

# Online poker becomes tourism draw

By John Brennan, New Jersey Record

On any given Sunday, Mike Azzaro – or mikeycasino, as he's known online – will travel from his home in Yonkers, N.Y., to a Ramsey hotel room for the night.

The reason is not glamorous, but it is profitable: Azzaro, 27, is a professional poker player.

Of the online players who have signed up to play in New Jersey at PartyPoker.com, 15 percent don't live in the state. You must be within New Jersey's borders to play, but residency isn't required. That so many out-of-state players are traveling to New Jersey – call it “poker tourism” – is an encouraging sign for the fledgling industry, which so far has been generating less than \$2 million per month in tax revenue for the state budget.

Mike Azzaro, sitting by the window, and other out-of-towners playing online at the Borgata in Atlantic City on Friday.

That figure is less than a tenth of the projections made last year by the Christie administration, but it is far closer to the amount anticipated by most industry analysts in the first year of play.

By crossing into New Jersey, Azzaro can engage in unlimited hours of legal online poker. New Jersey is one of three states that permit such play. The state's rollout of a variety of online games in November followed a similar move by Delaware a month earlier. Last spring Nevada – the state best known for gambling – became the first to offer online poker.

New Jersey benefits when Azzaro and friends cross the Hudson

and pay for hotel rooms and room service. And Azzaro admits he has “splurged” on purchases in the state to celebrate wins, such as after he won more than \$15,000 in PartyPoker’s first two tournaments in December.

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