Even without the gaming included in past events, a fundraiser for the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History ended up being a successful event, says the museum's director. While attendance was down, Matt Edwards said the museum staill raised more than $40,000 at its Casino Royale night, which saw some last-minute changes that Edwards worried would hinder the museum's efforts at its largest fundraising event of the year. A little more than a week prior to the Casino Royale event, which took place on Sept. 17, Edwards received a phone call from a state agency warning him the gaming, which included roulette, black jack and craps, violated state law. Though the museum had held the event featuring such gambling games using fake money for a number of years prior, museum staff opted to make a last-minute change to the night's entertainment. "I was really impressed with the band," said Edwards of the Durham-based cover band Risse. "They drew a lot of compliments from the crowd, and I'm glad they were able to put together such a quality show on such short notice."

When the gaming aspect of the event was scrapped, Edwards said he was concerned some supporters might be driven away. "It potentially could have been disastrous. We were very fortunate it went well," explained Edwards. "We had very few people ask for refunds, and we also sold a few tickets as a result of the change." Edwards noted attendance dropped from about 150 people in past years to 95 this year. Still, ticket sales for the draw-down were at an all-time high, and the silent auction proceeds were only $100 shy of the 2015 event. The $10,000 draw-down prize was split by five winners, said Edwards. "A few of them were generous enough to make full or partial donations of their winnings back to the museum," explained Edwards. "We don't budget for that, but it's always nice when it happens." Edwards said the $40,500 raised is a "sizable hunk" of the museum's $300,000 operating budget for the year.

Looking forward

Now that the dust has settled from the debacle over the evening's events, Edwards and others are left to ponder what sort of unique entertainment the museum may offer at future fundraisers. The casino part of Casino Royale appears to be scrapped for good, pending a change in state law. "I've already started working with talent-booking agencies to explore other options," said Edwards. "We lost our hook – the thing that made us unique and different." Edwards said he's not sure in what direction the event will go in. At whatever conclusion he arrives, he hopes to offer something unique and different again next year.

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