

SPRING 2020

premier

the magazine of the UNLV Harrah College of Hospitality

Changing Course

A PROGRESSIVE NEW
CURRICULUM PROMISES MORE
CHOICES FOR STUDENTS AND
MORE TALENT FOR AN INDUSTRY
EMBRACING CHANGE

ALSO

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AHEAD OF THE GAME

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RICHES TO RAGS AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

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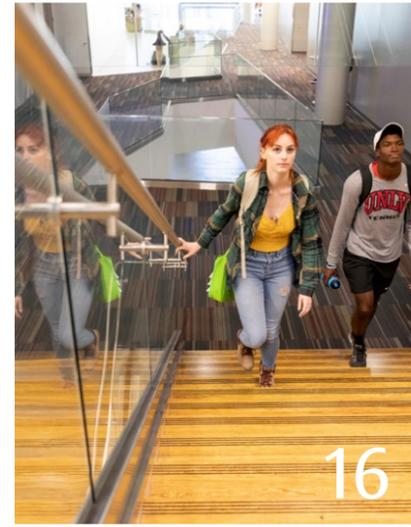
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premier magazine

SPRING 2020

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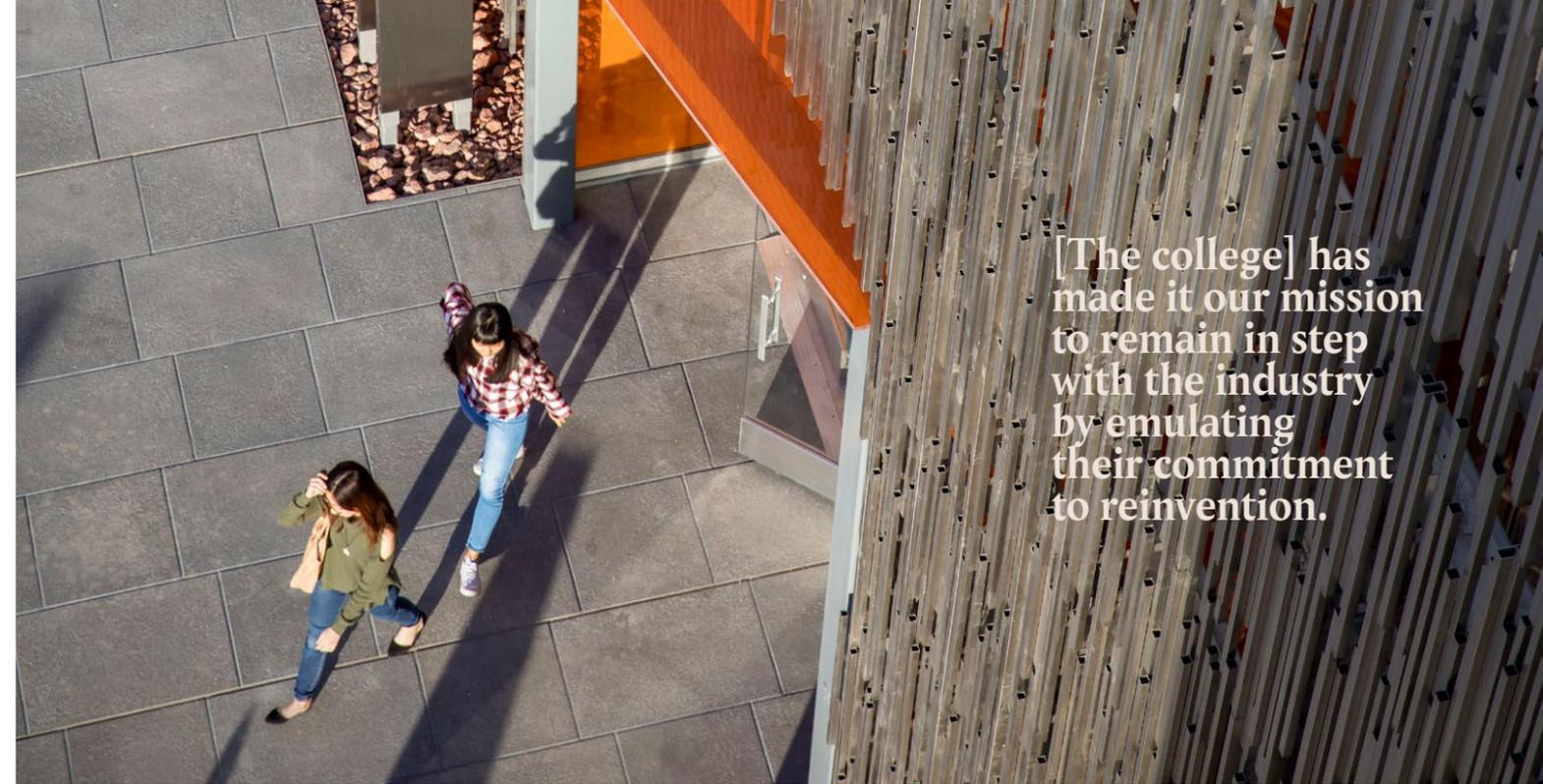
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[The college] has
made it our mission
to remain in step
with the industry
by emulating
their commitment
to reinvention.

From the Dean

The winds of change are blowing strong in both
the hospitality industry and academia

Whether you call it an evolution or a revolution, the hospitality industry is definitely going through one. Once considered almost exclusively the hotel/restaurant business, the industry has exploded into multiple sectors such as integrated resorts, theme parks, entertainment, destination marketing organizations (DMOs), meeting-incentive-conference-exhibitions (MICE), sports and events, and even museums.

The Harrah College of Hospitality has made it our mission to remain in step with the industry by emulating their commitment to reinvention. We do this by serving not only as educators, but also as surveyors of trends and champions of opportunities. If you've been following the college, you know that we've recently undergone a wholesale transformation—changing the name of our college and

moving into a new, state-of-the-art academic building. What you may not be aware of is that we've recently completed a full-scale redesign of our hospitality curriculum, which is launching in the Fall 2020 Semester (see "Changing Course," Page 16).

This is truly a watershed moment for the college, but the process wasn't easy. We worked closely with industry leaders over several years to identify the specific professional competencies that the industry now seeks in employees, today as well as those they believe will be crucial for the future. Our faculty then worked tirelessly to shape a curriculum that would deliver these highly-coveted knowledge, skills, and dispositions to the student. Furthermore, the college built flexibility into the new curriculum to give



Dean Stowe Shoemaker, Ph.D.

students more choices relative to their passions, and faculty more room to adjust course offerings as the industry continues to evolve.

These are necessary measures at a time when being viable and valuable means staying relevant and responsive. We owe it to our students to increase their marketability, and we owe it to the industry to provide a workforce that not only can make an immediate organizational impact, but also have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to move up the chain of command.

Make no mistake: The winds of change in the hospitality industry are blowing strong. And as the industry continues to evolve, so too will the William F. Harrah College of Hospitality.



Career and Alumni Services Unite!

After 12 years of focusing on internships and career readiness for hospitality students, the college's Boughner Career Center has evolved to encompass alumni relations. The change aligns with a university-level shift that merged career and alumni services functions to enhance engagement across the board. The Bob Boughner Center for Career & Alumni Services is charged with providing connections for students and graduates, promoting internship and recruitment opportunities over our wide alumni network, and supporting the college's alumni family.



Beverage Lab Gets a Makeover

The Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits Beverage Academy in Hospitality Hall received an anticipated upgrade in summer 2019. Used for teaching and hosting campus and community events, the space has been fitted with a custom stationary counter, two mobile bars, two EuroCave wine cellars (with capacity to hold more than 165 bottles), cabinetry with display shelving, and enhanced lighting. Special thanks to our donor Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, architect Carpenter Sellers Del Gatto, and installer McCarthy Building Companies.

Recent Honors

When they're not busy doing research, teaching students, and serving on committees, Harrah College of Hospitality faculty are being recognized as leaders in the industry



NHLA Women in Lodging Member of the Year (2019)

TONI REPETTI

Hospitality College Assistant Professor Dr. Toni Repetti received the 2019 Women in Lodging Member of the Year Award from the Nevada Hotel & Lodging Association (NHLA). The award, presented at the NHLA Gala Dinner & Awards ceremony October 17, 2019, recognizes a member of the NHLA Women in Lodging division who has contributed substantially to the growth, productivity, and visibility of Women in Lodging.

Horton Smith Award

CHRIS CAIN

The Southwest PGA honored Dr. Chris Cain as its 2019 winner of the Horton Smith Award, recognizing a PGA professional who serves as a model educator.

Best Paper Award

BILLY BAI

Professor Billy Bai's co-authored paper, "Virtual Reality in Hotel Commercials: An Experimental Study of Advertising Effectiveness," received the Best Paper Award at the July 2019 ICHRIE Conference in New Orleans.

Golf Professional of the Year

KENDALL MURPHY

Instructor Kendall Murphy was named Golf Professional of the Year (2019) by the Southern Nevada chapter of the PGA.

Research Assistantship Grant

AMANDA BELARMINO AND

CASS SHUM

Assistant professors Amanda Belarmino and Cass Shum received UNLV's Top Tier Doctoral Graduate Research Assistantship Grant, which provides funding for a doctoral research assistant for up to three years.

Toni Repetti (L) and award sponsor Lynn Gray from Standard Textile



Students of the college's PGA golf management program learn hospitality principles while perfecting their game.

Ahead of the Game

Looking toward a progressive future, the PGA of America partners with the Hospitality College's Sands Center for Professional Development to launch online continuing education program

by Matt Jacob

Ask any business owner, big or small, and they'll tell you some version of the following: Not every business is destined to succeed, but those that refuse to evolve and adapt with the times are doomed to failure. This universal truth applies to everything from the mom-and-pop shop that opened last week to the established organization whose history stretches back to Woodrow Wilson's first presidential term.

The Professional Golfers' Association of America certainly slots in the latter category: Founded in 1916, the PGA of America was directly responsible for growing the game and business of golf from coast to coast throughout the 20th century. But as cultural dynamics began to shift in the new millennium, the highly successful organization suddenly found itself in the figurative rough, its ball nestled against the base of a massive tree.

So much like a golfer would ask a caddy to help guide him out of such a precarious predicament, the PGA of

America's leadership team—in an effort to tweak its business model to better fit with contemporary times—went searching for some assistance. Ultimately, that search led them to the UNLV William F. Harrah College of Hospitality and its Sands Center for Professional Development.

Launched a little more than five years ago as the College of Hospitality's professional education arm, the Sands Center has rapidly established itself as a leader in creating and administering online workforce development courses that combine academic theory and industry expertise. Through non-degree certificate programs, the center offers various hospitality professionals a chance to gain critical knowledge that allows them to successfully operate in an ever-changing world while remaining a step ahead of the competition.

The PGA of America believed this type of continuing education was vital for its executive members because golf's core customer base is getting older, so philosophical changes are needed if the

organization is going to lure younger consumers whose desires and habits differ from those of older generations. Also, just as resort-casinos around the turn of the century began shifting their revenue focus away from gaming and toward elements like dining, shopping, and nightclubs, the golf industry is looking for ways to maximize its non-golf revenue potential through food, beverage, events, and elevated customer-service experiences.

So the idea was to provide the PGA's 24,000 members with the opportunity to enroll in an online program designed to broaden their skill set, improve their job performance, and put them on an upwardly mobile career path. "We feel this program will further position [our members] for success in their business and career," says Dawes Marlatt, the PGA's senior director for educational and organizational development. "The focus is on the total [golf] enterprise through strategies that will grow the top line as well as maintain operational excellence for bottom-line results."

The PGA of America's decision to partner with the Hospitality College in developing the co-branded certificate program made perfect sense, as the two entities have a longstanding relationship: Since 2002, UNLV has been home to one of just 18 PGA Golf Management University Programs, which educate and train tomorrow's golf professionals. The fact

The Sands Center has rapidly established itself as a leader in creating online workforce development courses.

that UNLV's Golf Management program is the only one in which students major in hospitality also appealed to the PGA of America's leadership team.

"We have a leading hospitality management program at UNLV," says Chris Cain, director of UNLV's PGA Golf Management University Program. "We've been doing this for several decades ... so we had the expertise, we had the industry connections, and we had a mechanism to make this work—to actually deliver a product."

Cain served on the PGA's national education committee for six years and thus was aware that the organization's curriculum was shifting with the times. Therefore, he was the ideal point person for researching and devising a continuing-education program that would best suit the PGA's needs. "I knew the [golf] market was demanding a different type of operator, one who was really good at managing golf but also knew some other stuff," he says. "And that 'other stuff'—that gap—was hospitality. So the PGA of America changed the whole curriculum for its entire program. Now, for the first time in 103 years, there are three paths to earning PGA membership: teaching and coaching, golf operations, and executive management. And that executive management is where we fit in."

The certificate program that's offered through the Sands Center is open to all PGA executives who have at least five years of work experience and a desire to pursue a career in executive leadership or general management in the golf industry. Those who enroll in the program are required to complete multiple online courses and application exercises, as well as a culminating experience. All of the material relates specifically to various hospitality management disciplines.

"The thought behind the program was, 'What can we do to train our members—

those who are already serving the industry, those who are between 35 and 65 years old who already have degrees, who are already PGA members, and already on the executive management career path?” Cain says. “And what can we do to continue to close the gap in some competencies that they may not have so they can lead an enterprise that’s not just golf, but everything—events, food and beverage, promotion, sales, and customer satisfaction—on a grander scale?”

As with all certificate programs offered through the Sands Center, each PGA course was developed primarily by Hospitality College faculty. Those faculty members also designed the rubric that PGA faculty will use to evaluate open-ended assessments and, ultimately, determine if individuals successfully complete what Cain calls a novel program.

“The PGA of America has had universities help them with developing [continuing

“[The program] is going to be the differentiator for PGA of America members who are interested in executive management.”

- Dawes Marlatt, PGA of America

education] courses where a member can go online for a few hours and get a better understanding of, say, what revenue management or turf management might be,” he says. “But to have a turnkey program where a number of courses are offered along with application exercises and a culminating experience—one that’s very similar to what a master’s student might do when they develop a thesis—it’s the first of its kind. And it’s going to be differentiator for PGA of America members who are interested in executive management.”

The program, which Cain estimates will take about three months for students to finish, went through pilot testing during the 2019 fall semester and is scheduled to officially roll out in 2020. Already, though, the PGA of America is pleased with the product. “We’ve been extremely satisfied with the collaboration and educational design throughout the development process, and the final certificate program met all of our expectations,” Marlatt says. “Our goal is to recruit the best and brightest to grow the game and business of golf. This program will highlight [our members’] capability and capacity to lead in a complex and dynamic marketplace.”

As much as Marlatt expects the

certificate program to be a difference-maker for his organization, Cain believes its success will also heighten awareness of the Sands Center for Professional Development. And with greater awareness comes the potential for greater impact—on both the Hospitality College and the industry in general.

“What the PGA project has done is give the Sands Center a better sense of how important it can be to our industry,” he says. “We had a leading organization in golf reach out to this college for expertise and professional development. And this product that we’re providing has already attracted other clients to the Sands Center.”

“We’ll be offering online degrees soon—we already have an online master’s degree—and those are great; those are credit-bearing degrees that are extremely valuable. But what the Sands Center can provide is a very quick and nimble approach to very specific needs that industry has for development of staff. It speaks so loudly to the need for lifelong learning and for the connection our college and its faculty have with our industry. Because without our activity in industry, I’m not sure this relationship would’ve happened.”

Captain Al Sets Sail into Retirement

When it comes to saying goodbye to UNLV legend Al Izzolo, Hospitality College graduates aren’t going quietly into the night

by Angela Ramsey

To say Al Izzolo is well known is a gross understatement. Even when his legions of former students don’t immediately recognize him, it doesn’t take long for the lightbulb to go on.

“Rarely do I go out without encountering a graduate,” the longtime Hospitality College professor said in a book interview in the early 2000s. “I’ve changed in 20 years, so the conversation always starts, are you Al Izzolo?”

Izzolo’s legacy, which spans four decades, triggers something profound in graduates. Some remember Al as a trusted student adviser and mentor. Others, who joined in his international educational expeditions, credit “Captain Al” with introducing them to the world. Generations of alumni know Izzolo as an industry sage, always willing to share his unique brand of inspiring realism.

Prior to joining the faculty in 1976, Izzolo was a restaurant recruiter who frequently visited the college looking to hire students because they “always seemed to work out.” Soon, though, Izzolo was the one

An industry man through and through, he found the opportunity to teach intriguing.



“Captain Al” led numerous international educational expeditions throughout his career.

being courted. An industry man through and through, he found the opportunity to teach intriguing.

“Coming from [the restaurant] industry, the three-course load—which proved to be four, with a few office hours and a bit of committee assignments—sounded like a 20-hour week. I wound up working closer to 60 hours.”

But it was a labor of love for Izzolo, who was instrumental in laying the fledgling college’s foundation—bringing in early donors, helping to create administrative standards, securing internships for students, and hosting fundraisers. He even partnered with colleague and fellow Professor Pat Moreo to write a food column titled “Under Five,” letting students know where to eat for less than \$5.

Upon his recent retirement, Izzolo remained predictably humble about his role in nurturing the college and its students into adulthood. The beneficiaries of “Captain Al’s” wisdom and guidance aren’t nearly as reserved. Here’s what some of them had to say:

Al’s Class Notes

Friends, students, and colleagues comment on Izzolo’s career, retirement, and impact on their lives.

“**BACK IN THE EARLY ’90s**, we were a much smaller college, and as such, students had the opportunity to know faculty very well. Al was the professor you went to when you wanted candid feedback. Never one to sugarcoat his advice, he was both quick to compliment as well as provide a not-so-gentle nudge in the right direction! Looking back, I realized he believed in his students more than we believed in ourselves. Al saw the potential and provided so many of us not only with hospitality knowledge but also with the confidence to move forward in our careers. Thank you, Al!

-Bobbie Barnes '93

“**AL ALWAYS HAD A KIND WORD** and plenty of time for us doctoral students. He is a true fountain of knowledge and always brought the operator’s perspective to his discussions. Congratulations on a wonderfully influential career and a well-earned retirement.

-John Farrish '10

“**AL, WE BOTH WORKED** for ARA in the 70’s. I went back to NY and worked in the hotel industry while you returned

Al’s Class Notes >

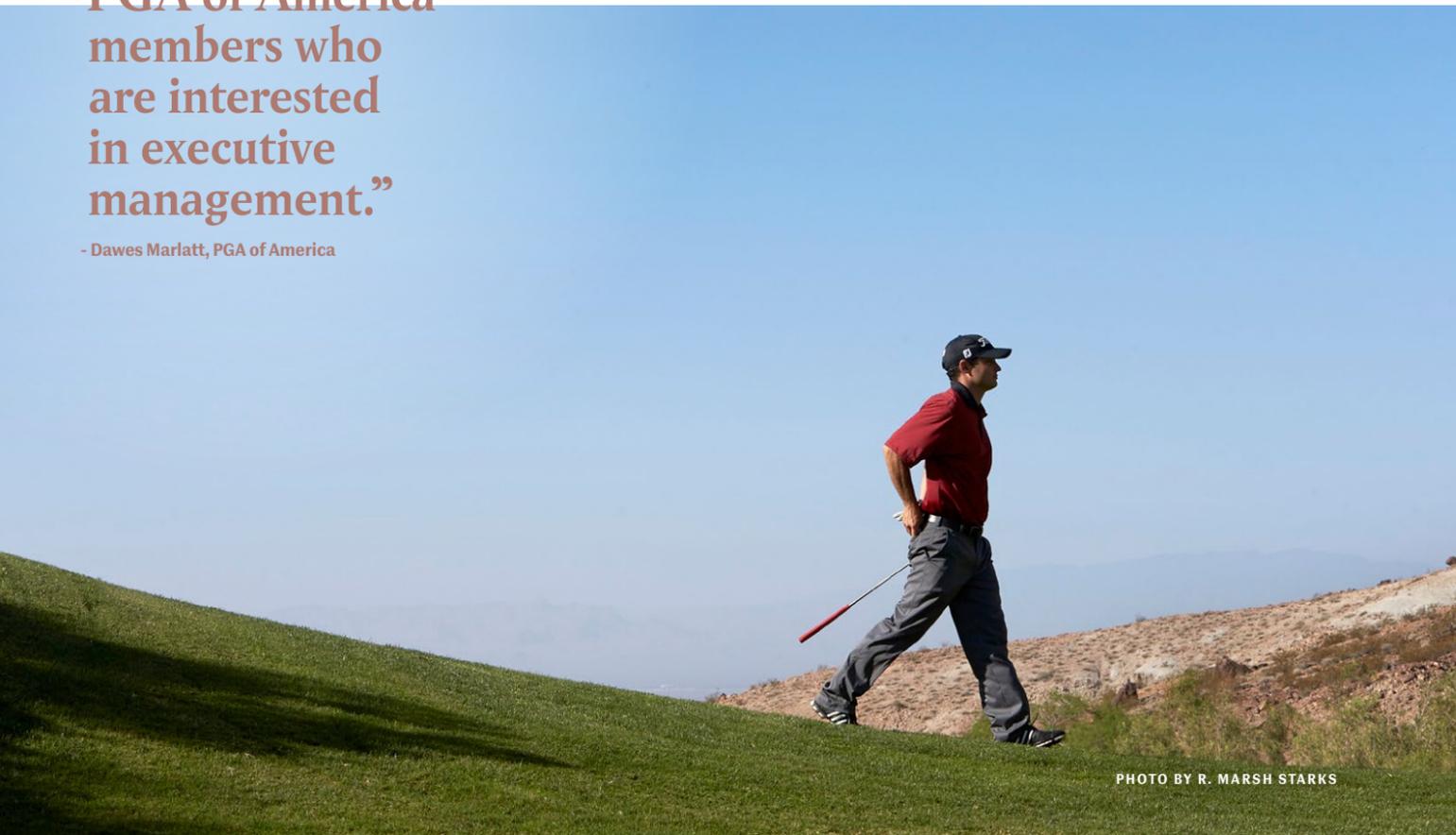


PHOTO BY R. MARSH STARKS

> Al's Class Notes

to Las Vegas in 1976 and taught at UNLV. Somehow, I thought you had moved on to another area, but you never left Las Vegas. It sure would be nice to meet with you for a coffee or drink. Time sure flew by. I can't believe it's been 40+ years!

- Floyd Benedict '71

“Al is a mentor and friend. He was instrumental in guiding many young college students, including me! I appreciate Al and his years of service. Thank you for coming to Maui and celebrating our wedding nearly 20 years ago.”

- Marc Moulinet '96

“I LEARNED A GREAT from Al's insights. Having the opportunity to take summer studies in Switzerland, he encouraged us to participate in all aspects of the courses, including engaging with other students and attending area experiences. This international opportunity served as a key to my professional growth on cruise ships. Now at Caesars Entertainment, I'm working with HR to implement his idea for UNLV's international students to intern with the company. Al, thank you for all you have done and for contributing to some key milestones in my education and career.”

- Holly Weberg '90

“

See page 52 for more of Al's Class Notes

In Memoriam Patti Shock

The hospitality community says goodbye to a meetings-and-events trailblazer and decorated scholar

Hospitality education pioneer and former Hospitality College faculty member Patti Shock passed away in November 2019 at the age of 79.

Shock was a fixture at the Harrah College of Hospitality for 25 years (1988-2013), serving in various leadership roles, such as chair of the Tourism and Convention Administration Department. Prior to her tenure at UNLV, she spent 10 years at Georgia State University.

Often credited with bringing the meetings and events specialty into the foreground of academia, Shock helped shape the hospitality curriculum at numerous institutions across the U.S. Her impact as an educator, author, and consultant is evidenced by the many professional accolades she earned throughout her career, including: Lifetime Achievement Award by the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Association of Catering Executives (2010); Distinguished Service Award by the International Association for Exposition Management (2000); and Educator of the Year Award by the Professional Convention Management Association (1996).

Shock continued to be a force in

Shock helped shape the hospitality curriculum at numerous institutions across the U.S.



hospitality education in recent years, serving as an academic consultant for The International School of Hospitality and an adjunct professor for Florida International University. When she wasn't dedicating time to advancing the discipline of meetings and events, she was pouring her energy into helping others—a generosity of spirit that impacted generations of students and colleagues.

“Patti hired me 18 years ago,” said Dr. Billy Bai, Hospitality College professor and associate dean of research. “As our department chair, she was always very supportive and good-hearted—doing everything she could to provide us with the resources we needed to advance. She was a great person and will be missed by all who knew her.”



New Faces

Tim Durnford
Associate Dean of Finance
and Administration

A hospitality professional at his core, Tim Durnford has built his career on tackling new challenges and building great teams

by Caitlyn Lopez

From the bustling field of restaurant management to the scholarly halls of the Ivy League, Tim Durnford has always known he'd work in the hospitality industry. Now, as the UNLV Hospitality College new associate dean of finance and administration, he's ready for his next adventure.

Career

I spent 27 years in upstate New York working at Cornell University. My last two years at Cornell, I was the associate dean for infrastructure and technology for the newly created SC Johnson College of Business.

Why UNLV?

UNLV's commitment to hospitality education is what initially drew me here. I was excited by the construction of Hospitality Hall, the renaming of the Hospitality College, and the current changes to the college's curriculum.

Something surprising about Las Vegas

I was pleased to see UNLV's drive to becoming a Top Tier research institution and how much diversity we have here. I've also been impressed by the sense of pride Las Vegasans have for their community. Particularly on the heels of the Oct. 1 tragedy and the Golden Knights success, the town really came together.

Why the hospitality industry?

My father was a food service salesman, so I've been around the industry almost my whole life. Later, I got my bachelor's degree in food science and nutrition from Colorado State University and my master's in hotel administration from Cornell. I am passionate about hospitality education and how it can change the lives of students.

Ideal summer vacation

My wife and I love adventure vacations. Last year, we hiked 120 miles through Portugal and Spain on the Camino de Santiago. The year before that, we did an eco-tourism trip through Costa Rica that was phenomenal.

A time you were daring

When my wife and I were engaged, we decided to do a three-month program in Italy. We spent the fall in Rome, and we were getting married in March, so my in-laws planned our wedding. This was before cell phones and email, so they would mail us letters across the Atlantic asking which flowers or cake flavors we wanted. We had the best experience of our lives, and we came home to a great wedding, too!

New Faces



Marla Royne Stafford
Executive Associate Dean
of Academic Affairs

From the South to the Strip, Marla Royne Stafford's path in academia has been guided by her passion for research and her mission to change the lives of students.

by Caitlyn Lopez

Marla Royne Stafford recently trekked across the country to plant new roots at UNLV. Her inspiration? The opportunity to work with some great minds and help build academic programs for the burgeoning Hospitality College.

Stafford is no stranger to working at the highest levels of college administration. This Chicago transplant took on her new role as executive associate dean of academic affairs for the College of Hospitality after serving as both department chair and interim dean at the University of Memphis' Fogelman College of Business and Economics. Stafford's experience leading faculty—along with her extensive research background in marketing, advertising, and services—makes her a perfect fit for the Hospitality College.

Your role at the Hospitality College

As the executive associate dean of academic affairs, I will serve as the college's chief academic officer. That means I will be leading faculty with new initiatives, growing and promoting academic programs, working to build our research, and helping students as they move forward in their studies.

Why UNLV?

The opportunity was very exciting. The Hospitality College is one of the top programs in the world, and it's in Las Vegas, which makes it very unique. I'm excited to help further the college's mission and be part of the team that will continue to raise its profile.

Your inspiration to get into academics

A few faculty members at Rollins College in Florida, where I got my MBA, recommended that I get my Ph.D. They thought it would be a great fit for me, so I left my corporate job at Tupperware Worldwide and got my Ph.D. in marketing. It completely changed my career path into academia.

Something people would be surprised to learn about you

I started college when I was 16 and studied theater at a university in Illinois. Then at 17, I transferred to the University of Arizona and studied speech communication.

Your research passion

I have always enjoyed advertising research, but these days I'm passionate about consumer well-being in regard to health care and environmental issues. Dean Stowe Shoemaker and I have talked about the health care industry and how it relates to hospitality. We think there is a lot of opportunity in this area.

Given your background, how do you fit in with the Hospitality College?

I have done a lot of research work in services—everything from the quality of services to the advertising of services—and I've used restaurants and hotels in that research. My background is in marketing, advertising, and services, and I think that transitions nicely into the hospitality arena.

PHOTO BY JOSH HAWKINS

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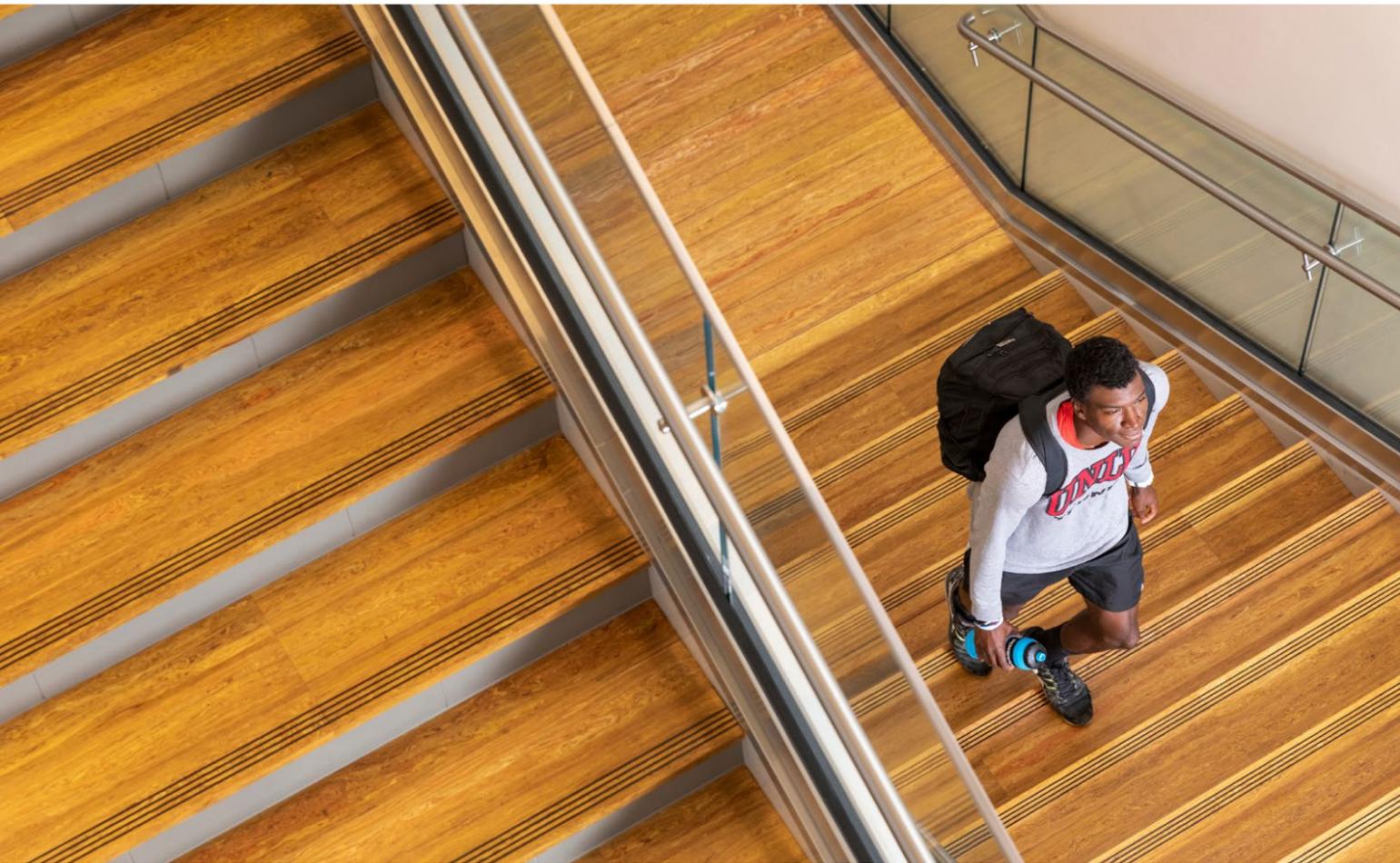


PHOTO BY JOSH HAWKINS

Hospitality has become an industry of improvisation. With its new curriculum, the Hospitality College has found a way to bend along with it.

by Angela Ramsey

When Richard Syptert came to UNLV, he searched for a degree program that would allow him to pursue his passion in sports events management. Following a brief spell in the Business School, Syptert found a permanent home in UNLV's Harrah College of Hospitality. The Las Vegas native knew what he wanted to do wasn't necessarily conventional, but hospitality checked many of his boxes.



“I felt like the hospitality program could complement more of what I wanted to do, because there’s an emphasis on management as well as serving other people,” says Syper, who is currently a sophomore. “That’s what stood out to me.”

Fellow UNLV student Cassandra Karsten found herself in a similar situation—gravitating from the business program to the Hospitality College to set herself up for a career in nonprofits.

“The focus of this college is people,” says Karsten, now a senior. “We are taught how to treat customers so they’ll keep coming back. We’re taught how to treat employees

so they’ll feel respected and want to be part of the team.”

With business principals at its foundation and service at its heart, the Hospitality College is attracting more and more students like Syper and Karsten whose interests lie outside of the traditional hotel/restaurant sectors. Hospitality has become one of the fastest growing industries because it’s not limited to one type of service—indeed, hospitality hopefuls now cast a wide net into fields such as travel, entertainment, health care, sports ... the list goes on.

But even the most open-minded students and programs have to live within the bounds of a university system, where core requirements and prerequisites reign supreme. It hasn’t been easy for students like Syper (who hopes to someday direct major tennis tournaments) and Karsten (who looks toward a future working with foster children) to find room in their

required class schedule—not to mention their wallets—to explore all aspects of their budding passions.

It has likewise been a challenge for the Harrah College to stay fluid enough to accommodate an industry so highly adaptive by nature. Innovations and trends are moving the needle at hyper speed, and the industry is seeking a workforce that is well-equipped to steer their organizations through fluctuating times.

“Industry decision makers know what they want in future employees,” says Dr. Stowe Shoemaker, Dean of the Hospitality College. “They want people who thrive in an increasingly dynamic environment but who also come prepared with a specific set of soft and hard skills.”

Recognizing the new needs of both industry and its future professionals, it was clear the college needed to move its own needle: Students like Syper and Karsten wanted more choice and more

relevance; the industry wanted a highly trained, yet more nimble, workforce. And the College of Hospitality was determined to give everyone what they wanted.

If it ain’t broke, why fix it?

In December 2017, the Hospitality College launched what many in academia consider to be a mountain-moving effort of redesigning a curriculum. It was a bold move for a top-ranked program known for its tried-and-true academic formula. But faculty members knew the industry would soon be outpacing the college, and responsiveness would prove key to student success as well as program longevity. They were also convinced that introducing a few new courses wasn’t the solution; to truly evolve, wholesale structural change was required.

“We started with a blank page, knowing that we wanted to base our new curriculum on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that the industry wants,” explains Dr. Gail

Sammons, a Hospitality College professor and member of the college’s ad hoc curriculum committee.

Learning precisely what the industry wanted didn’t happen overnight. The ad hoc curriculum committee spent months gathering the perspectives of hospitality professionals through interviews and surveys. These findings were supplemented with those collected during a 2015 education workshop titled “Hospitality 2025,” where hospitality insiders joined the Hospitality College for an in-depth look at trajectories and projected trends over a 10-year period.

Throughout the data-collection process, recurring themes and skill sets began to rise to the surface. These became the springboard for a curriculum discussion and a course “wish list.”

“Several things stood out,” Sammons says. “Our industry contacts definitely wanted analytics—the understanding of

Hospitality sophomore Richard Syper is headed for a career in sports events management.

financials. They also wanted students to understand guest services and be able to manage the service experience ... so critical thinking and problem-solving skills were big on the list.”

The committee agreed that certain identified competencies would be baked into the learning objectives for all new core courses. Students would now have to demonstrate strong communication and critical-thinking skills across the board, no matter which course they were taking. In addition, they would be required to sharpen their analytical skills through new core selections, such as Hospitality Financial Accounting, Hospitality Financial Analysis, and Revenue Management and Profit Optimization.

Under the new curriculum structure, proficiency in several computer programs, such as Microsoft Excel, will also now be required. Students are expected to demonstrate mastery of these computer programs within the first two weeks of class as part of a certification process.

This helps students by front-loading any technical learning or “refreshers” needed to succeed in each course while allowing instructors to focus on course content rather than teaching computer skills.

For a full year, the ad hoc curriculum committee created, reviewed, rearranged, and consolidated the college’s core courses so that the appropriate content would land in the path of all students. That year of blood, sweat, and tears finally paid off when the committee presented the college’s faculty with a shiny, new curriculum in October 2018; after a vote of the entire faculty, 79 percent approved it.

On the subject of choice

With university approval still pending, the work was far from over. But with a majority vote from the faculty, the college

had the green light to start refining courses under the new curriculum structure.

Perhaps the most notable shift in the new curriculum comes in the form of its core-to-electives formula: While beefing up desired competencies, the number of required core courses was actually trimmed from 58 to 52 credits. This allows students to take up to 30 credits in elective courses, giving them more room to form specializations.

“Prior to this, we were really lockstep,” explains Dr. Bobbie Barnes, Hospitality College assistant professor in residence and ad hoc committee member. “Now, we’ve reduced the amount of core

Senior Cassandra Karsten plans on using her hospitality management skills to launch a career in nonprofits.

requirements so students can construct a career path that more closely aligns with their passions.”

Under the new structure, students will have the option to choose up to two concentrations in hospitality sectors, including food, beverage, events, gaming, integrated resorts, and PGA golf management—an appealing option for students like Spert, who would have jumped at the chance to gain a wider skill base.

“Tennis tournaments are multifaceted,” he says. “I would love to learn the food & beverage and hotel management side of things to better understand all of these facets. Even if you’re concentrating in events, there’s a good chance you’ll be involved in these other aspects of hospitality.”

The revised elective structure also gives students the new option of building a 15-credit concentration outside of the hospitality college, which benefits nonconventional students like Karsten.

“Students are going to be able to explore more things they’re interested in without paying for extra classes that don’t lead to a degree,” says Karsten, who would have liked to supplement her hospitality degree with social work courses. “This opens the door for someone like me who wants to do nonprofits but needs the meetings and events knowledge. I felt like I had to pick one or the other, but now [students] can have both.”

Another creative component of the new configuration is the flexibility to launch (and, likewise, discontinue) electives according to industry demand. By adding an “X” to the end of course numbers—with the “X” denoting a kind of temporary status—the college can roll out content on a trial basis as special projects or new industry trends present themselves. “Let’s say we offer a new course on menu design and assign it the number FAB 329,” Sammons says. “If we put an ‘X’ by it (FAB 329X), we can offer it up to two times before it becomes an official

“We’ve reduced the amount of core requirements so students can construct a career path that more closely aligns with their passions.”

- Bobbie Barnes, assistant professor in residence

part of the curriculum. That way, if a trend doesn’t persist, that course topic doesn’t have to become permanent.”

Engineering a flexible curriculum embedded with the right knowledge, skills, and dispositions was the faculty’s primary goal. But the process, Barnes says, also involved creating a learning model that primes students for career mobility in the real world.

“We want students to be exposed to course material that really prepares them to move from employee to supervisor to manager to executive level,” Barnes explains. “So under the new curriculum, we thoughtfully built our freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior course schedules to mirror this progression, focusing on the decision-making skills required to get to the next level.”

Adds Shoemaker: “We’re really preparing our students for their first, second, third, and fourth jobs. Whatever sector they’re in, whatever new trend they’re facing, they can draw from the solid foundation they got here at the Hospitality College and move up in their organization.”

Mountains moved!

On October 17, 2019—virtually a year to the day after Hospitality College faculty signed off on the new core curriculum—the university gave its stamp of approval. The college’s list of elective courses, meanwhile, continues to be fleshed out by departments. Those involved describe the process as a labor of love—sometimes contentious, but always respectful.

“We had some knockdown, drag-

out fights,” Sammons recalls, “but we promised we’d hear each other out; we promised we’d do our homework and clear our calendars to meet as much as we could. If we had questions, we made sure we reached out to other subject-matter experts in the industry, our alums, and other faculty to make sure we were going in the right direction.”

There were additional hurdles. For instance, finalizing the updated curriculum meant gaining approvals from feeder programs—the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) and Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno—to ensure the seamless transfer of credits between institutions. After serious negotiations and concessions on both sides, CSN and Truckee Meadows agreed to align hospitality courses with those of the Hospitality College.

“The Nevada system has high standards,” Barnes says. “With each layer, we had to evaluate it, justify it. It’s painful, but the extra layers of approval only serve to make the product better for the students.”

It’s a product the college was determined to share with a larger audience. Coinciding with the fall 2020 launch of the new-and-improved curriculum, the college will begin offering select courses online. A full-scale online degree program will soon follow.

“We want to make sure our program is not only better but also more accessible,” Shoemaker says. “If students can’t come to us, we want to come to them. That’s how we’re going to connect students with the career of their dreams. That’s how we’re going to keep changing lives.”



DEAN'S CUP



Lee Business School Dean Brent Hathaway and Hospitality College Dean Stowe Shoemaker led the friendly competition in March 2019.

KEEPING TRADITION ALIVE

What used to be the Battle for Beam Hall has evolved into a new kind of competition, thanks to the vision of two dedicated alumni

by Caitlyn Lopez

For nearly 35 years, the Harrah College of Hospitality and Lee Business School were friendly rivals housed under the same roof in UNLV's Beam Hall. In 2009, an unlikely duo—Business alum James Ratigan, '78 and Hospitality Rebel John Peiser, '78—turned that competitive spirit into an opportunity to bring alumni together.

Thus, the Dean's Cup was born.

Dozens of proud students, faculty, and alumni come together once a year to represent Team Hospitality or Team Business in the Dean's Cup. Although the



Above: Hospitality alumnus Charles Beris, Dean Stowe Shoemaker, staff member Trevor Brown, and student William Choi celebrate winning the 10th anniversary Dean's Cup.

Cup's format has changed over its 10-year history—participants have enjoyed miniature golf, board games, and now bowling—the event has stayed true to the founders' vision of boosting Rebel pride and building lifelong connections.

How did the idea for the Dean's Cup get started?

John Peiser: Jim and I knew each other from serving on the UNLV Alumni Association's Legacy Board. He represented the Lee Business School, and I represented the then-Hotel College. The colleges were friendly rivals for years in Beam Hall.

Jim Ratigan: We wanted to create a signature event that increased both alumni membership and engagement for the colleges, so we came up with a miniature golf competition modeled after the Ryder Cup. We wanted to make it so anyone could play regardless of skill level.

How has the competition changed over the years?

Peiser: In 2011, we switched from golf to a board-game night on campus. However, it was difficult to identify a winner. We tried bowling the following year, and that worked a lot better.

Ratigan: The alumni directors for the colleges also expanded the event to include alumni, students, and faculty and staff, which was a fantastic idea. It's great to see everyone interacting together.

What's your fondest memory from past Dean's Cup battles?

Peiser: I tried to use our golf advantage the first year and enlisted some PGA golf management students to play with us. Unfortunately, we still lost to Business, but we have redeemed ourselves a few times since then.

Ratigan: John and I went to the trophy store, and I picked one that was within our \$50 budget, but it ended up being only about 8 inches tall. We thought the trophy should be a statement piece, so we purchased a much larger one that would [entice] people to compete.

What do you envision for the future?

Peiser: I hope to keep the tradition alive. Jim and I had a small dream that has blossomed into a great event, and we attribute that to the deans, staff, and everyone else involved.

Ratigan: I would love to see the event expanded to include other colleges and units on campus so that it becomes a true Dean's Cup. We have shown how it's done and how it's successful. It would be great to involve everyone at UNLV.

Dean's Cup Scorecard to Date	
Hospitality College	🏆🏆🏆🏆🏆🏆
Business School	🏆🏆🏆🏆

riches to rags AND EVERY THING in between

Hospitality professor Tony Henthorne traces the tumultuous history of Cuba's tourism industry

by Angela Ramsey

Havana, circa 1957. The Hotel Riviera rattles with laughter and conga beats as smartly dressed Americans glide between the showroom and casino. Back rooms swirl with the cigar smoke of Cuban officials and American racketeers, pockets lined with casino profits.

Fast-forward a couple of years, and a uniform-clad revolutionary named Fidel Castro stands in the same hotel, vowing to end gambling and American interventionism—a goal he would quickly make reality, along with the nationalization of all Cuban hotel-casinos. Soviet backing would allow Cuban tourism to survive over the next few decades, but the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the stranglehold of a decrepit Castro regime would ultimately thrust Cuba into economic ruin.

The story of Cuba's tourism industry is a tale of starts and stops over the past half-

century, and one that associate dean of graduate and international programs Tony Henthorne wanted to tell.

"Cuba is the largest county in the Caribbean, and it's the closest country to U.S. territory, yet it is the most unknown," Henthorne says. His recent book *Tourism in Cuba: Casinos, Castros, and Challenges*—a culmination of decades of work he's done in the Caribbean as a scholar, tourism consultant, and speaker—chronicles the island's complicated relationship with tourism against the backdrop of corruption, political upheaval, and isolationism.

But more than anything, Henthorne's book tells a story of survival.

"If you weren't in the hospitality business or sugarcane, you weren't going to survive in Cuba," he says.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Cuba was the No. 1 tourist destination in the Caribbean, and 95 percent of tourists were Americans, Henthorne says. But the casino business, run by Americans, was corrupt, and all the money was going back to the States and organized crime. This led to the repression and disillusionment of the Cuban people, which in turn left the door wide open for Castro, who promptly banished what he dubbed the "colonial" American presence. It was a dramatic, if not epic, split between the countries that endures to this day.

It's easy to see why Cuba's historical dependence on tourism is begrudged by many on the island. But if Cubans were ambivalent about tourism to begin with, communism only complicated the matter.

"During the so-called 'Special Period,'



Aging cars and embargoed goods like rum and cigars (shown above with Henthorne) have become symbols of Cuba's isolation.

after Cuba lost funding from the Soviet Union, Cubans were desperate for cash, literally starving in the streets," Henthorne explains. "They had to come up with ways to make money. While Cubans hated tourism, they ultimately decided that international tourism, which was the money machine

back in the day, would be the way to make money again."

Cubans' love-hate relationship with tourism intrigued Henthorne as a young professor at the University of Southern Mississippi, prompting him to volunteer for a fact-finding mission in 1994 to determine the viability of a study-abroad program on the island. The program, he hoped, would expose students to Cuba's two-tiered system, in which workers in

the tourism industry were paid in strong American dollars, while everyone else was paid in local currency.

"Professional people were leaving their careers as doctors, architects, lawyers, and teachers to work in cocktail lounges in big tourist hotels," Henthorne says. "It was a business environment unlike any other in the world and a great laboratory to study in."

Still, Henthorne was vexed by the obstacles that stood in the way of a full-blown tourism renaissance in Cuba. The country had fallen into disrepair under Castro. Basic services, like electricity, were unreliable. Hot water and elevators often didn't work, in stark contrast to

If Cubans were ambivalent about tourism to begin with, communism only complicated the matter.

competitors like Jamaica. Cuba seemed hopelessly locked in time.

"All those stories about 1957 Chevys in Cuba are true," he says. "The island went for many, many years without seeing much in the way of new products or new construction."

Henthorne points out that things have improved in Cuba in recent years with the help of foreign investors like Spain. Tourists still see an assortment of jalopies on the road, but elevators will work most of the time.

Still, of Cuba's 5 million visitors a year, Americans remain conspicuously absent, despite a brief thaw in relations between Cuba and the U.S. under the Obama administration. It's an artifact, Henthorne says, of the "bizarre grudge match" that has endured for six decades.

Americans can travel to Cuba if they're willing to jump through a few hoops, which include getting a license under one of 12 legal categories, like humanitarianism or journalism. You won't find tourism on the list, though—an irony not lost on Henthorne, who continues pounding the pavement in Cuba to prepare tourism executives there for the inevitability of Americans' return.



Hospitality catering students and staff prep for an event at the Liberace Mansion. Opposite page: Students McKayla Kulman, left, and Daisy Lopez, right. This page: Assistant Executive Chef Stephanie Bogert

IN GOOD TASTE

Serving Up Excellence

Mediocrity is not on the menu of the Hospitality College's thriving catering team, which is wowing hungry patrons both on and off campus

by Caitlyn Lopez

When Chef Mark Sandoval was hired as the College of Hospitality's executive chef in 2016, he was charged with developing new and meaningful hands-on opportunities for students hungry for experience.

One of Sandoval's first moves was to launch Rebel Grounds, a cozy campus café where students would get the chance to design and execute menus, train and manage staff, and serve customers.

The next step was to build a first-rate catering program, supported by a highly trained student staff.

Step three ... world domination? With Chef Sandoval, you can't rule it out.

"Whenever I walk around campus, I'm always asking, 'Why are we not doing *this*? How can our students get involved?'" Sandoval says. "They're already receiving the best education in the classroom. We just want to take what they're learning and give it some real-life context."

Hospitality College student Kenzie Collins thought her real-life context would be in the realm of casino management. But when she got a taste for events under Sandoval's guidance, the senior was captivated by the excitement of creating great guest experiences.

"I love that it's not a static desk job. It's a different experience every day," Collins explains.

Eager to learn all things events, the

Reno native decided to concentrate her degree in meetings & events and joined the college's burgeoning catering team. The culinary novice hit the ground running, working alongside Sandoval and his core team of about five caterers (and numerous student volunteers) on private dinner parties, sporting events, and formal banquets. Collins relished the chance to take what she'd learned in class and apply it to the real world:

"I love meeting and interacting with the clients," she says. "Learning to cook was also a bonus."

Turning classroom theory into experiential learning is the founding philosophy of the Hospitality College's catering program. In addition to event management, students learn how to run a business, including managing inventories, implementing cost control, and understanding budgets. It's a realistic exercise given that the catering program is self-sustaining.

"We invest the money back into things that benefit the students, whether that's replacing old prep tables, hiring more workers, or purchasing state-of-the-art kitchen equipment," Sandoval says. "The catering program is run with students in mind first."

Turns out Sandoval may very well get his wish of world domination: In 2019,

PHOTOS BY CONNIE PALEN



More Work Experience, Fewer Obstacles

The Hospitality catering team's continuing expansion offers students more opportunities to gain crucial work experience while earning money. These on-campus work options are particularly important for students who have busy school schedules, age limitations (under 21), and/or are unable to get work permits (due to international status).

Although the college is not a culinary program per se, the experience of working for the catering team helps students learn business principles that transcend hospitality sectors. These include:

- Just-in-time service
- Customer experience
- Revenue management
- Inventory control
- Wait-time management
- Food sanitation

Executive Chef Mark Sandoval (left) and hospitality student Sam Schwartz (right) create a seafood spread for a Liberace Mansion event

the catering team hosted more than 150 events, including retirement parties, council meetings, and tailgates. Also, a second Rebel Grounds location is planned for the new Black Fire Innovation building on UNLV's Tech Park campus.

Sandoval was also called upon to serve as an adviser in the design and permit process of the kitchen in the new UNLV Fertitta Football Complex, opening the door to a partnership with athletics. Plans are underway to launch an extension of the college's catering program in the Fertitta Complex's kitchen, which would serve student-athletes breakfast and lunch throughout the week. This new service load will call for the hiring of an additional chef and student caterers.

"This partnership is exciting because it's essentially students helping students," Sandoval says. "With the anticipated growth of the program, we hope to eventually serve all UNLV athletes breakfast, lunch, and dinner five days a week."

The Hospitality College catering team has also caught the attention of the off-campus community. For instance, the team is now the preferred vendor for the Liberace Mansion, a 14,400-square-foot event venue once home to the iconic Las Vegas performer.

"Our clients love to see the students working. It's a unique aspect we're able to offer," says Ivan Serna, the mansion's managing director. "Although they may be students, trust me, they have the experience and the knowledge. They always go the extra mile."

That's not a surprise, considering service excellence is a value Sandoval instills in the catering team at every stage. He coaches students before, during, and after events, and ensures they receive both front- and back-of-house training. This, he says, makes for a happy customer.

"We don't settle for mediocre; we always make time to provide students with opportunities to learn how to do something properly," Sandoval says. "At the end of the day, we're here to provide food that's delicious. That's why our customers keep coming back."

PHOTO BY CONNIE PALEN



Checking In

TRENDS, INNOVATIONS
& STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Facing the Future of Technology p.30

by Caitlyn Lopez



WHAT'S NEW IN RESEARCH

Facing the Future of Technology

Graduate student Wenrong Wang harnesses his gaming knowledge to lead an interdisciplinary study on the use of facial recognition in casinos

by Caitlyn Lopez

Hollywood has long been a pioneer when it comes to exploring the future of technology. We saw the Terminator assess threats by scanning his surroundings, Robocop identify villains by running an image through a police database, and Captain Kirk access confidential data via a retinal scan.

But this type of technology isn't the stuff of science fiction any longer.

Thanks to readily accessible facial recognition software, we all can unlock our smartphones and tag friends on social media, all with a quick scan of the face. And

“If you have a crowd of 200 people, the technology should be able to point out who shouldn't be there.”

- graduate student Wenrong Wang

it doesn't end there. Airports, retail stores, and even ATMs are using this technology to scour the facial features of visitors in hopes of weeding out criminals. It's the same reason security-conscious gaming execs are

investigating the viability of implementing facial recognition in their casinos.

“It's like picking out the bad guy,” says Hospitality College graduate student Wenrong Wang, who participated in a recent UNLV research project focused on using facial recognition technology in the casino space. “If you have a crowd of 200 people, the technology should be able to point out who shouldn't be there.”

In Spring 2019, Wang and three UNLV criminal justice undergraduate students set out to examine both the merits and challenges of employing facial recognition software in the casino environment. The interdisciplinary project was facilitated by Dr. Tamara Herold, a UNLV criminal justice professor who happens to be an expert in crowd dynamics.

“Interdisciplinary studies are unique because each person brings their own perspectives,” says Herold, who recruited Wang to lead the group because of his professional and academic background in gaming. “Combining disciplines enhances the knowledge and might even change the direction of research.”

Under Herold's guidance, the group combed through literature, visited a Strip property, watched industry-related videos, and spoke with casino professionals. As the information-gathering process progressed, the team came to recognize the technical difficulties associated with launching a facial recognition program in casinos. Plaguing the process, generally, are such challenges as size (casino floors are sprawling, high-traffic areas); dynamic

lighting (casinos often contain flashing lights); and image-capture limitations (individuals passing through common areas are rarely static long enough to adequately capture).

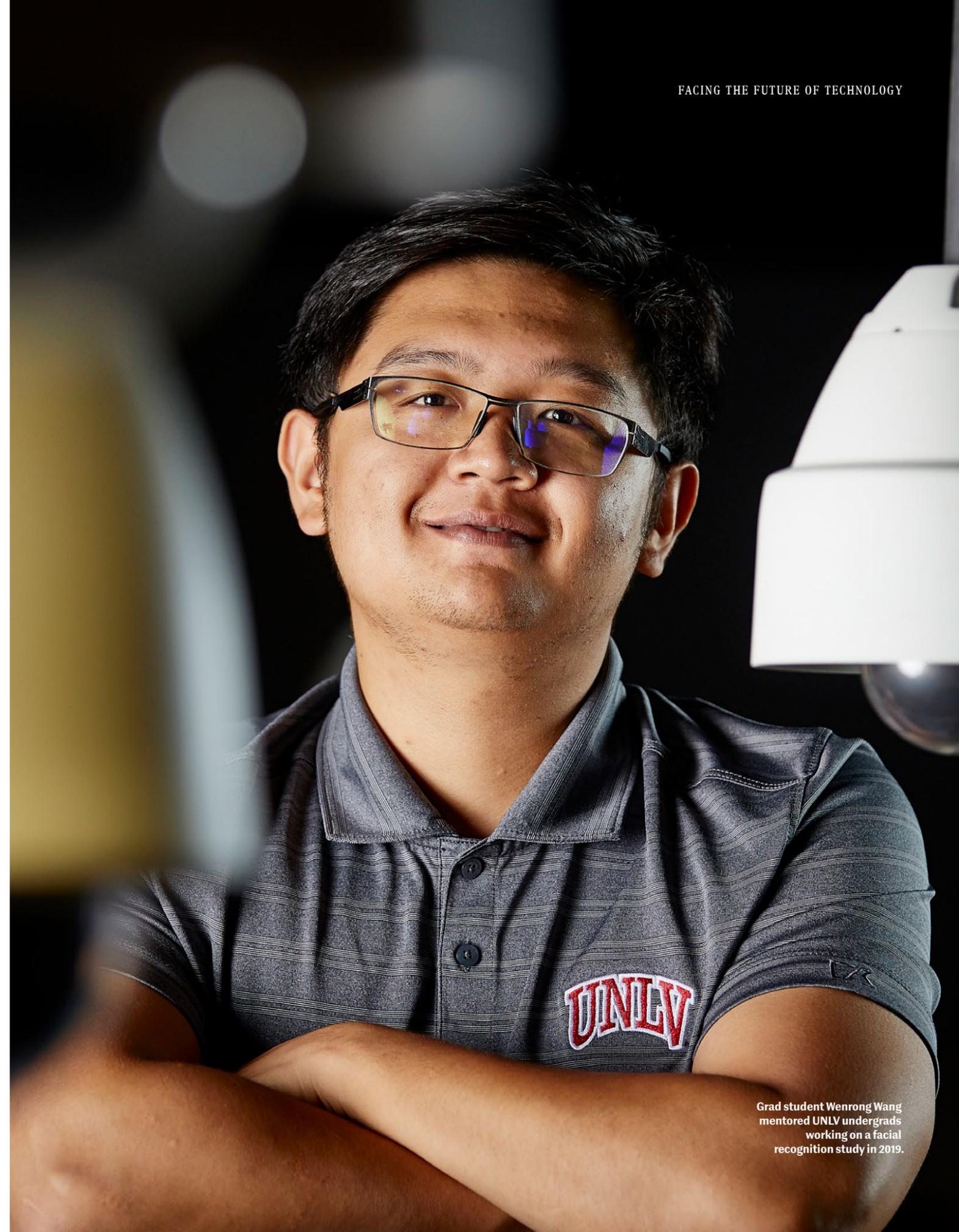
Wang says one guest speaker, a security director for a local casino, told the research group that his property had to abandon facial recognition software years ago because it wasn't producing consistent results. “The overall purpose of the technology is to reduce security's workload, but if it's not accurate or working as it should, then it can actually do the opposite,” Wang says. “Older properties often suffer because they weren't constructed with this technology in mind. It's also expensive to maintain the database and purchase high-quality cameras.”

As they got deeper into their research and closer to writing their final paper, Wang and his colleagues discovered that security isn't the only factor driving the use of facial recognition software in casinos. In New Zealand, for example, casino operators are testing facial recognition as a tool to identify problem gamblers for intervention purposes; other organizations are examining using the technology to flag high rollers and VIP guests so that premium services can be activated.

Of course, as Wang points out, these practices can raise serious ethical questions. “There's a fine line between increasing guest safety and invading one's privacy,” he says. “The technology can prevent problem gamblers from playing, but is that the casino's responsibility? And what if a VIP guest doesn't want extra attention? Are you invading their privacy by identifying them through the software?”

Casinos will have to grapple with these types of questions as facial recognition programs improve and costs come down. And when that time comes, Wang—who recently graduated and is now working for a major Strip property—may very well be sitting at the table helping to determine how the technology will figure into the hospitality industry's future.

PHOTO BY JOSH HAWKINS



Grad student Wenrong Wang mentored UNLV undergrads working on a facial recognition study in 2019.

WHAT'S NEW IN RESEARCH

Playing With House Money

A breakthrough research project landed hospitality undergrad Jasmine Nemati a top-tier journal credit and the experience of a lifetime

by Angela Ramsey

Class, study, work, repeat. Such is the grind of the typical undergrad hospitality management student. Voluntarily taking on additional tasks—let alone a complex, time-consuming research project—is an act of sheer audacity.

“My parents taught me that my only obstacle in life is me.”

- Hospitality College student Jasmine Nemati

Enter Harrah College of Hospitality student Jasmine Nemati, whose interest in research sprang not from boldness but from curiosity. The more time she spent studying, working, and interning, the more questions she had about the inner workings of the hospitality industry – and the more she was willing to work to find answers.

The Team

The 21-year-old's curiosity was piqued in 2018 during her internship at a major Strip property. She wondered, along with key leaders in the organization, if a particular food and beverage promotion was an effective revenue producer for the casino. Knowing she would need the help of an experienced researcher, Nemati approached one of her favorite instructors, Hospitality College professor Tony Lucas.

“Dr. Lucas is an amazing statistician,” Nemati says. “Since I've always been interested in statistics in terms of casinos, I knew this project would be an incredible learning opportunity and he would be a great mentor.”

Lucas was understandably wary given the complexity of the project but was swayed by Nemati's earnest desire to enhance her knowledge.

“You don't get a lot of people who are interested in this depth of analysis,” says Lucas. “We're talking time series regression. It's pretty brutal. But Jasmine is different. I tried to talk her out of it, but she wouldn't back down.”

Refusing to back down from a challenge is a lesson the Las Vegas native learned early on. “My parents taught me that my only obstacle in life is me,” says Nemati. “I can pursue any dream; all it takes is a bright mind and dedication.”

Nemati's determination so impressed Lucas that when the original study fell through, he offered the undergrad a different research opportunity.

The Project

The new study focused on a type of casino promotion program that is used to entice players to spend more on electronic gaming devices like slots. It's a marketing strategy known as free-play.

“Customers receive dollar incentives on their player cards based on how much they play,” Nemati explains, navigating the casino vernacular like a seasoned pro. “Free-play was initially launched in off-Strip casinos with lots of repeat customers, but now it is part of most every casino loyalty program.”

A ubiquitous practice because it works in driving revenue to the casino? So it would seem.

Lucas wanted to test this assumption using scientific methods. Once Nemati was able to source the performance data through her internship connections, and Lucas was able to build the statistical model, the two embarked on a four-month-long discovery process analyzing 365 days of player behavior at a top Strip casino.

The Truth Is in the Math

Contrary to a widely held hypothesis, the data revealed that players in fact do not consistently reinvest their incentive money back into the casino. They are wagering the initial full amount—a built-in requirement—but are quick to cash out once that requirement is met. Nemati says the results suggest that rather than being loyal to a particular property, players may instead be loyal to their players card—perhaps even multiple players cards.

The findings, now published in the article “Free Play Impact by Customer Segment” in the International Journal of Hospitality Management, were not a surprise to Lucas, whose work is known for challenging conventional wisdom in the area of casino marketing.



Prior to his tenure at UNLV, Tony Lucas, worked in the casino industry for 11 years in the areas of financial and operations analysis. He is an award-winning gaming researcher and has authored several widely used textbooks, including *Introduction to Casino Management*, *Principles of Casino Marketing*, and *Casino Management & Marketing Case Studies*.



“Customers just aren't behaving the way marketers say they are behaving, which makes the considerable cost of casino loyalty programs difficult to justify,” says Lucas, who likens a casino to a complex web of “simultaneous forces.” Studying this type of environment requires sophisticated measurement tools, he explained, as well as “a brave and educated casino management team willing to challenge the status quo by providing their data.”

Working alongside Lucas, Nemati realized that standing in the sometimes-controversial space of gaming research requires not only a thick skin but also a very specific set of skills. “It ignited in me a desire to continue my education in statistics and focus in on gaming,” she explains. “It solidified in my mind that if I want to pursue gaming... I have to fully understand the math behind it.”

The Future

If you had asked Nemati when she started college if she was going to be published in a top-tier journal, she would have surely dismissed the idea. But more and more undergraduate students are getting involved in research at UNLV, opening doors that used to be reserved for those at the graduate level.

Recent Hospitality College graduate Jasmine Nemati looks forward to continuing her education in statistics.

“The opportunity to witness Dr. Lucas building this model,” says Nemati, “and then teach me how to do the study ... even having my name on this study ... I feel so very privileged and grateful.”

Beyond the many benefits to Nemati and other students, university-led research is an asset to the gaming industry, which Lucas says is going to have to move beyond business-as-usual marketing tactics in order to survive.

“As gaming spreads across the globe, everybody is going to be fighting for the same customer,” Lucas points out, “so we better start figuring out what works and what doesn't work. I want to tear down the politics of marketing and make it more about science. This is how university/industry cooperative efforts can be a win-win. This is how we can help.”

Now a college graduate, Nemati continues to look for ways that she can help the hospitality industry contend with an uncertain future. With a major research project under belt, she is now prepared to take on even bigger questions—and embrace even greater challenges.

Take It From Our Alumni

Harrah College of Hospitality alumni share insider tips on how to get the most out of a career in hospitality.

Kim Gradisher '07

Executive Director, the Tyler Robinson Foundation

COMING FROM A LONG LINE of community servants, it's easy to see why Kim Gradisher has devoted her life to helping others. Whether volunteering for important causes or going about everyday work tasks, Gradisher demonstrates daily how giving runs in her blood.

The Wisconsin native moved West on a quest for warmer weather and an education through UNLV's top-ranked hospitality program. Her focus in recreational management was a natural fit, preparing her to take on roles for such nonprofits as the YMCA, Special Olympics, and the Arthritis Foundation. Now, more than a decade after earning her degree, Gradisher continues to embody an altruistic spirit while heading up the Tyler Robinson Foundation, which assists families affected by pediatric cancer. Armed with skills she learned at UNLV and a great cause, Gradisher knows what it takes to be a champion in the nonprofit world.

Pearls of Wisdom

Build your character through hard work.

"The biggest lesson I learned throughout college was the value of hard work and balance. I was working full time while taking a full load of classes, which taught me to be driven, resilient, and finish what I started."

Get your foot in the door as early as possible.

"Be proactive. If you have no experience, start volunteering and become acquainted with the organization. Learn the ins and outs as a volunteer. Build up your résumé while taking classes that pertain to your career interests."

Understand that nonprofits are a way of life.

"You need to have a work-life balance, which can be difficult working in nonprofits. I've found ways to incorporate my daily life into my career. There are ways that I can include my family in the events and outreach work I do. If you understand that nonprofit work is a way of life, it's not much of a challenge to create that balance."

Be passionate about your cause.

"It's important for me to get up in the morning and know I'm doing something good. I feel blessed to make a difference in the world and help families touched by pediatric cancer. They are worth getting up for every day."

Make sure your degree program works for you.

"I really enjoyed my time at UNLV. The fact it's a commuter college allowed me the flexibility to work full time and study full time. The Hospitality College was right for me because it gave me a broad range of skills that helped me build my career."

Peter Arceo '96

General Manager, San Manuel Casino

INSPIRATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN

a key driver for Peter Arceo, who began working with the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians in 2015. It's what motivated Arceo to leave college in Southern California to attend UNLV's Hospitality College, and what led to his professional ascension from card dealer to casino management. Arceo credits some "great people" in his early career for empowering him to reach his full potential in their organization. He now hopes to empower others.

Pearls of Wisdom

Supplement your education with hands-on experience.

"My mentors put me in positions where I had to make decisions. Luckily, UNLV provided me with the background that allowed me to take my education and put it to practical use. Take what you've learned in school and add it to the work environment. That will allow you to grow."

Stay open-minded about possibilities.

"If you have an opportunity, keep your mind open—even if it requires you to accept a position that's different from your first option. Give yourself a wider view of the business as you work toward your goal."

Don't be afraid to get creative.

"Whether it's a tribal or traditional casino environment, complacency is the biggest threat to business. Challenge yourself to think differently: How can we create a better environment to generate more revenue but also provide our guests a great experience? It's about empowering people to be creative and try new things."

Business should also be about helping others.

"I get excited because I not only work for an organization that drives business success but also one that gives back to the community. This means that the results of our success are not only seen in the casino but also in the community. I'm also passionate about developing the careers of others. Remembering how people helped me, I get energy by helping others."

Rebels make great team members.

"San Manuel's leadership team happens to be filled with a lot of fellow Rebels. We have great chemistry, and when you're looking at leaders and forming a great team, chemistry means a lot. We come from a common background, we were educated in a similar environment, and we respect each other. We're gelling."



Lexy Coley '02, '06 MS/MBA

General Manager, Omni Dallas Hotel at Park West

GENUINE HOSPITALITY MATTERS at the Omni Dallas at Park West, where UNLV Hospitality College graduate Lexy Coley has served as general manager since July 2019. Coley developed an interest in the hospitality industry at an early age during family vacations to places like Las Vegas, where she marveled at how every employee—from the front-desk agent to the room attendant—"took care of them." Coley's passion for service brought her to UNLV, where she studied hospitality management at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Since then, she's never looked back.

Pearls of Wisdom

The hotel business is ripe with opportunities.

"One of the things that drew me to the hotel industry is that there are always positions available in the market. Plus, the hospitality industry is everywhere. If you want to move, your career can move with you."

There's never a dull moment.

"There's always something fun about hospitality. And you can always discover something that can improve the guest experience. Finding those little things, whether it be in service or processes, is what motivates me."

Know your strategy.

"In this business, service is a must because the quality of service really impacts whether or not a guest comes back. But making sure that you have a clear strategy is also important. You need to know who you are targeting and what niche you are going for."

UNLV professors know the business.

"I loved my experience at UNLV! It was great that the professors had experience working in the industry. If they read something out of a textbook, they provided real-world examples that made it make sense. I loved that once I started working in the industry, I could apply that knowledge."

Sharpen your leadership skills and doors will open.

"If you show promise and are a good leader, you will have opportunities in this business. I went from director of housekeeping to director of rooms in a year before being offered the position of director of operations at Omni Frisco. Good companies will hone in on good leadership and advance those individuals."



And the Survey Says ...

When UNLV Athletics Director Desiree Reed-Francois was looking for help on how best to set ticket pricing for the inaugural football season at new Allegiant Stadium, she turned to the Hospitality College. That led to the creation of a comprehensive survey, the results of which stand to have a lasting effect

by Matt Jacob

It's not every day that one is handed the keys to a \$2 billion stadium and told, "It's all yours to use for several Saturdays each fall." Yet Desiree Reed-Francois finds herself in that very position, as the UNLV Director of Athletics leads her football program's transition from its longtime home of Sam Boyd Stadium in east Henderson to brand-new Allegiant Stadium in the shadows of the Las Vegas Strip.

Oh, sure, the Las Vegas Raiders will be the primary tenant of the state-of-the-art jewel that's currently sprouting skyward just west of Interstate 15 and Russell Road. But in striking a deal with the State of Nevada that paved the way for the stadium's construction—and, ultimately, the NFL franchise's relocation from Oakland—the Raiders agreed to share their

new palace with the UNLV football team.

Without question, the football program's move to Allegiant Stadium will open the door to numerous revenue-enhancing opportunities. After all, a modern stadium with modern amenities is certain to enthrall the Rebels' fan base, and that increased enthusiasm figures to trickle down to the athletics department's budget.

At the same time, though, Reed-Francois—who arrived at UNLV in June 2017, just three months before stadium construction began—faced a bit of a quandary as it pertained to establishing a ticket-pricing structure for the new stadium. Sure, she wanted to maximize revenue, but she didn't want to set prices so high that it would turn fans away. Nor did she want to alienate the segment of Rebel fans whose discretionary income is limited.

What she wanted was to find a perfect balance. She ultimately got there, but not before seeking assistance from a world-renowned pricing expert, one whose office just happens to be located but a few football fields away from that of Reed-Francois.

In late August 2019, after examining data compiled from a comprehensive survey of Rebel football fans and targeted alumni, the UNLV athletics department officially unveiled season ticket pricing for next year's inaugural season at Allegiant Stadium. Less than three weeks later, a relieved-but-upbeat Reed-Francois was sitting in her office, reflecting on a partnership between her department

Allegiant Stadium will host UNLV Football and the Las Vegas Raiders.

and the UNLV William F. Harrah College of Hospitality—and in particular, Dean Stowe Shoemaker.

"How the conversation originally started was Stowe came and talked to our athletic department about creating fan memories and about improving customer service," she says. "From that came a series of additional conversations, and when I started learning more about Stowe, I discovered he's one of the world's leading pricing experts. So I asked him for his help in creating a pricing survey for us."

That request was met with an enthusiastic, "Yes!"

"I felt that it was incredibly important that I help our home institution," Shoemaker says. "I love UNLV, and it's important to create great experiences for Rebel fans—and there's nothing better than having a full stadium. Plus, I have high respect for Desiree and what the athletic department is trying to do. So the question was, 'How could I use my expertise in pricing to help the university?'"

One of Shoemaker's first moves was to loop in a former student who not only had an interest in research, but who was an internship short of completing

her undergraduate degree in hospitality management—a degree she first began pursuing at UNLV in 1997 before pressing the pause button to embark on a career in the sports world.

"It was perfect timing because I needed an internship, and essentially this survey was my internship," says Andrea Roa, who spent a decade around the turn of the century working in broadcast operations and game entertainment for Major League Baseball. "I got to work one-on-one with athletics and one-on-one with Dean Shoemaker and his team to help craft the survey."

That survey ended up being multifaceted because Reed-Francois' goal was multifaceted: Besides learning what Rebel football fans would be willing to pay for a seat at Allegiant Stadium, she wanted to find out what those fans valued in a game-day experience—everything from parking, tailgating, and the process of entering the stadium to food and beverage offerings and in-game entertainment.

"We wanted to find out what was important to our fans, what they were looking for," she says. "So we looked at this survey as more than just setting prices. This is a \$2 billion stadium, so we want to be thoughtful, strategic, and methodical in everything we do as it relates to this new era. And for us to be responsive, we needed to listen."

After initial meetings with Shoemaker and Reed-Francois in late 2018, Roa went to work, spending hours studying proper survey-writing techniques and constantly revising the questions she wrote. And as she began exchanging versions with Shoemaker—who in addition to being a pricing expert is well-versed in survey writing—she quickly discovered that putting together a detailed, unbiased survey was a lot more difficult than she ever imagined.

"What I learned through this process and working with Dean Shoemaker is that there's definitely a right way and a wrong way to craft the wording of a survey," Roa says. "Your verbiage has to be crystal clear but in a manner that's neutral. If not, you're affecting the outcome of the survey."

"We wanted to find out what was important to our fans ..."

- Desiree Reed Francois, UNLV Athletics Director

Says Shoemaker bluntly: "Surveys are complex beasts."

Eventually, with the dean's assistance, Roa was able to tame the beast, whittling an initial 100-question survey down to a more manageable 56 questions. In July, the survey was emailed in waves to more than 60,000 individuals, most of whom had previously purchased tickets to a football game or were alumni who had a known affinity for athletics.

Besides basic demographic information, survey recipients were asked where they would prefer to sit in the new stadium; what they would be willing to pay for a VIP seat compared with a seat in the upper deck; what they thought was a fair price for parking; and which in-stadium amenities they valued (and didn't value). They were also queried about their overall entertainment spending habits, and their likes and dislikes related to those experiences. They were even asked to rate the importance of the on-field product. "For instance, how many people are going to the games just because they want

to drink beer in an environment that's fun versus how many want to make sure they have the best sightlines because they don't want to miss a moment of the action?" Roa says. "At the end of the day, we really wanted to understand behavior and what drives those behaviors."

Adds Reed-Francois: "This is a very competitive entertainment town. So finding out who our customer is, what they expect, and what they want was critically important. This survey helped us identify all that."

Thanks in part to a juicy carrot—those who completed the survey were automatically entered into a drawing for a chance to win passes to an Allegiant Stadium luxury suite for one of next year's UNLV football games—the response rate was strong enough to generate a 350-page report.

“This project fits in perfectly with what the Hospitality College is trying to do in terms of its research ...”

- Dean Stowe Shoemaker

That report helped Reed-Francois determine what to charge for season tickets for the Rebels' seven home games during the 2020 season. But it also taught her much more. "We've been surveying our fans since fall 2017," she says. "But this survey took it to a different level. It broadened the scope of the answers and the data we received, and Stowe also helped us make sense of that data. Because it's one thing to have a lot of information, but how do we actualize and



operationalize the data we collected? And with Stowe's help, we were able to do that."

While acknowledging that the survey was difficult to craft and that it "was constantly on my mind" for months, Roa says the hard work was worth it—and not just because it satisfied the internship credits she needed to finally finish off that bachelor's degree, which she received in May. As much as anything, she says it positions the UNLV athletics department to get the most of out of its new home.

"When you get that nice, new Ferrari, you need to know how to drive it," Roa says. "And that's what Desiree sees and understands: Yes, we have that shiny new toy, but we really need to know how to use it. That's probably one of the reasons [she] wanted to do this survey and do it well. Because what's the use of having a brand-new stadium ... if you're not effectively utilizing it in the long run?"

As much as this survey was about

The new stadium is scheduled to open in the summer of 2020.

helping the athletic department, it turns out a second UNLV entity also stands to reap some important benefits: the Hospitality College. That's because Shoemaker says the survey yielded "a tremendous amount of rich data" that he intends to turn into a publishable academic article to further one of the college's main missions.

"This project fits in perfectly with what the Hospitality College is trying to do in terms of its research, which we want to be relevant, rigorous, and have a wide reach," he says. "In other words, it's not just research written for other academics; it's research that's written for others who can use it to help improve their business and their fan experiences."

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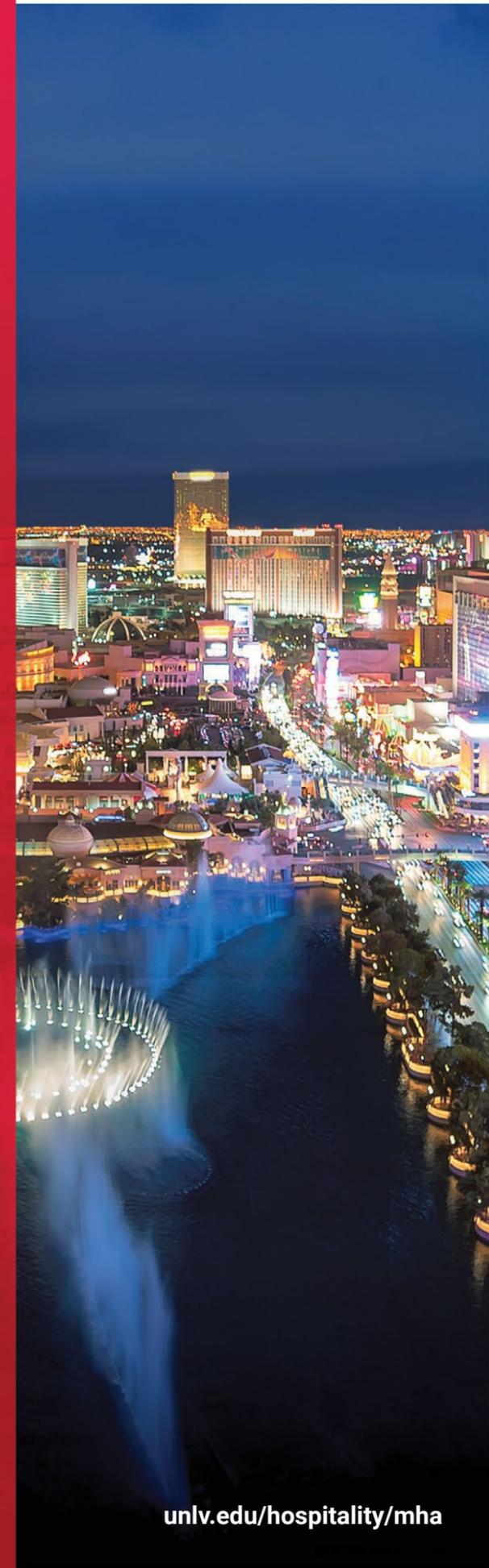
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BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Hands-on Hospitality

Students get an up-close view of the industry and the world with the help of some true champions of education

BANFI SCHOLASTIC TOUR, Italy

A College of Hospitality student is selected each summer to join food and beverage students from around the world on a seven-day educational tour of Italy. Presented (and generously funded) by the Castello Banfi winery in Montalcino, Italy, the tour exposes students to all facets of the winemaking industry, including grape cultivation, wine production, and food pairings.

“As college students, a lot of what we learn is conceptual, but this experience gave me the opportunity to see the concepts in practice. I saw the grape vines, the picking and sorting process, the barrel-making process, and the aging and bottling process. The trip is one I will remember forever, and the Banfi

team made that happen. I can’t thank them enough for the opportunity of a lifetime!”

Kristina Dean ('19), 2019 Banfi scholar

YOUNG HOTELIERS SUMMIT, Switzerland

Thanks to donations that support student development, the Hospitality College funds two qualifying students each March to attend the Young Hoteliers Summit (YHS) alongside student delegates from more than 40 of the world’s leading hospitality institutions. By attending YHS, students learn from industry experts, get the opportunity to network with fellow aspiring hoteliers, and compete against other institutions in a realistic industry challenge.



Student Kristina Dean (above) explores the fundamentals of winemaking on the Banfi tour. Left: Dean with Banfi participants.

“Getting to attend YHS was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Being able to meet other highly competitive college students from around the globe made me want to push myself for much more in life. It was everything I asked for and more. From the networking to the beautiful country of Switzerland, I truly had a blast at YHS.”

Beau McKelvey ('19), 2019 YHS participant

TRINCHERO WINE TOUR SCHOLARSHIP, Napa Valley

Under a scholarship program established by Trinchero Family Estates, a select group of Harrah College of Hospitality students qualify each January to participate in

Trinchero’s Napa Valley Wine Education program. The gracious Trinchero team provides students with tours of their wineries, in-depth tutorials about the winemaking process, gourmet meals, and a three-night stay at their historic Sutter Home.

“This trip allowed me to really experience my field before I graduated. It also set me apart as a candidate for several jobs and internships! I want to say a huge thank you to everyone at Trinchero for providing me with such an amazing experience and allowing me to meet and make friends with students who have similar interests and passions.”

Delainey Rowland ('19), 2019 Trinchero scholar



Top: Student Delainey Rowland (2nd from left, bottom row) and her Trinchero tour mates learn about the wine-making process. Bottom: Student Beau McKelvey (2nd from left) networks with students from around the world at YHS.

“This trip allowed me to really experience my field before I graduated.”

- student Delainey Rowland

CHECKING IN

CHECKING IN

On the Job

INTERNS REPORT

As part of the Harrah College of Hospitality's required internship program, the college's career services and PGA Golf Management offices placed 260 students into internship positions during summer 2019. That number increased to nearly 600 over the course of the 2019 Fall Semester.

Our summer interns worked in fields ranging from gaming to golf, and traveled to six international locales, including China, Guam, and Taiwan. Here's what some students had to say about their internship experiences.



"The most surprising thing I learned from Paws Up was how unified and cooperative all the departments must be to ensure each guest is provided with the best service. Each department is in constant communication with the others so that everyone is on the same page concerning things like special celebrations, allergies, and past stays."

MIRANDA HUIZING
The Resort at Paws Up
Greenough, Montana



"The hands-on training I've acquired has been very valuable. I am learning how to deal with real-life problems as opposed to hypothetical examples. It has definitely surprised me how many hospitality classes have come in handy and prepared me for this training."

NINA PEISCHL
Pinstripes
Oak Brook, Illinois



"I learned the things that change your life/career are usually obtained when you push the limits of your comfort zone. If I never studied in Vietnam, I would not have learned the different perspectives of the coaches that I worked with, from Egypt to China, Vietnam to France. I wouldn't have experienced the global influence and insights if I stayed in the U.S. for my internship."

COLE CHRISTENSEN
Ernie Els Golf Academy
Hanoi, Vietnam



"I learned so much about luxury travel needs and expectations. Service is never sacrificed for guests, and the extent to which the ladies and gentlemen of The Ritz-Carlton commit themselves to providing the finest personalized service continuously amazes me."

JENNIFER JAIMES
The Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe
Truckee, California



INSIDE SCOOP

It's not Hypothetical

Hospitality students prep for their careers by working on real projects for clients expecting real results

Semester grades and exams weren't the primary focus of Dr. Finley Cotrone's Hotel Operations & Management and Dr. Tony Henthorne's Marketing 2019 Fall Semester classes. Student success hinged on producing deliverables for two out-of-state companies developing innovative tourist destinations.

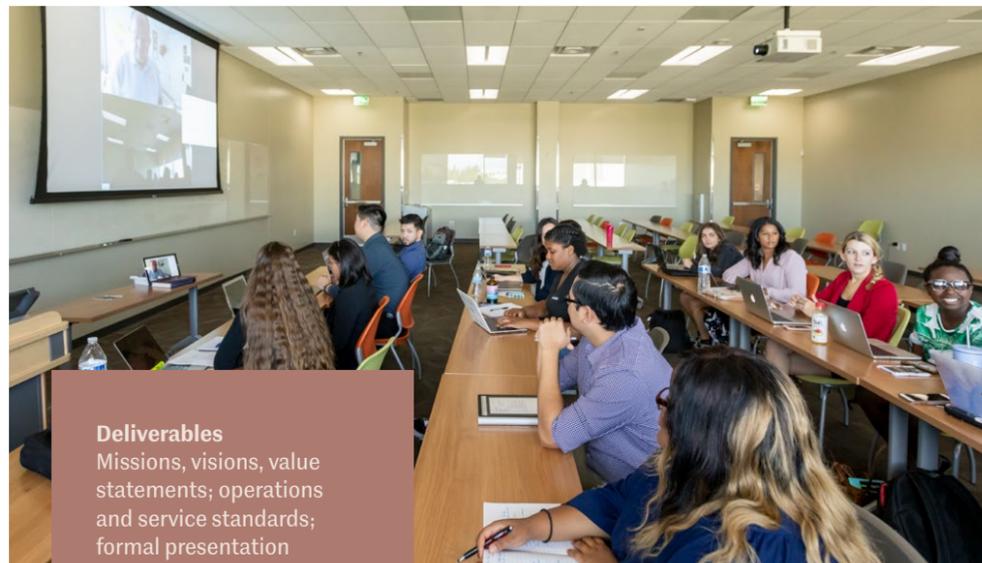
In both cases, the companies wanted to draw from the students' raw, objective talent and eagerness for results. These college/industry collaborations underscore how students can add value to actual industry projects while giving their résumés a major boost.

Project: Mineral Springs Resort
Location: Gonzales County, Texas
Instructor: Finley Cotrone
Partner: Alumnus Jim Mikula '78

Project Background

Alumnus Jim Mikula is part of a development team that is transforming a hospital in rural Texas into an artisanal hot springs resort. Built in the 1940s as a sanctuary for polio patients, the hospital and adjoining hot springs served as a center for healing and wellness for nearly 65 years.

To help set the project up for success, Mikula enlisted the help of Dr. Finley Cotrone's class to research spa/hot springs trends and develop operating and service standards for the property. Additionally, students brainstormed



Deliverables
 Missions, visions, value statements; operations and service standards; formal presentation

Skills Developed
 Effective communication in a task force; translating research into an action plan; strategic thinking

ways to incorporate artificial intelligence and other technologies to help property management alleviate labor shortages. In early December 2019, students presented Mikula with their results.

Participants say ...

"I asked the students to help me get the property started on the right foot. They were not just students to me; they were my task force. They played a critical role in developing this resort."

– Jim Mikula, mineral springs resort development team

“They weren’t just students to me; they were my task force.”

– Jim Mikula '78

"This project taught us to start with big ideas and not to limit ourselves. It's important for students to participate in real projects because we need to practice implementing concepts we learn in class. Many students finish college with great knowledge but don't know how it applies in a real workplace setting."

– Sonia Vazquez-Quintero, senior / Hotel Operations & Management course



Deliverables
 Marketing plan; formal presentation to company executives

Skills Developed
 Understanding of market research; consumer behavior; promotion strategies; market segmentation; effective communication

Project: WindMark Beach-Downtown Project
Location: Northwest Florida Coast
Instructor: Tony Henthorne
Partner: The St. Joe Company

Project Background

When Hospitality College professor Tony Henthorne approached real estate company St. Joe about its WindMark Beach project—one of the company's high-end Florida beach communities—the company embraced the idea of having Henthorne's graduate-level class develop a marketing strategy for the community's Downtown area. The plan would identify ways to attract new businesses and customers—helping to mitigate the effects of the 2008 economic crash, which stalled growth in the area, particularly in terms of amenities, like shops and restaurants.

Early in the 2019 Fall semester, St. Joe

senior marketing manager Lanier Motes visited Las Vegas to share intricacies of the project with the class; and in October, the company sponsored a trip for students to visit the WindMark community in Florida. In December 2019, company executives came back to campus for formal presentations by the class.

Participants say ...

"The WindMark Beach community was built in a different part of the region, and the type of marketing required is completely different from our other communities. I think that students from another part of the country can see the

Opposite page: Students video chat with Texas hot springs resort project developer Jim Mikula. **Above:** Students tour the Downtown area of the WindMark Beach Project in Florida.

area in a whole new way. We're excited to see a fresh perspective."

– Lanier Motes, St. Joe Senior Marketing Manager

"Real projects like WindMark have moving parts that respond to the business environment in real time. With this project, we got to examine actual data and have live clients we can direct questions to. With imagined projects we often overlook challenges, which limits our learning potential."

– Menh Diep, graduate student / Marketing Services course

Giving Back

COMMUNITY MATTERS

Paying It Forward Pays Off

Some very special Hospitality College students recently had the chance to meet with the donors who funded scholarships that provided them with an opportunity to pursue a college education. Both students and donors arrived with messages of gratitude. Everyone left feeling inspired.

MacKenzie Family Scholarship

"I came from a single-parent family and wanted to work hard to help my mom. Through scholarships, I was able to get my freshman and sophomore years paid for. It's great that I don't have to stress about finances."

— Ileana Nii, MacKenzie Family Scholarship recipient/Sophomore, interested in hotel operations and travel and tourism



(L-R) Amy Howard, Chrystal Triguero, and Anthony Martin.

Ogletree Deakins Scholarship

"I am a first-generation college student who came from two immigrant parents. So they are vicariously living the American dream through me. To be able to come home and make them proud, saying 'I'm going to college debt free' is super gratifying."

— Crystal Triguero, Ogletree Deakins Scholarship recipient/Freshman interested in meetings and events management

"Finding an opportunity to support students who have a passion for hospitality, at a program in our own backyard... it's really an honor to be part of that. We're thankful for that opportunity."

—Anthony Martin, Ogletree Deakins Scholarship/Ogletree Deakins Office Managing Shareholder

"I think we all know what it's like to be saddled with that debt and work full time while we are in school. We wanted to help lessen that stress a little bit... so you [Crystal] can concentrate on why you're here."

—Amy Howard, Ogletree Deakins Scholarship/Ogletree Deakins Associate

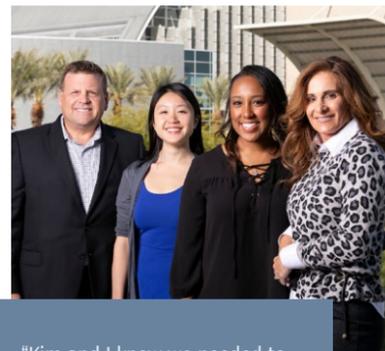
Taeubel Family Scholarship

"The scholarship made it so I didn't have to worry about paying for classes and books. I could focus on school and my grades, which is very important because I want to graduate Summa Cum Laude. I am so thankful to the Taeubels. This scholarship has truly been a blessing."

—Whitney Collins, Taeubel Family Scholarship recipient/Senior, interested in hospitality entertainment

"I love food and beverage, but I also love to look at the smallest details, which is why I like finance. This scholarship gave me a chance to explore both while letting me focus on school and not so much on the money."

—Maggie Gee, Taeubel Family Scholarship recipient/Senior, double majoring in Finance and Hospitality Management with an interest in food and beverage



"Kim and I knew we needed to give back. We'd been looking at the school for a while, and we thought 'It's about time.' There are a lot of different ways to give back, but in the end we wanted to give directly to students to see their success."

—Tony Taeubel/Taeubel Family Scholarship Founder

Above: (L-R) Tony Taeubel, Maggie Gee, Whitney Collins, and Kim Taeubel.

ALUMNA OF THE YEAR

"Colleen is an industry veteran who has contributed greatly to the success of many of Las Vegas' iconic Strip resorts, including the Cosmopolitan, where she helped shape all the marketing and hotel revenue strategies since its opening."

— Bill McBeath '86
CEO, The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas

I recall fondly the days when Colleen was my student—sitting in the front row, always inquisitive, and willing to challenge me. These qualities propelled her to the C-suite. But despite her success, Colleen remains very connected to the college. She's always willing to share her time, particularly when it comes to mentoring students. I can't think of anyone more deserving of this honor.

— Stowe Shoemaker
Harrah College of Hospitality Dean

Join us April 27, 2020, to honor Alumna of the Year Colleen Birch and Industry Leader of the Year Bill Hornbuckle at the Vallen Dinner of Distinction at Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas. For information, email margaret.hausbeck@unlv.edu.



UNLV HARRAH
COLLEGE OF HOSPITALITY
2019 Alumna of the Year
Colleen Birch '99
Congratulations!
The college, the university, and the industry salute you for your service and your support.



Hornbuckle (2nd from left) talks shop with scholarship recipients: (L-R) Darian Fluker, sophomore; Meagan Taylor, sophomore; and Frank Luis, freshman.

The Secret of His Success

From busboy to COO of one of the largest resort brands in the world, Industry Leader of the Year Bill Hornbuckle '84 has never forgotten those who helped him get to the top. Now, he's determined to help others get there too

by Angela Ramsey

The story behind Bill Hornbuckle's rise to the pinnacle of the hospitality industry is an interesting, even inspiring one. But it's not complicated: The president and COO of MGM Resorts made it the old-fashioned way—by working his way up.

It was a steady and often unglamorous climb, one that involved years of saying “yes” to changing assignments, undesirable shifts, and incremental promotions.

“I was a room service attendant and a busboy at the Jockey Club,” Hornbuckle recalls. “I worked in banquets at the old MGM. My first real job—where I ended up in a suit—was as an assistant hotel manager at the Flamingo Hilton working six days a week.”

The hospitality bug struck Hornbuckle at an early age—18 to be exact, when he got his first industry gig as a bartender in his home state of Connecticut, where at the time the legal drinking age was 18. He says he enjoyed the fast pace of the service environment but quickly recognized the hospitality scene in Connecticut “wasn't really happening.” With a few community college credits under his belt, Hornbuckle began inquiring about an up-and-coming school out West—what was then called the “Hotel School” at UNLV.

Four weeks later, Hornbuckle and his two friends were driving out to Vegas—a destination they almost didn't make. “I had paid \$100 for a station wagon,” Hornbuckle recalls. “The car died before we got out of Connecticut. A friend's dad loaned us his van ... so that's how we got to Vegas.”

Fast-forward a few years and Hornbuckle was a UNLV graduate and well on his way to becoming one of the college's greatest success stories, ascending through the ranks at Mirage Resorts, Caesars Palace, and then MGM.

“Bill is a great example of someone who really took what he learned in school and ran with it in the industry,” says Hospitality College Dean Stowe Shoemaker. “Others would have been content to stay where they were, but Bill kept on pushing.”

It's a success story that doesn't surprise Cindy Kiser Murphey, a fellow Hospitality College grad ('80, '95 MS) who is the president and COO of New York-New York.

“When Bill has a vision, he holds onto it, works incredibly hard to make it come to life, and inevitably makes it better,” says Kiser Murphey.

Hornbuckle's history of pushing the envelope may partially explain his skyrocket to success, but it's his commitment to helping others (particularly students) that truly sets him apart. That commitment is one of the reasons Hornbuckle was chosen as the Hospitality College's 2019 Industry Leader of the Year.

Among his numerous community-wide philanthropic efforts, Hornbuckle and his wife, Wendy, established an endowed scholarship fund in 2004 to provide much-needed financial support to Nevada-based students pursuing a hospitality degree at UNLV.

It was a logical decision for the UNLV alum and 40-year veteran of the hotel-gaming industry. But Hornbuckle's inspiration to create the scholarship stemmed from something even more personal. “I was poor when I was in Catholic high school,” Hornbuckle recalls. “And I didn't know it but my parents weren't paying tuition. They couldn't afford it. But the school kept me on for three-and-a-half years. Ten years later, I finally found out and said, ‘I want to pay it back! The administrator of the school said, ‘Don't pay it back; do something better. Set up a fund.’ So I paid for other kids to go to school, and it was meaningful.”

That legacy of giving is both meaningful and powerful for the recipients of the Hornbuckle Family Scholarship at UNLV. Some of the latest scholarship beneficiaries got



“Bill is a great example of someone who really took what he learned in school and ran with it in the industry.”

- Dean Stowe Shoemaker

the opportunity to meet with the MGM exec in November 2019 at his corporate office in the Bellagio. It was a rare opportunity for the students to talk shop with an industry icon and share the impact of the scholarship directly with their donor.

“It's an incredibly fulfilling feeling to know that someone I had never met believes in me,” sophomore Meagan Taylor says. “A few weeks ago, we were doing mock interviews for a class and I was incredibly nervous. It dawned on me that the president of the MGM believed in me enough to invest in me ... which was a real confidence booster.”

Before their visit ended, Hornbuckle thanked the students, wished them well, and left them with one last piece of advice: “The only thing that I would ask of you is that you remember this. Someday when you are in the position to do so, give back to someone else.”

> Al's Class Notes

“Al is a legend. He’s one of three UNLV professors whose names I remember with fondness.

- Matthew Abramsky '94

“PROFESSOR AL IZZOLO WAS A GREAT TEACHER and industry professional. I learned great things from his teachings, and he really cared about the students. If you worked in food and beverage, you realized he was right about everything he taught. Al once told us about meeting a server with a funny name, like Star Trek. I later took a trip to Oakland and went to a restaurant called Mama’s Kitchen. The host called a server over and said, ‘Hey Star Trek, take their order.’ I never laughed so hard in my life. I told my wife, ‘Professor Izzolo was serious about this!’

- Perry Keith Todd '84

“I had the pleasure of being one of Al’s teaching assistants in 2016. Getting to learn from and teach with Al was a highlight of my college experience. Congratulations on retiring!

- Emelia Santos '18

“AL WAS A GREAT TEACHER. I had the chance to travel with Aussie Al to Australia and Fiji. The trip was amazing, and Al always made great memories that will last a lifetime. He also had a beer club, and it was a



very educational class to learn about the different types of beer.

- Brayton Williams '07

“I ENJOYED CHITCHATTING with Al about all kinds of alcohol, the role beverage has in the hospitality industry, and swapping stories about the Tau Kappa Epsilon boys in his office.

- Alycia '18

“I TOOK A CLASS from Professor Izzolo in 1977. I remember him talking to us about the real world and how it would tempt us to live beyond our means as we grow in our careers. This lesson helped me build a successful 40-year career with Aramark and retire comfortably to enjoy my wonderful family.

- Tom Minor '78

“AL WEARS MANY HATS. He’s on the board of directors for my condo association and has done a great job of listening to and returning messages for many years now. He owns a few units in our area and walks around from time to time, talking with neighbors and listening to their concerns.

I knew Al from UNLV first, but I got to know him better when he became a member of our board. Wow, 43 years! Way to go! I wish you the very best, Al.

- Barbara Hermes, college staff

“IT WAS A PLEASURE to have Al as my internship instructor at the original Castaways Hotel and Casino. In later years after graduating with my bachelor’s in 1979, I coordinated internships at the Dunes Hotel and Casino for Al when I was the resident manager. Best of everything to you, Al, in future years as The Captain on the high seas.

- Gary Waters '79, '93

“Thank you for your years of passion and heart on behalf of multiple generations of students, the Hotel College, UNLV Campus & Greek Life! Stay around and stay involved. Go Rebels!

- Regent Sam Lieberman '96

“I HAVE SO MANY FAVORITE STORIES OF AL. He wasn’t just a great

Professor Al Izzolo attends a graduation in 1990.

teacher but a better friend. Enjoy retirement! You deserve it!

- Matt Snitzer '07

“ONE DAY BETWEEN CLASSES, Uncle Al caught me in the hall and said, ‘Packer, come with me. I got you an internship.’ We went to his office, where he tried to explain in vain the roles of public relations. I took the internship and still work in PR, thanks to him looking out for me. Happy Retirement, Captain. Thank you for being amazing.

- Brad Packer '95

“AL, I ENJOYED WORKING WITH YOU all those years in the Hotel College. Sandra and I wish you the best in retirement.

- Lyell Metcalf

“AL WAS PART OF A NEW GROUP of professors at UNLV Hotel College in the late 70s. What I remember best about Al was his intention to provide practical knowledge that we would use in our careers. And just as important, whenever I was on campus or at an alumni

event, he remembered me—even after 30 years. My stepdaughter Sydney Bosshart '12 also went to the Hospitality College. I asked who the professors were, and she mentioned Al was teaching. So, I said, ‘Great guy. Knows his stuff, and is an easy A.’

- Jim Mikula '78

“CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR RETIREMENT! Wishing you all the very best for the coming years.

- Lina Kim, assistant professor

“I MET AL AT THE LOYOLA UNIVERSITY food service, an ARA facility. I was there on an ARA fellowship, and Al was a corporate exec. We found humor to carry us through some stressful situations, like cafeteria food fights! We stayed in touch over the years, and both married lovely, understanding ladies. He is a class act, and I wish him well!

- Gary W. Brown '73

“IT WAS ALWAYS AN HONOR to associate with Al Izzolo. When I interviewed for a Japan internship he ran, I was comforted knowing it’d be a great opportunity since he was involved. When I found out I was selected, Al was thrilled about what Japan had in store for them and vice versa. If he wasn’t involved directly with the internship, I’m not sure I would have been as comfortable traveling overseas. I had one of the greatest experiences in my life. Sending you the very



UNLV legend Al Izzolo and his wife Cora attend the college's 2019 Vallen Dinner.

best, Al, and thank you for all of your dedication to hotel education.

- Jennifer Zajac Winters '93

“TRAVELING ON A TRAIN TO ROME and wishing I spoke Italian, Al jokingly said to ‘just-a add-a an a-ya to-a da end-a of-a every-a word-a.’ Perfecto! Hey, wait?!

- Patricia Foster '89

“AL, CONGRATS ON YOUR RETIREMENT! I enjoyed chatting with you when you stopped by the Boughner Career Center when I worked there back in BEH. Enjoy retirement!

- Lisa Rubin '12 Ph.D.

“I TRAVELED WITH AL to Australia and Fiji, as well as Europe. He came to be known as ‘Euro Al’ to us at the time. I have never learned so much as I did being immersed in the culture. It was amazing, fun, and had a lasting impact on my life.

- Angela (Szewczyk) Archibald '07

“There are too many memories to mention just one, but two things stick out in my mind from my days at UNLV: Runnin’ Rebel basketball and Al Izzolo—specifically summer studies in Switzerland.

- Lucia DePreto '92

“THE FIRST TIME I MET AL, I was walking through the Hotel College to my pre-law class. I

Al's Class Notes >

> Al's Class Notes

saw a flyer about trips to Australia and Europe, and contacted him to learn more. While my major was law and not hospitality, he still highly suggested that I go on the trip. If I enjoyed it, he said I should consider changing my major. I loved the trip and enjoyed learning about the hospitality industry, which convinced me to change my major. I am a graduate of the Hotel College with a bachelor's and master's, thanks to Professor Al.

- Teresa Manley '08

“BIG AL WAS A MENTOR and a real leader for students. It was always a great time to attend the Hotel Association happy hours at Sunset Park on Fridays. He would share his knowledge and experience with students. After graduating, I collaborated with Mr. Izzolo in establishing an internship program at many of the gaming/hotel companies in Las Vegas. Thank you for your friendship, Al.

- Bob Hester '79

“There will forever only be one Captain Al! I could go on and on about my favorite stories! So many great memories and travels made with you, Al, and I treasure them all! Congratulations on your retirement. Keep living the dream! Thanks for all the laughter and the great times shared.

- Angela Birdsell Siegel '91

“AL WAS NOT ONLY a very important person during my time as a student but also in my early career. We had great times together during our travels and as representatives of IFSEA. He was very helpful to my son Paul, who also received his master's from our college. Al is someone who you will always remember and cannot thank enough. Thanks Al!

- Don Boobe '78

“THANK YOU, PROFESSOR AL, for helping us all create lifelong memories!

- Tessa Riess-Norton '05

“ONE OF MY FAVORITE MEMORIES was a joint-school (UNLV & NYIT) trip for 3.5 weeks in Europe, led by Captain Al. Thanks for the memories, sir! Enjoy retirement!

- Roberto Ramirez '05

“AL AND I HAVE REMAINED FRIENDS and see each other a few times a year to catch up. We actually spent time together at Gary Austin's Sportsbook while I was a student! Last year during the UNLV fundraiser, I actually bought a few bricks for AL to honor and memorialize our friendship. Even with all of this, I will never forgive him for giving me a B on my internship paper when I believe I deserved an A! Al, congratulations on such a great career that affected so many in such a positive way!

- Bob Aeronson '84

“PROFESSOR IZZOLO WAS one of my favorites! He was always upbeat and would do anything to help. Before I was graduated, he oversaw my internship in New Jersey. When I returned to school for my last semester, completing my internship paper seemed to slip my mind on various occasions. Before I knew it, graduation was upon us. Realizing I messed up, Al smiled, shook his head, and allowed me to hand in my paper-only a semester late! I was forever grateful. I wish him only the best of everything!

- Rochelle Bernstein '89

“AL WAS A WONDERFUL PROFESSOR and mentor. He gave me the first opportunity in a leadership style role as a TA for his TCA 201 class. I enjoyed every moment of that and felt very honored to have been recognized by him for the role!

- Lauren Wier '11

“Al ate at my house when he interviewed in 1976. We made many memories together, and he has always made me laugh! He and Cora made me a pork chop dinner the evening my son Andrew was born. We traveled Europe together ... what a time!

- Pat Moreo '69

“I FIRST MET MR. IZZOLO when I was a student of his in 1980. Thanks for the C grade! I had him again as a senior

for my intern class, and I got an A. Over the years, I have met with Al and some other teachers at the various Hotel Admin parties. Nothing quite like that campus beverage club with the educational presentations. We never had that in the old days—just Al and a book in FDH. I am really glad I got to take classes and hang out with him. I wish you all of the best in the future.

- Bill Newman '83

“I ENJOYED WORKING across the hall from Al. Current students and alumni were always waiting in the hall outside of his office to see him every day. I liked him so much I had my baby on his 70th birthday!

- Robyn Hadden '05

“I WAS AL'S ADMIN from the late 80s to early 90s. Best experience of my life. I will never forget what an amazing leader, mentor, and friend he was to all of us—not just his students, peers, and family but anyone who crossed his path. I will love, respect, and cherish him forever. Thanks for 25 years of friendship and a lot of great times! So much love to you from your biggest fan. Always to infinity and beyond!

- Leslie Nacht Hawkins '82

“WISHING CAPTAIN AL an amazing, well-deserved retirement. Al was one of those once-in-a-lifetime professors that not only teaches you the industry but truly teaches life lessons and real-world experience. There are not enough Al Izzolos in this world. I am fortunate that he was both a teacher and a friend.

- Adam Gordon '04

amazing, all the way into my 40s! We still chat from time to time and enjoy each other's company and humor. You most certainly will go down in UNLV history and will never be forgotten! Thanks for everything, Capitan Al! Love to you and happy retirement.

- Nora Obrien '96

“Let's just say I love Gary Austin's Sportsbook! UNLV in the '80s was special! Thank you, Mr. I.

- Ricky T. '85

“I GOT TO KNOW AL pretty well since I was the president of IFSEA and he was our adviser. He attended my wedding to Dan Hawkins just after graduation in 1982, and he was the hit of the dance floor. Our daughter Lauren also had Al as an instructor 24 years later. He told us at her graduation that it made him feel old to teach a child of his students! Al, you made the Hotel program fun, and we learned a lot from you! Happy retirement!

- Leslie Nacht Hawkins '82

“WISHING CAPTAIN AL an amazing, well-deserved retirement. Al was one of those once-in-a-lifetime professors that not only teaches you the industry but truly teaches life lessons and real-world experience. There are not enough Al Izzolos in this world. I am fortunate that he was both a teacher and a friend.

- Adam Gordon '04

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