

Bring your friends – interactive gaming hits Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Ships ablaze and sinking fast. Winning poker hands with only four cards showing. Fast, fun and competitive.

These machines are part video game, part slot machine. It's definitely interactive because they can't be played alone. While they are considered skill-based, fast reaction time is the biggest asset to winning.

And, yes, it is all about gambling.

Harrah's Lake Tahoe is the first casino in Northern Nevada to have skill-based gaming. The two machines just arrived and are near where the escalator to/from Harveys is located.

It's easy to see how these games could be addicting in the same fun manner that a video game can be. The difference is that those games often take a quarter to play and these are \$2 a pop. (Harrah's can raise or lower the minimum bet, but not players.)

"We want to be at the forefront of new and exciting gaming. We want to stay current and competitive," Nick Breaux-Fujita, Harrah's regional vice president of marketing for Northern Nevada, told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Interactive gaming is the latest rage in the casino industry.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

The devices came to Tahoe before Reno because this is a bigger tourist market when it comes to gaming. And that means people are not usually solo gamblers, as is the case with locals.

Two to four people may play at a time on each machine. It can be friends or strangers. Everyone stands, which makes it different from any slot machine and many table games. The social nature of the games sets them apart from any other games in the casino – even craps. They really aren't like anything else on the casino floor.

The amount players can win is randomly chosen by the machine, though there is always a chance to recoup at least a little more than the \$2 bet. The maximum win increases with the number of players, with \$480 being the most per game if four are playing.

Gamblit Poker is a bit like Texas Hold'em. While understanding poker is not necessary, it does help. There is a cheat sheet each player may use to know the various poker hands, but the

game moves too fast to look at in the moment. Each player is given two cards from a single deck. A card is turned over in the center and players “grab” it to add to their hand. Once a player has five cards then the game speeds up to the final seven or 11 cards (depends on the number of players). It’s a race and gamble to know which card to take. Best poker hand wins.

The skill involved is knowing which cards to select, being able to react fast, knowing what opponents have in order to “steal” a card they’d want, and deliberately filling out the hand to speed up the game.

Remember, this is all electronic. It’s touch screen action. No one is actually dealing the cards.

Cannonbeard’s Treasure is similar to blackjack in that players are trying to reach a certain number and if they go over they bust. The difference is the game’s computer decides what the number is and if players will get three or four cards. Cards 2-10 are face value, jack-queen-king are 10 points, and aces are one or 11. The machine does the counting – at least the total. Players need to be able to add what’s in their hand and the card being dealt.

Again, speed is important. And when a player has the maximum number of cards the dealing goes faster with a limited number of cards until the game is over.

The winner’s ship shoots cannons at the losers. With enough of those cannon balls, the ship eventually sinks.

Both are manufactured by Gamblit, which has other games in the production line. Gamblit launched the machines five weeks ago at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas. They are at five properties in Vegas, one in San Diego and now in Stateline.

Little touches to the machines include drink holders and USB ports to charge a phone.

The machines will be on the casino floor at Harrah's in Stateline for the summer. If they are popular, Harrah's plans to create an interactive area with the focus being "the casino of the future." It would mean leasing more machines, maybe putting in Ping-Pong and air hockey and the like, along with food and beverage service.

While the thought was these games would cater to millennials, casino managers are finding that age is not a factor in those who want to have some fun.