



LIERS HIT JACKPOT!

23 co-workers
split record
\$437M
Mega Millions
prize

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Jay Huang, owner of the Brookville shop where the winning ticket was sold before the Jan. 1 drawing.

\$437M lottery win a 'family' fortune

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It may be the fantasy of every longtime, lottery-playing workplace group on Long Island — hit the jackpot, divvy up the winnings, and book a trip to some place with hot sun, warm sand and cool drinks.

But a group of 23 co-workers at a not-to-be-named small Long Island retail business may already be in touch with accountants and travel concierges after one of their Mega Millions tickets hit for \$437 million — the largest face-value jackpot in New York Lottery history.

An employee with the group was driving to work, their attorney said, and had to call her husband to tell him their mortgage payment bounced. Shortly afterward, she arrived at work to find the group had hit it big from a ticket bought at the Brookville Auto Service Center in Glen Head. And with a nod to the ever-so-public times of 2019, the group claimed the prize Jan. 11 after the New Year's Day drawing through a limited liability company they set up with the pitch-perfect moniker, New Life 2019 LLC.

To the chagrin of those wanting details of the new millionaires, they have not been named.

"Due to the formation of the LLC, the members are not required to be identified," said Brad Maione, director of communications for the New York State Gaming Commission.

The winning workers opted for a single lump sum of \$262,213,914 and are actually dividing up \$176,155,308, after state and federal withholdings, according to a news release Tuesday from the New York State Gaming Commission. With an even split, each walks away with about \$7.7 million.

Eric Jaffe, an attorney in Huntington, said he was contacted the same day the group got back to work after New Year's and learned the Mega news. Already working with their employer and knowing several of the employees, Jaffe said, "I knew enough of the people that



Owner Jay Huang at the store where the winning ticket was sold.

Other lucky wins

New Yorkers who have won big — but not quite as big:

■ **Robert Bailey**, 67, retired federal government employee from Harlem, won a **\$343.8 million** Powerball jackpot in 2018. (The drawing was for nearly \$700 million, but he split it with a woman in Iowa who picked the same winning numbers.)

■ **Harold Diamond**, Wurtsboro, a retired elementary school principal, won a **\$326 million** Mega Millions in 2014.

■ **Seven state workers** in the Albany area won a **\$319 million** Mega Millions lottery in 2011.

■ **Wayne Harris** of Homer won a **\$105 million** Mega Millions jackpot in 2017.

they felt confident bringing me in to give guidance."

Indeed, he accompanied some of them to the lottery office on the day they handed over the winning ticket, he said.

The LLC made it easier to deal with a large number of winners, especially as they wished to remain anonymous, according to Jaffe. The LLC brought no associated "tax benefits or tax consequences," he said.

As a group, "they are the salt of the earth, great people," Jaffe said. They have long played the lottery weekly, with each putting a dollar into an envelope, the release said.

Did they boost their chances

by pooling their resources over the years? Buying multiple tickets for any drawing improves the odds, said Bruce Torff, Hofstra University professor of educational psychology and self-described "stat geek."

However — and here comes the reality check — even with a large group playing over time, it still "computes to pretty much a waste of money the odds are so wretchedly low," Torff said.

Most of the winners plan to "continue working because they view themselves as a family and not just co-workers," the release said. Also the money will go toward all the regular obligations like bills and debts, but also, new houses, college funds for their kids, and travel. As for THE moment when 23 Long Island lives changed forever? As the colleagues came to work and learned they had won, the release said, "there was a lot of crying, hugging . . . Many of the members double- and triple-checked the ticket in disbelief."

The clerk who rang up that winning ticket, Niz Aydogan, said he was glad the group came forward.

"I'm lucky to sell the ticket," said Aydogan, 53, of Carle Place. "I made some people very happy."

The store, owned by Jay Huang, has a large banner near its entrance telling customers the jackpot ticket was sold there. The store will receive \$10,000 from the New York Lottery, according to a news release.

"It's good for the boss and the business," Aydogan said.

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