

Casino Connection

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A Dynamic History

by Roger Gros



This month marks the end of the year commemorating the 75th anniversary of the legalization of gaming in Nevada.

Now, in the grand scheme of things, 75 years isn't a long time, But that's the point. In that short period, Nevada has become the capital of the casinos; the center of the universe for the gaming industry. When other jurisdictions around the world consider gaming, they either boast that they'll be the "next" Las Vegas or they don't want to be like Las Vegas. Either way, their homage to our style of gaming is a huge compliment.

I started in the gaming industry in Atlantic City. I was a dealer at Caesars and the Golden Nugget for six years before I ever visited Nevada. My experience with Nevada-style gaming up until that point was largely with the old, gruff "dummy-up-and-deal" kinds of supervisors who just wanted to get out the hands, the spins or the dice.

So when I first arrived in Las Vegas in 1985, imagine my surprise when I discovered that Nevada gaming was much more than simply getting the hands out. I learned about customer service, professionalism as a way of life, and the fact that gaming could become a profitable and fulfilling career path.

That's why it's so important to look back on the past 75 years to discover how this industry came to be the dynamic force it is today in the state of Nevada, the United States, and indeed, around the world.

Last month, I traveled to New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. It was my second trip since Hurricane Katrina ripped apart the entire region. The differences in how the two regions, which both contain gaming, responded to this disaster, is marked, and a lesson for all who work in Nevada.

In Louisiana, where there is a limited number of gaming licenses, a sky-high tax rate, and little incentive for owners to reinvest in their properties, gaming is doing well, but it is hardly a driving force in the reconstruction of the region. It's a model of why heavy government involvement in gaming is a detriment.

In Mississippi, where they adopted Nevada-style regulations in the early 1990s, gaming is leading the way in the reconstruction of the region. With the number of licenses only limited by market forces, a reasonable tax rate that encourages capital improvements in properties, and a full slate of amenities like we see in Las Vegas, the gaming industry has already reached the level of employment and revenues that were present before Katrina. The thousands of employees who have returned to the Coast are driving the redevelopment of the small businesses, the housing stock, and the heart and soul of the region that was so damaged by the storm.

Yes, jurisdictions that have copied or at least emulated the Nevada gaming blueprint are the most successful—and profitable—in the world.

For the employee in Nevada, the history is important because we need to be on constant vigil against public officials or other groups that may attack the way we do business in Nevada. There's a reason that casinos in Atlantic City or Indian gaming in California did not devastate our industry. It's the imagination, the vision and the wisdom that has been exemplified by the fathers of our industry, from 1931 until today.

Gaming is just a small piece of the resort industry in Nevada today. Most Las Vegas Strip casinos now take in less than 50 percent of their revenues from the gaming floor; a fact that would have been unthinkable just 15 years ago. Today's full-service resorts now boast five-star hotels, gourmet restaurants, luxurious pools and spas, the best concentration of shopping anywhere on the planet, and events that make the state the epicenter of media attention for extended periods at a time.

So before you dismiss the 75th anniversary of gaming in Nevada as simply a publicity stunt for the casino industry, think about what your life would be like without a healthy gaming and tourism industry driving the vibrant economy of Nevada. I think you'll realize that we have indeed reached a major milestone.

Roger Gros is editor of Casino Connection and co-publisher of Global Gaming Business, the industry's leading gaming trade publication. Prior to joining Global Gaming Business, Gros was president of Inlet Communications, an independent consulting firm. He was vice president of Casino Journal Publishing Group from 1984-2000, and

held virtually every editorial title during his tenure. Gros was editor of *Casino Journal*, the *National Gaming Summery* and the *Atlantic City Insider*, and was the founding editor of *Casino Player* magazine. He was a co-founder of the *American Gaming Summit* and the *Southern Gaming Summit* conferences and trade shows. He is the author of the best-selling book, *How to Win at Casino Gambling* (Carton Books, 1985), now in its third edition. Gros was named "Businessman of the Year" for 1998 by the Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce.