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ART HISTORY

Influence of NEPA entertainment reaches beyond the region



Ryan Sitkowski, left, and Chris Motionless of Motionless in White perform during Sonic Temple Art and Music Festival on May 8, 2025 at Historic Crew Stadium in Columbus, Ohio. AMY HARRIS/INVISION/AP

Is it skill or luck?

Pa. Supreme Court set to decide on lucrative slots-like games

By Bob Kalinowski
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Are they games of skill or luck — or a little of both?

The state Supreme Court will soon decide the fate of so-called skill game machines, the slot-like devices that have proliferated in recent years in bars, convenience stores and gas stations across Northeast Pennsylvania and around the state. Lower courts have ruled they are not gambling devices that can be regulated under current state law.

Some operators have launched stand-alone skill-game parlors that have been dubbed “mini casinos” that offer a VIP atmosphere with amenities like massage chairs and provide free alcohol to players, such as the Keystone Klub, which has venues in Edwardsville and West Pittston and two locations in Scranton.

Unlike slots in casinos, which are taxed at roughly 54%, the skill games remain untaxed and unregulated. Gov. Josh Shapiro had been hoping to add a 52% tax on the skill games, estimated to generate around \$1 billion a year, as part of his 2026-2027 budget, which is due by the end of the month.

Skill-machine lobbyists insist the machines are not gambling devices based solely on the luck of a random spin, as skilled players have a chance to win on every wager by moving symbols up or down to get three in a row in the money line — or by solving a post-spin memorization puzzle similar to the 1980s game “Simon Says.”

State officials argue much more luck than skill is involved to win — and few players even know about the post-spin chance to recoup your wager.

“It’s luck. All we do is put money in and hope you hit,” said Lester Jackson, 69, of Wilkes-Barre, while playing at the Edwardsville Keystone Club in the Gateway Shopping Center. “But it relieves a lot of stress. And it pays out fair. It gives people something to do instead of running all the way up the casino.”

Regardless of what the Supreme Court decides — whether they are skill machines or gambling devices — state Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski, D-121, of Wilkes-Barre, predicts they will be legal and taxed in the near future.

The state legislature has been waiting on the Supreme Court ruling before introducing legislation.

“You’re never going to stop people from smoking, drinking or gambling, but we can regulate it, make it safe as possible, and make sure it’s honest,” said Pashinski, who is retiring at the end of this year. “The bottom line is: how can we regulate it, but in a way so it still

who shaped the big band and swing era, were born in the early 1900s in Shenandoah, in Schuylkill County.

Today Wilkes-Barre and Scranton both have lively jazz festivals. The Wilkes-Barre Cavalcade of Jazz began Friday and the Scranton festival is Aug. 7-9.

PENNSYLVANIA POLKA

The region’s role in the development and continued popularity of polka is right there in the lyrics to the 1942 classic “Pennsylvania Polka.” “It started in Scranton, it’s now No. 1.”

Polka is part of the region’s Polish and Eastern European heritage.

One of polka’s biggest stars was from Nanticoke. John “Stanky” Stankovic died in 2025 at age 89. He is a member of the International Polka Association Hall of Fame, and Stanky and the Coal Miners performed on five continents.

Polka superstar Jimmy Sturr, a University of Scranton graduate, often describes himself as a friend and a fan, praising Stankovic’s rendition of “Apple, Peaches, Pump-

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By Melissa Janoski
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Consider the Ritz Theater in Scranton. Will Rogers did rope tricks there in the heyday of vaudeville and metal bands and jazz ensembles play there today. With that framework in mind, here is a sampling of the history of regional entertainment as America celebrates 250 years.

JAZZ

Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, influential American jazz musicians and bandleaders

THE NEPA 30

Case cements students’ rights to free speech

By Olivia Schlinkman
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In 2017, when high school student Brandi Levy was disciplined by her school for a Snapchat photo that criticized her cheerleading team and featured vulgar language, the Levy family took legal action in the name of freedom of expression.

That single, frustrated post ultimately paved the way to the Supreme Court, earning an 8-1 ruling in Levy’s favor and cementing a new legal precedent for free speech in the digital age.

NATIONAL IMPACT

It all started when the Mahanoy



THE NEPA 30
No. 24: As the nation approaches America250, we are counting down ways NEPA has powered American history.

Area freshman created a Snapchat post expressing her frustration with not making her school’s varsity cheerleading team.

“F— school, f— softball, f— cheer, f— everything,” the post read, alongside a photo of Levy



Brandi Levy listens to the U.S. Supreme Court hearing spurred by her 2017 profane Snapchat post Wednesday in her Mahanoy City home. SCRANTON TIMES-TRIBUNE FILE

and a teammate holding up their middle fingers.

Drama spreads like wildfire in a high school setting, so it’s unsurprising that Levy’s coaches got

wind of the post and suspended her from cheerleading for a year. In response, Levy’s parents sued

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