

911 CALLS FROM YONKERS RACEWAY

» The following is a selection of the most common types of 911 calls received by Yonkers police dispatchers from 810 Yonkers Ave., the address of Yonkers Raceway and Empire City. Police received 374 calls citing that address in 2011.

42

Motor vehicle accidents

23

Traffic violations

17

Past larceny

15

Bomb threats

12

Prisoner transports

5

Emotionally disturbed persons

3

Child abuse/neglect

» The following statistics are for Empire City at Yonkers Raceway. The figures are for 2011 unless otherwise noted:

7 million

Number of attendees

40

Number of arrests

5,050 (in March)

Video lottery terminals

\$335 (in March)

Daily win for video terminals

\$7.7 billion*

Credits played

\$609.8 million*

Net win for the state

\$314.6 million*

Education contribution

\$182.9 million*

Yonkers Raceway's commission

*In the most recent fiscal year from April 1, 2011, to March 31 of this year.

Sources: Yonkers Raceway and the New York Lottery

CASINO'S ODDS OF CRIME LOW



Yonkers Raceway officer Carlos Pagan stands guard at one of the casino entrances at Empire City. TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS

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Empire City at Yonkers Raceway served about 7 million patrons last year, and only 40 of them misbehaved so badly that they were arrested.

The casino attracts about 15,000 visitors on weekdays and from 20,000 to 25,000 on weekends, and almost all of them are law-abiding. In fact, Yonkers police get only about 20 calls for service a month from the complex.

"For the number of people that are visiting that facility and the number of hours they're in operation, it doesn't seem like a very large workload," Yonkers Police Commissioner Charles Gardner said. "Their level of crime there is relatively low."

The low number of arrests and city police visits to such a busy place has the casino's operators boasting that Empire City is one of the safest places in Yonkers, the state's fourth-largest city.

"Our uniforms are very similar to the Yonkers Police Department," raceway general manager Bob Galterio said. "We get a lot of comments from people who appreciate how safe they feel here because Yonkers P.D.'s here, and they're not, but it just gives the impression of that. We have cops at every door, so the first person you see when you

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come in is a police officer.”

Police statistics back up Galterio's claims. A review of 911 calls placed from 810 Yonkers Ave., Empire City's and the racetrack's address, showed 374 calls in 2011, according to documents obtained by The Journal News using the state's Freedom of Information Law.

The calls ranged from traffic accidents, larcenies and fire alarms to prisoner transports and children left alone in cars in the raceway's parking lot. Calls to 911 reporting crimes don't necessarily mean a crime has been committed; it's simply a request for police response.

Raceway officials said most of last year's 911 calls citing 810 Yonkers Ave. as the location didn't come from their property, but from the public sidewalks or streets surrounding the raceway. They said that if a traffic accident occurs in front of the raceway's property near the busy intersection of Yonkers and Central Park avenues, police or civilians might describe the location as the raceway.

The raceway had 40 arrests in 2011 by raceway guards and city police, spokeswoman Taryn Duffy said. She explained that about 30 of those arrests were for disorderly conduct and the others were

for stolen property or counterfeiting.

Police got 15 calls about bomb threats, but Duffy said the raceway has only five in its records, with no explosives found. Duffy said the raceway has had no violent incidents on the property since the casino opened in 2006.

By comparison, Playland Amusement Park in Rye hosts about 500,000 visitors annually and it had 137 arrests in 2011 and 106 arrests in 2010. Peter Tartaglia, the county parks' director of marketing, said Playland's arrests were mostly for disorderly conduct and "little stuff."

Crimes committed at the raceway are adjudicated through Yonkers City Court.

Galterio declined to say how many of the raceway's 1,200 employees work as uniformed and plainclothes security guards. The guards are licensed peace officers, which gives them quasi-police powers, including the ability to arrest people and charge them with crimes.

The raceway official who leads the security force is Charles Cola, a former Yonkers police commissioner.

In addition to the guards, Galterio said the raceway has about 1,600 surveillance cameras in the complex, which often



Carmen Soto, 67, of the Bronx talks about the security at Empire City at Yonkers Raceway. Soto said she comes almost every day and never has a problem with security. TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS

lets his security team catch people who violate the raceway's rules. The cameras have been used to identify people who took other patrons' forgotten cellphones or property in order to retrieve the lost items, he said.

Yonkers Raceway's president is Timothy J. Rooney, whose family bought it in 1972. In the most recent fiscal year ending March 31, patrons played \$7.7 billion in credits on Empire City's machines, though that figure doesn't represent cash inserted into the machines.

State troopers initially patrolled the casinos at

Empire City and other racetracks in the state, but they were withdrawn in 2008, leaving security in the hands of the racetracks' managers. Besides the security, there are private medical responders on the property during operating hours who have an ambulance stationed there, along with a medical office.

On the afternoon of May 15, patrons in Empire City's gaming hall said they appreciated the security presence. Bronx resident Carmen Soto sat at a video lottery terminal, and she called Empire City her home away from

home.

"I think the security is good," said Soto, 67, who comes to the casino several times a week.

Soto said her friends have complained in the past about eyeglasses and wallets that have gone missing.

"I've never had a problem," said Soto, noting that she keeps her purse firmly in her lap while playing the video games.

Patrick Fitzpatrick, 72, of Rochelle Park, N.J., also said he felt secure.

"You rarely see anything. Once in a while you see people make a fool of themselves," said Fitzpat-

rick, who estimated that he comes to the casino once a week. "They're too busy losing their money in the machines."

Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano called the raceway's low incidence of crime last year "amazing," and he praised Cola for his work there.

"The owners of that track have a vested interest in making sure that track is safe because it's that reputation that will keep people coming back," he said. "They've never asked the city for additional support. If anything, they give us additional support."