

Online raffles are temporarily approved in Alaska, as non-profits adjust to pandemic precautions

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Organizations that hold charitable gaming permits are temporarily permitted to hold raffles online. (Jamie Klaes)

For the first time in Alaska, the state is allowing the online sale of raffle tickets. The temporary change is aimed at helping non-profit organizations, who feared COVID-19 restrictions would limit their ability to fundraise.

One of those non-profits is Alaska EXCEL, which provides education and career training to rural youth and young adults in Alaska.

Jamie Klaes is an aviation instructor at Alaska EXCEL, and helps with marketing. Lately, Klaes has been driving around Anchorage with a big, yellow duck trailing behind.

"And it's really fun to see people smile and wave, and kind of laugh, get a kick out of it. Because I know a lot of people have just had a rough year," said Klaes.

Alaska EXCEL is hosted the second annual Great Alaska Duck Race Sept. 12 in Anchorage. The fundraiser rules are pretty simple: people buy raffle tickets, and each ticket gets assigned to a rubber duck. The ducks get dropped into Anchorage's Ship Creek, and the fastest ones win cash prizes for the ticket holders.

Last year, tickets for the event were mostly sold in person, at tables set up around town. But this year, the COVID-19 pandemic complicated that strategy.

"We weren't sure we were going to be able to hold this one because of the virus," said Klaes. "But due to the fact that the gaming laws were changed to be online, and we can sell tickets online, we are holding it."

In Early June, the state gaming department issued temporary guidance, allowing organizations that hold charitable gaming permits to sell raffle tickets online. They can also draw winners online.

According to state gaming manager Katrina Mitchell, this marks the first time any sort of online gaming has been permitted in Alaska. But, it is limited to raffles. The rule change is set to expire on November 15, when the state's COVID-19 emergency disaster declaration ends.

Alaska EXCEL is partnered with 10 other non-profits for the fundraiser.

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