who would use his education to help his nation. Byron's friends say media reports about his past got overplayed.

"I didn't know the Byron I heard about on the news," said Kevin Russell, 27, a former president of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society and member of the Navajo Nation who will be one of the speakers at the memorial. Russell remembered his former friend as an

athletic, humorous, kind and eager to volunteer.

"When I needed a volunteer, I could count on Byron."

ASU student leaders hope Byron's death will lead to more counseling services and support for American Indian students who, they say, often undergo culture shock when living so far from home. ASU doesn't have a counselor dedicated to Native American issues. Martha Christiansen, ASU's director of counseling/consultation of student-counseling services in Tempe, said staffers are trained to help students with diverse backgrounds. The office includes

American Indian students and staff, many of whom sought help to cope with the tragedy of Byron's death, she said.

"If students find that their needs are not being met, we would like to work with them," Christiansen said.

Students believe more effort is put into recruiting students to the campus and not enough into providing support once they get there, by either the campus or their nation.

"A lot of these kids face culture shock," Russell said. "I faced it alone and I did OK. But there are students who don't have the skills to survive college by themselves."