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Gambling addicts "become something else"

Susan snuck away from the office to play the slots, ultimately losing thousands

By Tim Whitnell
 SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

Susan may be one of the luckier ones when it comes to problem gambling. The 52-year-old successful business management consultant — who didn't want her last name published — ultimately realized she had a problem and sought help before it was too late.

She was confronted by her husband, and after several failed attempts to refrain from venturing to a casino for hours on end, turned to a Burlington-based regional addiction counseling service.

It was a different story in the beginning, though, with her well-paying job and go-go personality helping to feed her addiction.

"Work was my first addiction. I worked a lot of hours and it was a lot of stress. In a way it was a pretty addictive environment at my work. I was usually managing multi-million dollar projects. When you are well paid they expect a lot and I was a perfectionist. The casino was my escape."

Susan worked in an office that was 20 minutes from Woodbine, a horseracing track with hundreds of slot machines located near Pearson airport. She would sneak away to go

to play the slots, often losing hundreds or thousands of dollars per visit.

"There were times I didn't think I could hit the button fast enough," she recalled.

While admitting to blowing thousands of dollars on slot machines at casinos across southern Ontario, the Halton resident had the means to eventually wipe out that self-imposed debt.

Unlike some people who morph into emotionally broken-down and financially-broke gambling addicts, Susan didn't lose her life savings, house, car or marriage through her habit. But she acknowledges her actions did put a lot of stress on the relationship with her husband.

"Everything we had was joint," she said of bank accounts and credit cards with her husband, "(but) I didn't care."

Her husband eventually figured out something was amiss based on irregularities in their bank statements. In order to avoid detection of her activities, she took out credit cards in her own name and ran up debt to their limit. She did that with two cards, she said,

and could have kept losing thousands of dollars without her husband knowing.

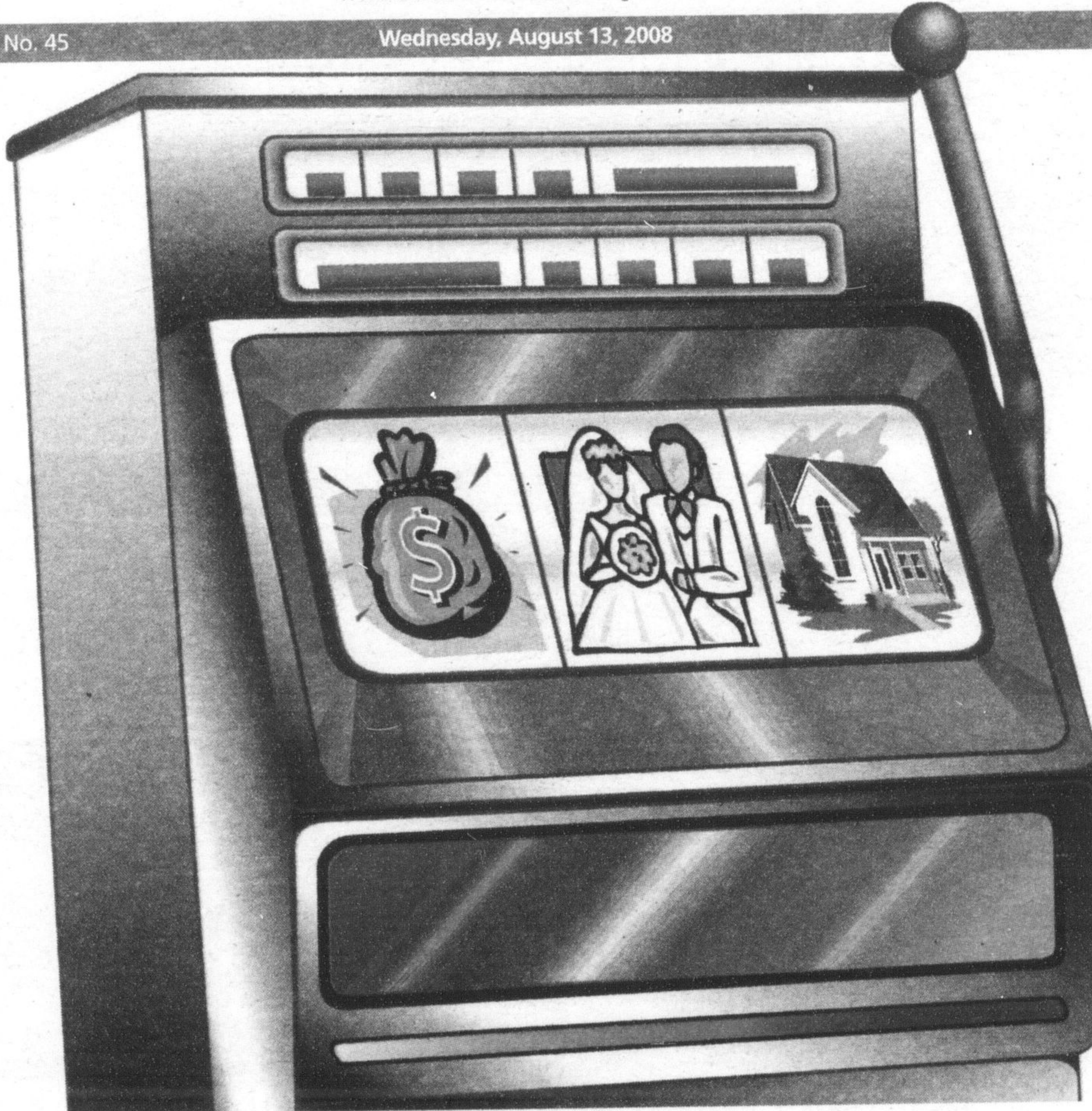
"Could I have hidden it? Probably, but it weighs you down. You come out (of a casino) with no money and wondering why you are there. I came out crying many times. You hate yourself, you become something else, you become a liar, you cheat, steal. I took from us."

She said at her worst she thought about hurting herself. "You've got this huge secret that no one understands and I did think of running my car into a bridge (support). If I wasn't dreaming about the casino, I was scheming."

Married for 10 years, Susan's husband said he initially saw no indication that his wife had a problem. "I've been in casinos lots of times. To me, it's a bit of entertainment... Susan and I used to go for a few hours. I never saw any (warning) signs, although I could see she was much more into it than I was."

He eventually began to notice odd entries in their bank statements but initially believed

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Fraud cases up, violent crime down

Halton Regional Police have released their mid-year statistical report on crime in Halton and in short, fraud is up while violent crime is down.

The analysis, created by the Halton police Niche system, found that for the first six months of 2008 a total of 234 more criminal offences occurred than during the same period in 2007.

This increase is being blamed on incidents of fraud, which jumped up from 400 offences by mid-year 2007 to 749 in 2008.

Halton Police Chief Gary Crowell said much of this increase can be chalked up to Internet scams and similar frauds that weren't tallied before. "Some of those infamous scams we see coming from African countries, from eastern European countries, we are now stating those as frauds."

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