

# In This Issue

5  
From the Dean

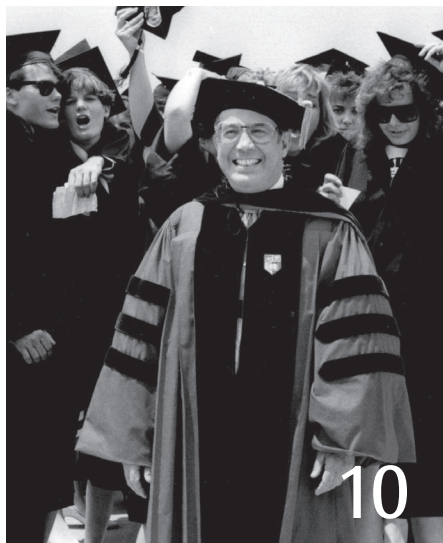
56  
Recipe:  
Vegetable Terrine

59  
On the Job:  
Interns Report

62  
Giving Back

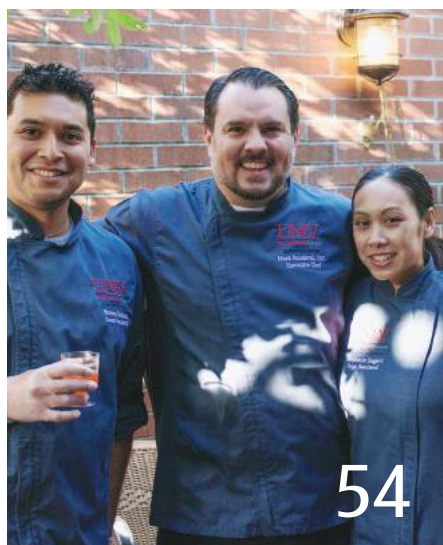
63  
Donor Honor Roll

65  
Class Notes



FRONT OF HOUSE

## The Man Who Started It All



IN GOOD TASTE

## The Most Important Meal of the Sports Calendar



FEATURE

## 50 Intriguing Alumni



CHECKING IN

## The Psychology of Online Travel Reviews

# premier magazine

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OF HOSPITALITY



## From the Dean

With a landmark anniversary comes rebirth

**n**o matter if it's a birthday or an anniversary, 50 years is a huge milestone—and it's certainly a big deal for the college! It's easy to understand why given how far we've come in the past five decades. From our humble start as a tiny department in the business school to our current position as a global force in hospitality education, this college has flourished on a steady diet of determination and heart. You don't have to look any further than our 50 Intriguing Alumni stories on pages 16-52 to grasp the effects of half a century worth of programmatic relevance and rigor.

But this landmark anniversary represents more than a chance to rejoice in past accomplishments. It demonstrates

the incredible momentum we feel as we usher in the next 50 years. It is an opportunity to embrace an educational landscape that is undergoing a revolution and move forward shoulder-to-shoulder with our students, our alumni, and the industry we love.

### New Name

As we set our sights on the next 50 years, the college must lead the way in recognizing the ongoing evolution of the hospitality industry, which has moved beyond its hotel-centric origins into such new sectors as gaming, hotel development, entertainment, restaurants, spas, golf, etc. In September 2017, the college



Dean Stowe Shoemaker

responded by officially changing its name from the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration to the William F. Harrah College of

Hospitality. Of course, we will never abandon our "Hotel School" roots, but we believe the new name communicates a more inclusive approach to hospitality education and better reflects the nature of the workforce our students are entering.

### New Home

We're tremendously fortunate to be celebrating our 50th anniversary at the same time we are opening our new academic building, Hospitality Hall, located in the



heart of the UNLV campus. This building, which showcases the names of industry partners/donors throughout the structure, essentially reimagines how the modern learning environment should look and feel. Unlike traditional academic facilities, Hospitality Hall features amenities typically found in hotel-resorts, such as function space with sweeping views, a café, common areas, and a professional golf center. We are so happy that Hospitality Hall will serve as a home base for current students, alumni, and friends of the college for years to come.

### New Era

While transforming our physical environment and updating our brand are important for the college's progress, we also view our 50th anniversary as the opportune time to assess our curriculum and scholarship. When I talk to alumni and hospitality experts, I emphasize that the college is not just training industry professionals, we are creating industry leaders. To deliver on this promise, our program must remain nimble and forward thinking, and continue to seek guidance from industry partners. As similar programs around the country are being absorbed into business schools, we will continue to double down on hospitality, refreshing our courses and elevating the substance of our material. By doing so, we will continue to provide our students with unparalleled opportunities in the world's greatest hospitality laboratory: Las Vegas. This is our commitment.

**“The college is not just training industry professionals, we are creating industry leaders.”**

## 50 Never Looked So Good

**Thanks to the dedication and sacrifice of some true “Hotel College” champions, the wait is finally over: UNLV’s Hospitality Hall is opening for business.**



UNLV’s long-held vision to one day build an academic facility solely dedicated to its world-class hospitality program was at one point just an elusive dream, with the monumental project encountering a decade’s worth of starts and stops. But, thanks to the generosity and dogged determination of the global hospitality community and the state of Nevada, the Harrah College of Hospitality has found a place to call home in Hospitality Hall, a gleaming 93,500-square-foot facility that doubles as the campus’ new centerpiece. As it throws open its doors during the college’s 50th anniversary year (and UNLV’s 60th), Hospitality Hall will serve as the state-of-the-art incubator for the next generation of hospitality leaders. It will also serve as a constant reminder to students, faculty, alumni, and friends that dreams can indeed come true.

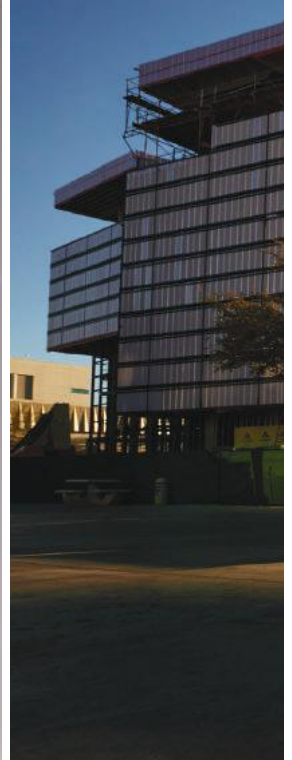


During months of construction, Dean Shoemaker, supported by McCarthy Construction, led numerous building tours (seen here with Congresswoman Dina Titus).

50 NEVER LOOKED SO GOOD

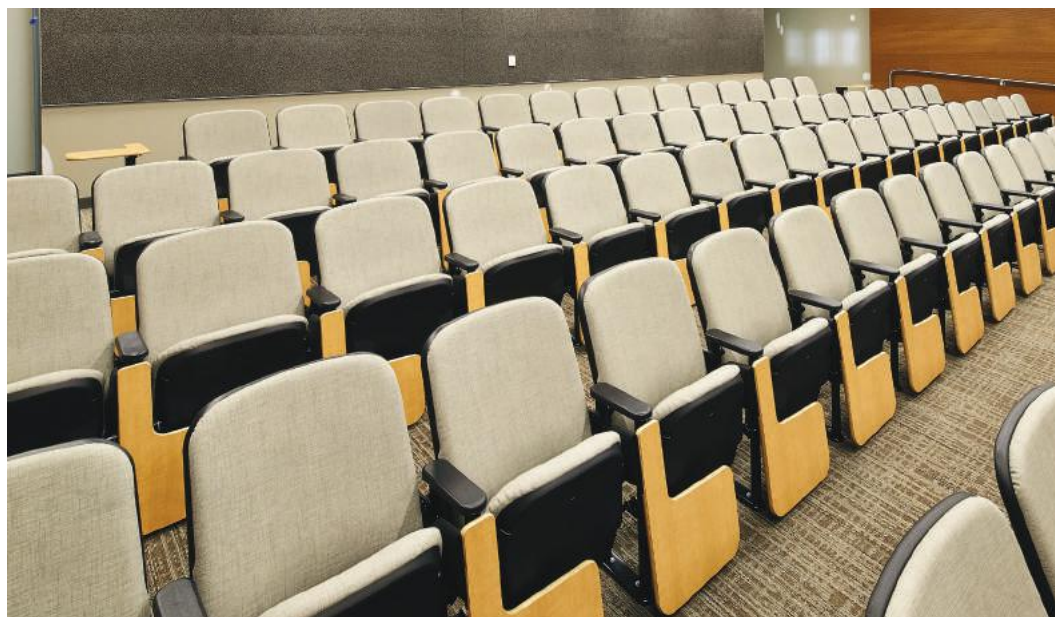




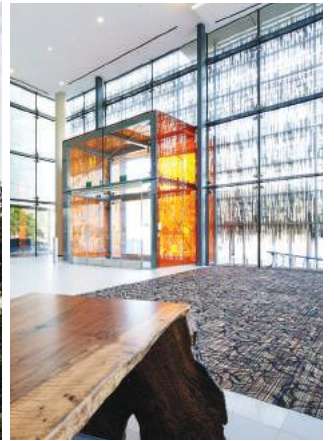


### Building Facts

- The amount of steel used to construct the building is 1,477,728 pounds, or roughly 738 tons – or 73 orcas.
- The amount of concrete in the building would be able to fill an entire Olympic swimming pool, which is about 88,000 cubic feet.
- The longest piece of steel in the building is nearly 70.5 feet long and weighs more than 8 tons. This is longer than a Major League Baseball pitcher can throw a fastball, which is only 60.5 feet long.
- The largest exterior panels are 12 feet long, 4 feet tall, and weigh 325 pounds. The average weight of an offensive lineman in the NFL is 310 pounds.
- There is enough concrete inside Hospitality Hall to build a 5-foot-wide sidewalk stretching 12.5 miles.







Opening in the 2018 spring semester, Hospitality Hall features 16 classrooms, four conference rooms, 80 offices, and a 120-seat auditorium. Other highlights include a 10-station learning kitchen, a student-run café, a golf center, and event space with sweeping views of the Strip.







# The Man Who Started It All

To many in higher education, Jerry Vallen is a visionary—a man who built a new kind of school for a new brand of student. To Las Vegas, Dean Vallen is the man who put the iconic “Hotel School” on the map and helped bring UNLV into the national spotlight.

Right: Regent Lillie Fong, photographed here at the Beam Hall groundbreaking with Jerry Vallen and fellow Regents, was instrumental in securing support for Beam, the college's home of 33 years.





**f**ifty years ago, Philadelphia-born Dr. Jerome Vallen was called upon to head a new hotel administration department at a startup university in the shadows of the Las Vegas Strip. This was a tall order, given the program's virtual obscurity on a campus going through growing pains. But this son of a restaurateur wasn't to be deterred.

With his characteristic persistence and charm, Dean Vallen chipped away at every obstacle he encountered, fostering an unprecedented alliance with the hotel industry, battling for—and winning—the school's autonomy, and bringing to bear a new educational model that spawned an era of hospitality superstars.

Here's a conversation with the man who started it all...

#### **What do you remember about those initial days and weeks after you first landed here?**

I started work July 1, 1967. My wife, Flossie, and I arrived three weeks earlier to buy a house. We had four children, and they were all quite young. In those days, the city was in bankruptcy because they had closed the Atomic Testing Area, and there were dozens and dozens of houses for sale. We got friendly with the motel owner where we were staying, and he took me to the bank. The [banker] threw open a cabinet with hundreds of keys, and he said, "You want a house? Pick one."

#### **What was the UNLV campus like at that time?**

Gee, it wasn't very much of a campus. There were two buildings at the front. We were housed with fine arts, business, foreign language, and education in Grant Hall, and at that time it was only myself and two other faculty members, using a great deal of part-time people from the Strip. For years, we used members from the hotel industry for faculty because we had more students than we could get the campus to buy faculty for. And for the first four years, we were subsidized by the hotel community [Nevada Resort Association].

**And now, 50 years later, the college is finally getting its own building. What are thoughts about that?**

I think [Dean Stowe Shoemaker] has done a good job. For him to be able to accomplish that ... that's really great. Don't forget that when the building [Beam Hall] was given to the two colleges (Hotel and Business), the campus was small and young, and it was just a question of economics. They had a big building, and they needed to fill it. So they just put the two colleges in there. We sort of had an affinity with Business—but also a disaffinity. We had a lot of arguments.

**What were these arguments about?**

We wanted to get spun out [of the Division of Business] as we grew. The Business College wanted to keep their number of students, obviously to their advantage. And that was a very traumatic time for the whole campus. There was quite a bit of uncertainty and real drama—that's a good word to use. It took some nitty-gritty work before we were able to succeed, but we did.

**Why were students initially attracted to the program?**

The internships in the hotels—that was something that nobody else had. Again, we came with money from the hotels, so the hotels were committed immediately to our success. And then the hotels took the interns, and we rotated: Everyone was in housekeeping this week, everybody was in food purchasing next week, everyone was in bells the next week, so that every hotel on the Strip had an intern or two. It was a unique place, no question about it.

**Early on, what was your biggest challenge as dean?**

Getting the rest of campus to acknowledge us as an academic grouping. There was a lot of early tension. I remember there was a fellow named Bob Smith who was the dean of the Sciences, who was a big supporter and really nice man. And



### college deans

Jerry Vallen	1967-1989
David Christianson	1989-1998
Stuart Mann	1998-2010
Don Snyder	2010-2013
Stowe Shoemaker	July 2013-present

**Top: Jerry Vallen as new program head. Bottom: UNLV President Donald Moyer, along with his wife Jewel, center, hosted a reception for Flossie, left, and Jerry in the summer of 1967.**



he was concerned, for example, that we were going to teach food science. That would have been a big conflict with the Science College. Ultimately, we would have not been successful if it hadn't been for supporters like Bob, Donald Moyer [the university's first president], and Jerry Crawford [the university's vice president], because a hotel program was sort of the antithesis to some of the arts and letters people.

#### What were some other obstacles you faced?

It was very scary at the beginning because we met with the unions, and they were concerned that we were going to put students into the hotels who were not unionized. We had a couple of nice luncheons and finally convinced them that these were all non-paid internships. So, in the end, we got friendly, and the union members became strong supporters of the program. They would come in and act as visiting faculty members for us. It worked out quite well.

#### What kind of students were you looking to bring on board?

Those who had finished their associate's degree and preferably

had experience in the industry. I knew that one of the problems that junior college students had was that they had no place to transfer because the few four-year [hospitality] schools that were around in those days—Cornell, Florida, Texas, Denver, and Michigan State—had more students than they needed, and they wouldn't take transfers. Since I had come out of the junior college programs where transfers were critical, we began to take the transfers. That's how the population of the program boomed right away.

#### During your 22-year tenure as dean, for which accomplishments are you most proud?

We graduated some fantastic young people. Every time we have one of the dinners that I go to, and I see these men and women, I'm proud. When I was dean, our secretary was a woman named Joan Reynolds. She was just a beautiful person. Joan let anyone who wanted to see me, see me. That was the rule we had. Students would come in, and we would talk. It killed a lot of time, but it was worth it. I loved the students.

*Excerpts taken from September 2017 interview at Dr. Vallen's Henderson, Nevada home*

#### ALUMNI REFLECT ON DEAN VALLEN

“Jerry created an urban campus truly connected with the industry that bridges practice and theory, and he did that very successfully.”

– Pat Moreo '69

“Dean Vallen was everything UNLV needed to make a hotel school work in this city. There were so many detractors. It wasn't easy. Jerry stuck to it. He raised money. He found his place in politics.”

– Chuck Lehman '71

“Jerry was both pragmatic and empathetic. He emphasized work ethic and helped produce students who were good in-keepers and highly recruitable. They [Jerry and Flossie] also behaved like your de facto family when you were away from home.”

– Jerry Inzerillo '75

“Dean Vallen had a big, long vision of the role UNLV could have for the community, but he did it in a very personalized way. He cared deeply about every one of us. He had a way of making you feel like he had your back.”

– Cindy Kiser Murphey '95 M.S.

“Jerry was a great man. He really understood hospitality and tried to build the relationship between the industry and the university, and he was always trying to think of new ways to engage the community.”

– Scott Sibella '88



#### Flossie Vallen (1930-2017)

Flossie Vallen, who passed away this year at the age of 86, was a fixture at the Hotel College during her husband Jerry's 22-year tenure as dean. Her energy, humor, and welcoming personality left a lasting mark on students, university faculty, and staff, as well as the community at large.

See Class Notes on page 65 for more alumni reflections on Dean Vallen.

PHOTO BY CONNIE PALEN

# LAS VEGAS & THE HARRAH COLLEGE OF HOSPITALITY

THEN

NOW



Elvis Presley marries  
Priscilla Beaulieu in 1967



Elvis impersonator  
marries Shia LaBeouf  
and Mia Goth in 2016



25,400 hotel  
rooms in 1970




149,300 hotel  
rooms in 2016



70 undergraduates  
enrolled in 1967




2,247 undergraduates  
enrolled in 2017



Student body represents  
1 country and 4 states in 1967



Student body  
represents 30 countries  
and 50 states in 2017



1 state (Nevada) with  
legalized casinos in 1967



40 states with legalized  
casinos in 2017



11 graduates  
in 1969



740 graduates  
in 2017



\$25m construction  
costs for Caesar's  
Palace in 1966



\$4b estimated  
construction costs  
for Resorts World,  
opening in 2020



## Retired, But Never Forgotten

The college offers these committed educators a heartfelt congratulations and thanks as they embark on new adventures

### Donald Bell →

"Coming to UNLV was the second best decision I ever made. The first was marrying my wife Kathy," says UNLV faculty veteran Dr. Donald Bell, who retired at the end of the spring 2017 semester after more than three decades with the Harrah College of Hospitality.

Bell's career in teaching began nearly by accident. In 1970, after a decade of working in the restaurant business, Bell began pursuing his master's degree at Michigan State. While working as a graduate assistant in a food and beverage class, he suddenly found himself in charge. "The professor left mid semester, so I had to teach the class."

The classroom turned out to be a fitting place for Bell. He went on to earn a Ph.D. from the Food Science Department at Michigan State, where he taught for several years before accepting a job at UNLV in 1981.

During his successful career, Bell has authored several notable books and guided thousands of students into successful careers in hospitality.

"Dr. Bell's wit, wisdom, and devotion to education has influenced so many of us," says Dr. Rhonda Montgomery, chair of the college's Food and Beverage and Event Management department. "If you look around this college—across the entire hospitality industry—you will see Don's imprint."



**"Coming to UNLV  
was the second best  
decision I ever made.  
The first was marrying  
my wife Kathy."**

### Gary Waters

After more than two decades with the college, beloved gaming professor Gary Waters has retired to spend more time with his family and travel with his wife. Known among students and educators for his patience and compassion, Gary leaves a lasting mark on the college.

### Dale Shigenaga

Dale "Shag" Shigenaga, who retired in spring 2017, was a constant presence in the college's Beam Hall kitchens since 2003—serving as the assistant executive chef and overseeing equipment and facilities. Shag's presence in the kitchen, and wicked sense of humor, will be sorely missed.



FACULTY  
MEMBERS  
WITH

**10+ YEARS OF  
SERVICE**

**40+ Years**

Al Izzolo  
David Christianson

**35 + Years**

Donald Bell\*

**30 + Years**

James Busser

**25 + Years**

Ashok Singh

**20 + Years**

Carola Raab  
Rhonda Montgomery  
Gary Waters\*  
Seyhmus Baloglu  
Gail Sammons  
Grace Chatfield  
Clark Kincaid

**15 + Years**

Michael Dalbor  
Robert Woods  
Billy Bai  
Tony Lucas  
William Werner

**10 + Years**

Christine Bergman  
Chris Cain  
Yen-Soon Kim  
Dan McLean

\*newly retired



NEVER  
LOOKED  
SO GOOD

FIFTYxFIFTY

WRITING BY  
Angela Ramsey  
Caitlyn Lopez  
Matt Jacob



# 50 INTRIGUING ALUMNI

In a half-century we've produced some amazing stories.  
Here are just a few of our favorites.

---

**"To do what I've done, you  
have to be obsessively  
committed to not failing."**

## THE DARK HORSE

### Marco Benvenuti '02

**Cofounder and Chief Marketing  
and Strategy Officer, Duetto**  
LAS VEGAS

**E**ven next to the most eccentric entrepreneurs, Marco Benvenuti is an outlier. He's the guy in the red poncho in a sea of suits, darting nimbly between disparate topics of basketball, musical theater, and writing code. He's the bull in the china shop—only this bull is driving an Alfa Romeo.

But don't let his showmanship fool you.

"To do what I've done, you have to be obsessively committed to not failing," Benvenuti says, reflecting on his consulting firm-turned-tech company, Duetto, which he launched in 2010. "People make the mistake of thinking that I don't take things seriously."

Proving people wrong has been one of the engines that has powered Benvenuti's success. He began defying the odds soon

after arriving at UNLV in 1999 from his home in Tuscany. "I actually started out on academic probation at UNLV, because my international credits didn't translate to letter grades," Benvenuti recalls.

With the help of a supportive circle of professors, the ambitious Italian found pathways to overcome challenges and achieve his academic goals. "UNLV was my launch pad," says Benvenuti, who graduated from the Hotel School and the Honors College (Summa Cum Laude) in just two years.

UNLV was also the place where Benvenuti discovered his love for revenue management. "I was lucky that one of my instructors worked in revenue management and allowed me to come to his office to see how it worked," he says. "When I told my Hotel College advisor that I wanted [revenue management] to be the topic of my Honors College thesis, he suggested I interview revenue managers on the Strip. Once I did that, I knew this area was going to change the future."

Since graduating from UNLV, Benvenuti has gone on to earn a master's degree



from Cornell and work for several major hospitality brands. Still, he never quite gelled with corporate America.

"They tell you to tone it down, but I came in like a bulldozer and broke rules," Benvenuti says. "I would never allow myself to be a slave to a job, so I never overextended myself. The decisions you make allow you to be daring."

Today, as Benvenuti sits in his fashionable Summerlin office surrounded by *Star Wars* memorabilia and stuffed animals, he's making his own rules—the mark of a true Rebel, he says. "There is strength in being different. That's where the genius happens ... that's where the innovation happens."

And he's not toning it down for anyone.



## THE BRAND BUILDER

### Josh Wand '00

Founder and CEO, ForceBrands  
NEW YORK CITY

When Josh Wand arrived at UNLV, he was a man with a plan: to learn all he could about the restaurant industry so he could one day open his own establishment. Four years and several influential classes, internships, mentorships, and trips to foreign lands later, Wand altered his plan.

"What I thought I wanted to do was own restaurants. But after I got to UNLV, I realized, 'Wait a minute. That's not exactly what I want to do in hospitality,'" Wand recalls. "After [the Hotel College] exposed me to all these wine, beer, and spirits suppliers, I thought, 'So I can be in hospitality and represent these amazing food and beverage brands, but I don't need to actually own or operate the restaurant. I can work in a different role.'"

Today, that role is the founder and CEO of ForceBrands, an executive and board of director search company with industry-specific job boards, which Wand launched in 2007. Understanding that people are an organization's greatest asset, Wand says he set out to build a company that took a more human approach to recruiting and staffing: "I wanted ForceBrands to focus on the unique qualities of the people

involved and help individuals and companies find and reach their 'hire purpose.'"

While working to lift up other companies, Wand has also boosted his own: ForceBrands has grown from a staff of one to more than 55 employees across New York City, California, Colorado, Texas, Minnesota, and Tennessee. It's a success story Wand insists his alma mater helped him write.

"UNLV taught me how to innovate, how to zig when everyone else is zagging, how to find solutions and, most importantly, how to treat people," he says. "I can honestly say I would not be where I am at this stage of my life—which I'm very happy with—without UNLV. Not a lot of people can say that about their university."



## THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

## M.J. Maynard '92

Deputy General Manager, Regional  
Transportation Commission

LAS VEGAS

**W**hen M.J. Maynard went from Hard Rock Food & Beverage VP to Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada executive a dozen years ago, some may have wondered if she was abandoning hospitality altogether. Not so, says Maynard, who sparkles at the mere mention of the word hospitality.

"You're allowed to wear many hats in the hospitality business," she says. "If you understand finance, budget forecasts, marketing, human resources, and the importance of the customer experience, you can work in any industry. So I was prepared for the change."

Early in life, Maynard never had the luxury of being unprepared. On her own since she was 15½ years old, Maynard worked as a dishwasher to make ends meet, surviving on sheer tenacity and the opportunities that materialized from it. "When you're on your own at an early age, you work really hard [to please] your boss, because you want that positive feedback that you're not getting at home," she says.

Maynard's desire for encouragement never outweighed her personal drive to succeed. By her senior year in high school, she had moved from dishwasher to busser to prep cook to shift manager.

It was this same fierce ambition that drew her to UNLV to pursue a degree in hospitality. But this too proved anything but easy, as Maynard found herself working all hours while caring for her young son. "I took a couple of detours on my college path, and when I came back to UNLV for a second time, I questioned whether or not I could do it," she recalls.

Advice from a wise professor, who told



her that she'd be fine if she could pass Hospitality Accounting II, propelled her forward. The young mother passed the course handily and went on to earn her bachelor's degree. To this day, she lives by the mantra, "Know your numbers!"

Above all, Maynard exemplifies the good that can come when you create your own path.

"Don't ever put yourself in a box," she advises students and aspiring hospitality practitioners. "There are so many people to learn from in this business, and there are so many directions you can grow."

**"If you understand finance, budget forecasts, marketing, human resources, and the importance of the customer experience, you can work in any industry."**



#### LOYAL QUEST

## Esther Oh Kostecky '99

**Hotel Manager, Four Seasons Hotel Seoul**  
SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

It's a love story that began in the late 1990s when Esther Oh Kostecky met with a Four Seasons rep at a student career mixer at UNLV. "It had been my dream to work for a luxury brand," she says. "When he said they had future plans to open a property in Korea, I was so happy."

Future plans aside, Oh Kostecky was promptly scooped up by the company's Beverly Hills property, where she started as a manager in training at the front desk. Over the next 18 years, she explored numerous operational sides of the hotel business at eight Four Seasons locations on three continents.

Her infatuation with hotel operations, however, was not embraced by everyone close to her. "Koreans really want to be a doctor or a lawyer," she says. "My parents wanted the same for me, but I always wanted to do something no one else did."

Oh Kostecky's desire for something different allowed her to ascend the management chain at properties in California, Pennsylvania, New York, and even Tanzania, where she opened a new safari lodge. But the desire to work at a Four Seasons in Korea stayed with her. And when the opportunity came, she grabbed it.

"It took 16 years, but I was finally able to open a property in Korea," Oh Kostecky beams from her Seoul office. "I'm so happy to be reconnecting with my family, while doing what I love."



#### A 5-STAR CAREER

## Mary Beth Cutshall '88

**Senior Vice President and Chief Business  
Development Officer, HVMG**  
ATLANTA

Sometimes, it's the things we're told NOT to do in life that influence us the most. Such was the case for UNLV alumna Mary Beth Cutshall, who initially considered following in her father's professional footsteps.

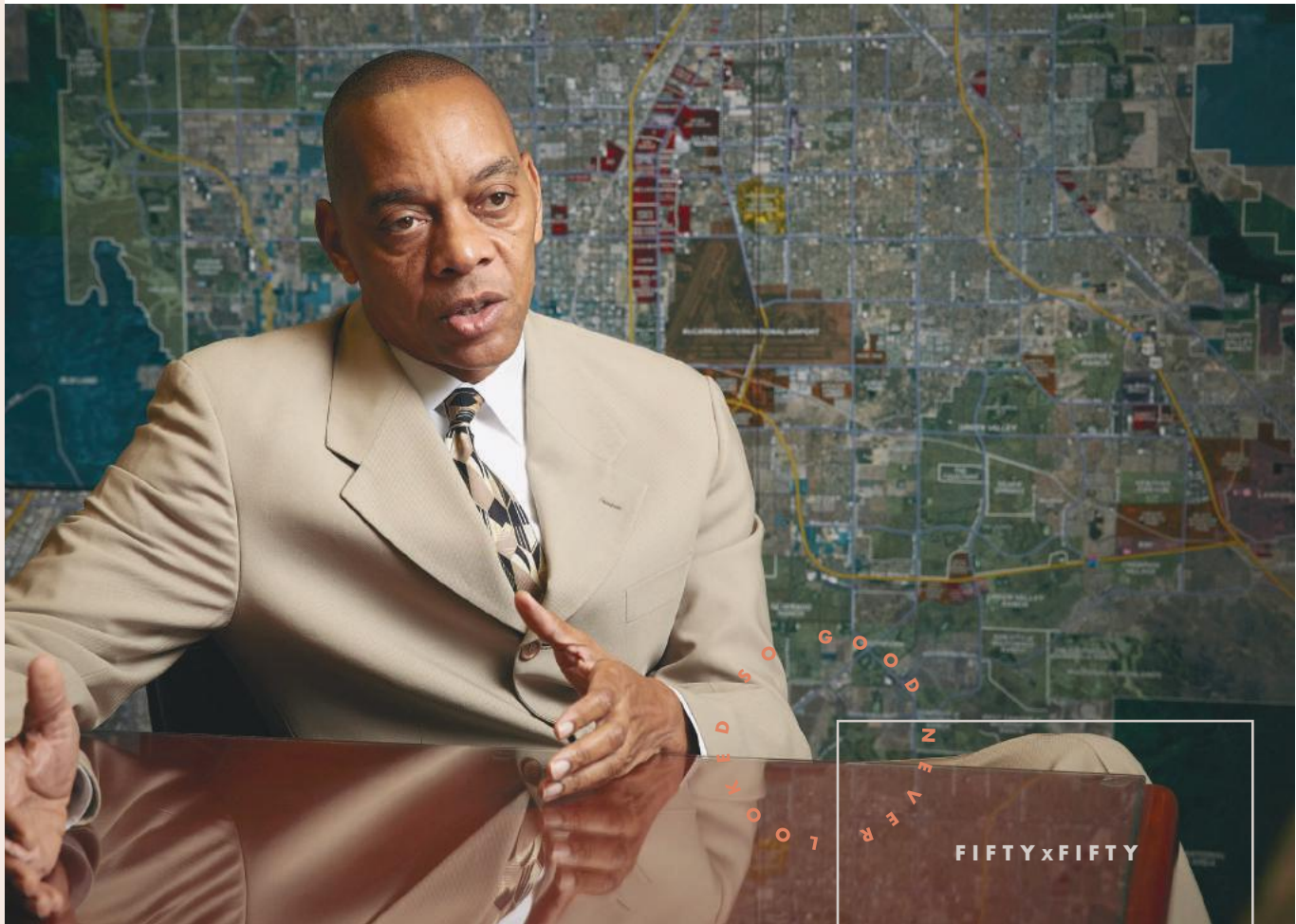
"He is a retired airline pilot, so I grew up traveling extensively," Cutshall says. "Because my dad and I share similar personalities, at one point, I thought I wanted to be an airline pilot, too. When I told him that, he said, 'You should expand your interests.'"

Though Cutshall heeded her father's advice, she remained drawn to a career rooted in the travel industry. Exposed to a high school friend's family hotel in Maine, Cutshall found her true calling. "At 17 years old, it was clear: 'I'm going to be in the hotel business. This is my future.'"

And what a future it turned out to be. Since earning a bachelor's degree from UNLV—after transferring from the University of New Hampshire's hospitality program—Cutshall has steadily advanced in her hospitality career, working in nearly every facet of the hotel industry. That includes real estate transaction, which has been her focus for the past 14 years.

Asked to pinpoint her most impactful experience at UNLV, Cutshall zeroes in on an internship with Marriott Hotels that led to her first job offer—an offer that came well ahead of graduation. "Going into my senior year knowing I had [a job] 10 months later—you can't ask for anything more," she says. "I would not have been set up like that had it not been for UNLV."





#### FOLLOWING HIS DREAMS

## Marcus Threats '87

**Hotel Broker, Marcus & Millichap**  
LAS VEGAS

**Marcus Threats is still looking for the high school guidance counselor who dismissed his college aspirations, suggesting he instead learn a trade. With six college degrees under his belt, it's safe to say Threats proved her wrong.**

"It really just comes from never giving up," Threats says, "and knowing that nothing is impossible."

It certainly wasn't easy for Threats growing up at a time when African-Americans weren't allowed to work or visit the Strip. Still, the young Las Vegas native dreamt of running a casino.

"The hotel-casino industry always fascinated me," he says. "I looked at the Kirk Kerkorians and the Steve Wynn's of the world, and thought, 'Why not me?'"

Education was the answer for Threats, who earned two associate degrees from community college and then a bachelor's degree from the Hotel School at UNLV. But a call from the U.S. Navy pilot program temporarily steered Threats away from his hospitality career to pursue another childhood dream.

"When I got selected for flight training, it was an opportunity I couldn't say 'no' to," says the former lieutenant, who went on to complete 187 carrier landings throughout his seven-year military stint.

Following his service, Threats continued to defy the naysayers by earning an MBA and two law degrees, eventually finding his career niche in hotel development. "You can do anything if you set your mind to it and just follow your dreams," Threats says.

If anything, his string of life successes highlight one truth: Sometimes high school guidance counselors get it wrong.

## THE NEGOTIATOR

## Jeremy Aguero '96

Principal Analyst, Applied Analysis  
LAS VEGAS

To say that Jeremy Aguero has been in the limelight lately would be an understatement.

"There are tailgates at our public meetings," says Aguero, who over the past 18 months has been at the epicenter of the UNLV/Raiders stadium deal. As the lead staff for the state's Las Vegas Stadium Authority, Aguero is working on the negotiations of critical contracts and leasing agreements—details that are not only shaping the stadium project but also the future of Las Vegas.

Aguero's reserved manner makes him seem more suited to the behind-the-scenes kind of work typically associated with his data analytics consulting firm, which in addition to state and local governments serves housing developers and the real estate, technology, and gaming/hospitality sectors.

But the career path of this fourth-generation Las Vegas wasn't always clear. "As a student at UNLV, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do," says Aguero, reflecting on the numerous majors he considered before landing on hospitality.

He credits much of his eventual student success to International Gaming Institute founder Professor Shannon Bybee, who pushed him into rigorous economics and honors classes and then on to law school. "He knew what was best for me," says Aguero, a 2004 graduate of UNLV's Boyd School of Law. "I would not be where I am without him."

Today as Las Vegas prepares to welcome its first NFL team, Aguero finds himself in the middle of an historic moment—a moment for which Aguero says he came prepared: "There is no such thing as a rough draft in life. When you come to the table, preparation and diligence are the keys to meaningful progress."



## STILL HUNGRY

## Chuck Lehman '71

Founder, Fresh and Ready Foods; Entrepreneur  
LOS ANGELES

Chuck Lehman's imagination for business, even in semi-retirement, stems from the kind of moxie that percolates early in life.

"I wanted to be in the restaurant business since I was 12," says New York-born Lehman. "I set up my own pancake restaurant in my house." No surprise, this son of a food wholesaler would be running three L.A. restaurants just four years out of college.

A self-described "terminal entrepreneur," Lehman's career has taken many turns, from restaurateur to business founder to maker of gourmet dog treats. "A good roll of the dice," is what he calls his recent gig as a venture capitalist backing an audio tech startup.

But the scrappy kid from Long Island admits he had a lot to learn when he first arrived at UNLV. "I thought I knew it all when I got here," Lehman says, "but by the time I left, I realized that I didn't."

His knowledge came from numerous corners. By day, he studied food and beverage at UNLV. By night, he interned at the Sands alongside the Rat Pack, braving the hostile picket lines of the 1969 culinary strike. Never to be outdone, Lehman once organized his own strike against UNLV's food service vendor. "I thought Hotel College students should be running the cafeteria," Lehman says. "I was not successful."

Ultimately, Lehman found success in most of his endeavors, but he never forgot where he came from. "I've always been a Rebel," he says with a moxie-soaked grin, "and I'll always be very proud of my affiliation with UNLV."





## THE DOWNTOWN CRUSADER

### Ryan Doherty '99

Co-Owner, Wendoh Media, Corner Bar  
Management and Life Is Beautiful  
LAS VEGAS

**W**hen Boston-born Ryan Doherty came to UNLV as part of a college exchange program, his intention was to stay for one semester. Twenty years later, the entrepreneur still proudly calls Las Vegas home.

"I ended up making a bunch of close friends right off the bat, so I just kept telling myself, 'OK, one more semester,'" he says. "A lot of us weren't from Vegas, so it was like we had a big family here when no one actually did."

Doherty used the relationships he

fortified in college to bolster his career, eventually teaming up with fellow Rebel and current business partner Justin Weniger.

"There's a ton of equity in having a lot of friends and people you trust," Doherty says. "Those connections I made at UNLV have stayed with me, and we continue those relationships by supporting each other's businesses."

Together, Doherty and Weniger own a media company, two bars, and half of the annual Life Is Beautiful festival. Supporters of revitalizing downtown Las Vegas, the duo centralized their businesses entirely around the Fremont East Entertainment District. Doherty is so devoted to downtown that he even keeps a part-time residence at the El Cortez when business calls for late nights.

"Every business downtown is technically competition in a way, but we're also huge cheerleaders for each other," he says. "It's important for downtown to be a place

**"Those connections I made at UNLV have stayed with me, and we continue those relationships by supporting each other's businesses."**

where tourists make a stop on their tour of Vegas, and we're getting to that point by working together."

After two decades in the desert, the Rebel spark continues to guide Doherty and Weniger, who live with the mindset that "it's now or never."

"There's been half a dozen times where we've just looked at each other and said, 'If we're going to bet everything, now is the time,'" Doherty says. "Some things work, and some things don't. It's all a roll of the dice, and that's a bet we're willing to take."



## HOSPITALITY'S HELPING HAND

### Lynda Tache '97

**Founder, Grant a Gift Autism Foundation**  
LAS VEGAS

It was a labor of love when finance executive Lynda Tache launched the Grant a Gift Autism Foundation in 2009 to connect families affected by autism with the resources they need. "There's a lot of focus on early intervention," says Tache, whose son, Grant, was diagnosed with the disorder at age 5, "but once the child is diagnosed, it's like no one has any answers for what to do next."

Tache's organization began by offering financial assistance, social programs, and vocational opportunities to individuals with autism. Then in October 2016, she partnered with her alma mater and longtime friend Gary Ackerman to form the UNLV Medicine Ackerman Center for Autism, a one-stop-shop for services that include diagnostics, treatment, and behavioral therapy. "It was like the stars and moon all aligned, and everything was coming together full-circle," Tache says in reference to the Ackerman Center.

A true Rebel at heart, Tache beams with unmistakable pride when describing her college experience. And although she's walked an unconventional path since graduating from the Hotel School, she emphasizes the need for hospitality in all career fields—especially health care.

"I know what it's like to feel that people don't understand or don't care about what you're going through," Tache says. "So, it's important that we give our clients a safe place to come and feel like they belong. At the end of the day, we're all in this together."



## GLOBAL PLAYER

### Jung-Ho Suh '82

**Chairman, Ambassador Hotel Group**  
SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

Back in 1955, following the Korean War, Jung-Ho Suh's father launched the Ambassador Hotel Group, which quickly became Korea's leading hotel enterprise. So when Suh landed at the Hotel College in the late 1970s, his career path was set in stone: He would get his education at the leading hotel school in the United States, return home to join the family business, and, eventually, take it over.

But the rise to the top was more of a steady stair climb than bullet elevator. In fact, his father insisted on "bottom-up" training, so prior to coming stateside Suh worked low-level jobs at Ambassador hotels, then secured jobs as a restaurant assistant, parking manager, and waiter while at UNLV.

"It was my father's way of teaching management—one had to know the field in order to manage a business properly ... and had to experience the practicalities to understand how one's employees felt," Suh says.

Since inheriting Ambassador Hotel Group management rights from his late father in 1992, Suh

has continued to grow the family business, which now features—in partnership with international hotel chain Accor—nearly 20 properties spread across South Korea. So how much did his alma mater play a role in his success half a world away?

"My academic experience at UNLV had a huge impact on my life," says Suh, who was named 2010 UNLV Alumnus of the Year. "I was able to experience a variety of cultures, and learn the advanced hotel and restaurant management methods of America. ... These experiences at UNLV formed a fundamental foundation for my company management."



## FINDING INSPIRATION

### Kirk Posmantur '84

Founder and CEO, Axxess Worldwide  
ATLANTA

**K**irk Posmantur's vigilance as a young hotel guest sparked an early interest in the hospitality business. "As a 12-year-old-kid who traveled a lot, I would write letters complaining about the quality of the sheets and other related hotel services to Howard Johnson, Bill Marriott, and others," he says.

It's no wonder, then, that when it came time to consider colleges, Posmantur zeroed in on a program with close ties to the hotel industry. "My father took me to visit UNLV the summer before my senior year," says Posmantur, a native of Long Island, New York. An unexpected and very lucky meeting with Dean Jerry Vallen promptly sealed the deal. "He said, 'You're accepted ... right now,'" laughs Posmantur. "He had my file and said, 'You have enough credits to go to UNLV.' And there I was at UNLV, at 17 years old. I thought I just hit the jackpot."

As a hospitality student, Posmantur quickly championed the skill of networking. Fellow students would become "lifelong friends," and work connections would lead to numerous professional breaks and lay the foundation for a thriving career. "Working in the [casino] pit, working in restaurants, working in housekeeping—having these experiences really gave me an incredible perspective on the business," he says.

They also helped shape his "partnership marketing" firm, which today works with some of the biggest brands around the world.

Looking back more than three decades, Posmantur says the thing he most prizes about his UNLV experience was his exposure to industry giants like Steve Wynn. "He knocked our socks off," says Posmantur, describing Wynn's visit to the Hotel School when he was a freshman. "He inspired me beyond words. This is what makes UNLV special. That's why I wanted to go to school in Las Vegas—to hear leaders like him."



**"As a 12-year-old kid who traveled a lot, I would write letters complaining about the quality of the sheets."**

PHOTO COURTESY AXCESS WORLDWIDE



## COURTING SUCCESS

### Debby Jacobs '81

Co-Owner, Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa  
RANCHO SANTA FE, CA

**"T**ennis is my first love," says Debby Jacobs, part owner of Rancho Valencia, a 45-acre resort north of San Diego that she, her husband Hal, and their family bought in 2012 and fully renovated a year later. As part of the remodel, Jacobs championed the restoration of the property's 18 tennis courts and the buildout of the resort's new fitness facilities.

Her love for the game and commitment to health and fitness have influenced several important life decisions, including her choice to attend UNLV, where she played tennis on an athletic scholarship in the late 1970s. "Athletics was one big family," Jacobs says. "It still is."

It was a bit more complicated for Jacobs to identify an academic route, which came by way of a counselor's advice. "She recommended hospitality," Jacobs recalls. "The curriculum looked like the perfect path for me."

She dove headfirst into the program, discovered a passion for hospitality, and earned her bachelor's degree in Hotel Administration, which would later complement her role as head tennis professional and director of tennis at various clubs. To this day, Jacobs says she blends hospitality principles with charity work for organizations such as the La Jolla Playhouse, for which she has helped raise more than \$10 million over 15 years. "My hospitality background has helped me immensely with budgets, catering, design, and scheduling."

Through it all, Jacobs has remained anchored in the Rebel spirit, as evidenced by her fantasy football team's name, "Rebel with a Cause." "UNLV embraces individuals," she says. "It's non-conforming, which enables you to choose your own path."

# Women at the Top

When the Hotel School was formed 50 years ago, the hotel/gaming business was a man's world. Today, thanks in large part to professionals like these extraordinary alumnae, women are at the head of the table in the C-suite.

## NO RESERVATIONS

### Cindy Kiser Murphey '80, '95 MS

**President and COO, New York-New York**  
LAS VEGAS

**W**hen contemplating college back in high school, Kansas-born Cindy Kiser Murphey thought she'd study journalism before moving on to law school. A single college fair changed all that. "I saw a booth for hospitality management," she recalls, "and I instantly knew that's what I wanted to do."

She immediately jumped into action. "I told my family I was moving to Las Vegas," she says. "My mother was enthusiastic. Others in my family were not."

Armed with her mother's blessing, Kiser Murphey packed up her car and made her way across the country. "I knew UNLV was very entwined with the hospitality community and that there were so many opportunities."

Committed to seizing each of those opportunities, Kiser Murphey plunged into her studies and began taking on leadership

roles in student organizations, such as the Hotel Association.

"Cindy had a way of getting people involved," says former classmate and current MGM Resorts International president Bill Hornbuckle. "Still does."

Kiser Murphey's experience rallying students at the Hotel School laid the foundation for what would become a storied career. She quickly climbed the ranks as a human resources professional, opening such properties as The Mirage and the MGM Grand. Now, as one of the few female hotel presidents on the Strip, Kiser Murphey encourages others to take advantage of all that the Hotel College has to offer to find their place in the industry.

"There are so many fascinating careers in hotels," says the former Alumna of the Year. "At UNLV, you've got internships, clubs, sight visits ... take advantage of these things, and one is going to capture your imagination."

## LIVING BOLDLY

### Ann Hoff '90

**President and COO, Excalibur**  
LAS VEGAS

**G**rowing up in the cradle of Southern hospitality—New Orleans—Ann Hoff developed a passion for the industry. Her decision to move to Las Vegas to study hospitality in the late 1980s, however, was met with skepticism by her parents.

"I was able to convince my father that I should pursue my passion," says Hoff, who followed her father's advice and postponed college for a year to work in the business. "I ultimately chose UNLV because of its reputation, its academic excellence, and its geographic desirability."

Hoff's love for hospitality hasn't waned in her 27 years working for MGM Resorts. And much like her decision to come to UNLV, she sees her most daring career moves as the most defining.

"To risk nothing is to risk everything," says Hoff, citing the quote that inspired her to take a mid-career departure from the booming Las Vegas market to open a hotel-casino in Biloxi, Mississippi. "I thought going





into an emerging market would be the most daring thing I could do to prove myself. I learned more during that time than I have in my whole career.”

After four years in Biloxi, Hoff returned to Las Vegas to continue serving as a marketing executive for MGM Resorts before transitioning into operations. In 2014, she claimed the top seat at Excalibur.

To this day, she credits UNLV for helping to lay the groundwork for her success. “It changed my life,” she says. “I wasn’t planning on staying in Las Vegas, but because UNLV opened so many doors for me, I’m still here 30 years later.”

#### HER WAY

### Paula Eylar-Lauzon ’89

**Senior Vice President of Administration,  
Boyd Gaming**

LAS VEGAS

**C**alifornia native Paula Eylar-Lauzon was a Rebel right out of the gate.

“To come from a very conservative background, where social expectations were clearly defined, and say ‘I’m moving to Las Vegas to study hospitality,’ my parents did not take it well.”

But Las Vegas — and a career in the hospitality industry—was her dream. And she was willing to do whatever it took to make it a reality.

“I worked graveyard in the cage at the Barbary Coast to gain Nevada residency so that I could afford tuition,” Eylar-Lauzon says. Later as a hospitality student, she continued to work full time, keeping to a strict budget and struggling to find time to sleep.

Her determination was fueled by a genuine love for service. “I realized that I like seeing people happy and having an opportunity to provide a positive experience,” says Eylar-Lauzon, who went on to scale the ladder at several major hospitality brands.

“To risk nothing is to risk everything.”

Above, left to right: Cindy Kiser Murphey, Ann Hoff, Paula Eylar-Lauzon, Rikki Tanenbaum, and Vicki Savini.

Now as Boyd Gaming's senior vice president of administration, Eylar-Lauzon feels fortunate to know she is serving a company she loves while blazing the trail for other female executives in the hospitality industry.

As far as the hard knocks she experienced early on? Eylar-Lauzon says it helped her become a better leader, manager, and mother, as well as a cheerleader for students facing challenges. "I have so much respect for students who work and go to school full time," she says. "I know it's tough, but these students are the ones who are going to succeed."

#### HOTELIER WITH AN EDGE

### Vicki Savini '92

**General Manager, Renaissance Reno Downtown Hotel**  
RENO

**W**hen Vicki Savini was offered the chance to completely renovate and rebrand a failing hotel property in Reno, she jumped at the opportunity.

"It was such a massive project, I couldn't refuse," she says, her smile unflinching.

Savini's appetite for tackling the seemingly impossible has proven to be a recurrent theme throughout her career. "My career path in Las Vegas sent me through multiple departments of a hotel," she recalls. "I said yes to every request to work on a project, especially the unknown. I'm the one who goes into the boss's office and asks them what is sitting on their desk that they don't want to deal with. No blueprints? Even better."

Savini credits her success to an innate fighting spirit, but she also points to an education that set her apart from others. "It's fun to actually be working in the industry I majored in," she says. "Being in the hotel business and having a 'hotel' degree gave me an edge. There's a lot of pride associated with being an alum of the college."

Rebel pride is something Savini carries proudly to this day, even as a Reno native and recently-anointed Reno hotel executive. "I love both ends of the state equally," she says. "But I still wear red in a blue world."

As for the renovation of the property she manages? Savini says the Renaissance Reno—the city's first non-gaming, full-service, branded hotel—is an unabashed hit. Blueprints be damned!

#### DISCOVERING SHANGRI-LA

### Rikki Tanenbaum '06 MHA

**Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer,**  
**Golden Nugget**  
LAS VEGAS

**R**ikki Tanenbaum's decision to move to Las Vegas was an unconventional choice, considering her circle of Wall Street-bound friends. But growing up in upstate New York, Tanenbaum had long carried a torch for the lights of Las Vegas. "When I was about 15, my family took a trip out West. I think it was the casino buffet and the interior palm trees that made me want to vacation here."

So enraptured by Las Vegas, Tanenbaum convinced her parents to return again and again to her self-proclaimed "Shangri-la." So when she was presented with the opportunity to start her career in Las Vegas with a major hospitality brand, she went all-in. Outworking and "out-networking" those around her, Tanenbaum rose quickly through the ranks and eventually moved on to regional marketing roles throughout the country.

During her sharp professional ascent, Tanenbaum continued to focus on her education, earning both an MBA from Duke and a master's degree in Hospitality Administration through Harrah Hotel College's online program. "It reinforced the work I was doing and supported my goal of becoming more effective and promotable in the hospitality industry," she says.

Promotable, indeed. Tanenbaum returned to the lights of Las Vegas in 2015 to head up marketing for the iconic Golden Nugget. Then in 2016, she was promoted to chief marketing officer for the gaming division of Nugget parent company Landry's.

Between her job, donating time as a board member for The Animal Foundation, and supporting the university, she continues to outwork the best of them.

"Being in the hotel business and having a 'hotel' degree gave me an edge. There's a lot of pride associated with being an alum of the college."







#### WALKING THE WALK

## Colleen Birch '99

**Senior Vice President Revenue Optimization, The Cosmopolitan**  
LAS VEGAS

**C**olleen Birch's initiation into the hospitality business was anything but typical.

"I was a bartender in a remote fishing village in Alaska," says Birch, a Seattle native who spent summers away from her regular job as a nanny serving whiskey to commercial fishermen in Bristol Bay. "It was supposed to be a one-year break from college, but it turned into five."

It also turned out to be a much-needed reprieve from the ambivalence she felt as a sophomore at Washington State University. "Nothing clicked for me," she says.

That began to change when Birch enrolled at UNLV. "The minute I came into the Hotel College," she says, "I knew it was what I was supposed to do."

Birch's enthusiasm blossomed further when she landed a job at Caesars Palace and began to connect the dots between work and school. "I even got excited about my Facilities Management class," she laughs. "Who gets excited about Facilities Management?"

Birch's eagerness to learn translated into opportunities at the front desk, reservations, and housekeeping. Her move into revenue management came as the result of a bold idea: "I suggested to my manager that one person should be in charge of analyzing pricing and demand." That suggestion led to Birch becoming Caesars' first yield manager.

Fast forward to today, and this senior VP and mother of two is helping UNLV students lay the groundwork for their own bold careers. "My passion is mentorship," says Birch, who received the John Yaskin Mentor Award in 2017. "When students wait after class to tell you that your words inspired them ... that's when I know it matters."

## We would like to acknowledge the members of the UNLV Harrah College of Hospitality Alumni Board:

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## GAME ON

### Brett Abarbanel '09 MS, '13 PhD

**Director of Research, International Gaming Institute**  
LAS VEGAS

**C**runching numbers. Calculating odds. Predicting outcomes. This has been Brett Abarbanel's life—both in and out of the office—for as long as she can remember.

It's why she studied statistics at Brown University and developed an affinity for poker at the Ivy League school. It's why she spent the bulk of her college summers at the horse-race track in her hometown of Del Mar, California. It's why she moved to Las Vegas, took a job at the International Gaming Institute (IGI), furthered her education at the UNLV Harrah College of Hospitality (earning both a master's and Ph.D.), and ultimately returned to the IGI to spearhead cutting-edge research for the world-renowned facility that one industry publication recently dubbed the "Harvard of Gaming."

So, yeah, Abarbanel is a numbers gal through and through. But that doesn't mean the knowledge she gained at the Hotel College stopped on the casino floor.

"One of the best things about

getting my degree in hospitality here is that it allowed me to take some of that more theoretical perspective that I got from academe and put it into the perspective of that massive world we have out there with hotels and resorts," she says. "I mean, I got to learn about food and beverage. So, yeah, my expertise is supposed to be in gambling, but every now and then I'll be at a restaurant and think, 'Wow, that guy is doing a good job waiting on that table!' It's the kind of thing I never thought that I would ever absorb."

"The Hotel College has helped me to connect with the applied world, the [gaming] industry, in a way that one doesn't always get with an academic career."

In her current role with the IGI since August 2016, Abarbanel's life is now consumed with studying the ever-evolving global gaming world, in particular the recent phenomenon of esports wagering (she's the co-founding director of the Nevada Esports Alliance). It's work about which she is extremely passionate—although it has come at the expense of another passion: her poker game. "I work too much to play enough, and [poker] is one of those things where being in practice makes a huge difference," she says. "So right now, I'd say my game is average. And that's what you should print so people invite me to their games!"

## THE MAN ABOUT TOWN

### Bill McBeath '86

**President and CEO, The Cosmopolitan**  
LAS VEGAS

The Las Vegas Strip has undergone a complete transformation over the past three decades, with bargain-centric properties giving way to luxury megaresorts. And nobody has had a better view of it than Bill McBeath.

McBeath was just a year removed from college when he landed at MGM Mirage, where he learned under hotel-casino icons Steve Wynn and Bobby Baldwin just as they were launching the megaresort era. A decade later, Wynn handed McBeath the keys to Treasure Island, thus beginning a leadership run in which McBeath subsequently presided over The Mirage, Bellagio, Aria/City Center and, today, The Cosmopolitan.

Given his career track and the fact that he's a lifelong Las Vegas, one might assume McBeath was born to be a hospitality power player. Not exactly. "No one in my family is in this industry," McBeath says. "But growing up in Las Vegas and watching the growth of hospitality within the city ... created a desire to [follow] in the footsteps of some of the great visionaries, including Benny Binion and Steve Wynn."

Once he zeroed in on a career path, McBeath knew the best place to begin his journey was at his hometown university's renowned hospitality program, which he says "provided the foundation [for] my career and instilled in me a fundamental understanding of hospitality and more importantly, gaming hospitality."

"I take great pride in graduating from the Hotel School, knowing that some of the world's most outstanding hospitality leaders took the first steps in their career as a result of being shaped by their time and education at UNLV."





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**“I take great pride in graduating from the Hotel School, knowing that some of the world’s most outstanding hospitality leaders took the first steps in their career as a result of being shaped by their time and education at UNLV.”**

Bill McBeath



# The New Faces of Hospitality

There's a new gang in town! Meet five hardworking millennials who are storming the Strip with new ideas, no hang-ups, and a fierceness that is shaking the hospitality industry to its core.

## BETTING ON THE FUTURE

### Lovell Walker '09

**Executive Director of Interactive Gaming Development, MGM Resorts International**  
LAS VEGAS

**A**s the Las Vegas gaming customer base evolves, Lovell Walker is tasked with redefining the world in which slot machines and table games were once king. A millennial himself, Walker taps into the sensibilities and tastes of a younger crowd, bringing newer technologies such as mobile gaming and esports into the casino space at MGM Resorts International.

#### **What is a unique challenge you've faced?**

I've had to manage people twice my age who have been doing their jobs for as long as I've been alive. It was difficult, but I got their buy-in by getting my hands dirty and

showing an interest in learning from them. Once we had that dynamic, everything came together, and we supported each other.

#### **What advice would you give to current students?**

Fall in love with the process. We all think about where we want to be when we're 30 or 50. Everyone wants to go from A to Z, but no one thinks about B through Y. Your end goals will be inevitable if you focus on the process. It will keep you in the moment.

#### **What does it mean to be a Rebel?**

Being a graduate from the Hotel College means being part of something prestigious. It's on my résumé for the rest of my life. When people see me, they see UNLV and vice versa. It's a badge I wear with honor.

## QUEEN OF THE GREEN

### Shawna Elliott '11, '13 MS

**Director of Instruction, Rhodes Ranch Golf Club**  
LAS VEGAS

**S**hawna Elliott's experience as a PGA Golf Management student within the hospitality program helped guide her to a hole-in-one career. Now Elliott is committed to passing her torch by coaching women and children, and igniting their sense of confidence on and off the green.

#### **In what ways has UNLV impacted your career?**

What allowed me to thrive and be successful was the mentorship I received from UNLV. The golf management program is like a second family that has continued to support me throughout my journey since



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From left: Lovell Walker, Shawna Elliott, Megan Hutton, Sandy Kim, and Andrew Insigne.

## 50 INTRIGUING ALUMNI

day one. In addition, having the opportunity to experience the industry firsthand as a student was very influential.

### What is a unique challenge you've faced?

Being a woman in the golf industry is not very common, but I've never seen it as a challenge. I embrace my individuality in the industry and have seen it as an opportunity. As a business owner, I learned to have inner confidence and to trust my own instincts when doing something new or unfamiliar. Taking that leap of faith has allowed me to grow as a person and professional.

### What advice would you give to current students?

Find what really excites you and just go for it. There are always going to be opportunities as long as you're willing to create them. The more you tap into your inner passions, the easier success will come.

## SERVING UP SUCCESS

### Megan Hutton '11, '16 MHA

**General Manager, Pronto by Giada  
at Caesars Palace**  
LAS VEGAS

**F**or Megan Hutton, the path to success is less like climbing the corporate ladder and more like navigating a professional lattice. From casual dining to fine dining to her current gig overseeing a team at a quick-serve restaurant, Hutton has taken on management roles that will round out her skills and make her more marketable in an industry that demands it.

### How did you decide on a career in food and beverage?

I did 200 hours as an intern in special events and worked 1,000 hours in hotel operations, and I immediately figured out that I didn't



want to do either [for a career]. Then I started taking elective classes as a process of elimination, and I just found an incredible passion in F&B. I've had opportunities I never in my wildest dreams thought I could experience, including working with celebrity chef Guy Fieri, who is also an alumnus.

### What does it mean to be a Rebel?

Being a Rebel means taking whatever you learned at UNLV and giving it back to the community. I'm very proud to say that I grew up in Las Vegas, I went to school here, and now I'm contributing to the community and showing what UNLV graduates can bring to the table.

### What advice would you give to current students?

Never stop making yourself better. That means getting extra training, finding multiple mentors, and networking. The only person that will get you to the next level is you.

## THE SUITE LIFE

### Sandy Kim '11

**Assistant Director of Housekeeping,  
Four Seasons Hotels Las Vegas**  
LAS VEGAS

**I**t's easy to get lost in a constant flow of tasks when the workday technically never ends, but it's a duty 28-year-old

Sandy Kim manages with the composure of a seasoned hospitality professional.

### How did you decide you wanted a career in hospitality?

I've been working in the industry since high school. I was naturally drawn to it and enjoyed how every day was different. I didn't know hospitality was something I could continue studying until I met with my high school counselor, and she pointed me toward UNLV.

### Describe a time when you were daring.

I was working as a concierge at Aria when MGM reintroduced its Management Associate Program. They told us that internal candidates were not permitted to apply, because they believed we already had access to climb the corporate ladder. I figured they would want to promote from within, because we have an added advantage of understanding the company's culture. So I emailed the senior vice president of human resources, and she ended up agreeing with me. They reopened the program to everyone, and I was accepted into it.

### What advice do you have for current students?

You're going to get out what you put in. The Hotel College offers employer info sessions, job fairs, networking meetings, mentorship program—the list goes on. There's so much that the college offers students, and they should take advantage of all that they can while they can.



## LIFE OF THE PARTY

### Andrew Insigne '11

Director of Event Marketing, TAO Group  
LAS VEGAS

**A**ndrew Insigne's specialty is his ability to orchestrate complex events while injecting a sense of playfulness into every detail. He realized at an early age that his clients want more than a just party—they're looking for an extravagant escape from the ordinary.

**Tell us about a time when you were daring.**

After I went to Marquee [nightclub at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas], I knew I had to work for TAO Group. So, I saw a security casting call for the company on the college's Listserv and used it to weasel my way into talking to the right people. They connected me with the marketing director, and I was hired the following week. I took the risk, because I realized I was a new graduate with minimal experience up against 500 other new hotel grads. At the end of the day, you have to prove you're worth the shot.

**What is a unique challenge you've faced?**

Age and appearance. What I've learned is that you should dress for the job you want and not the job you're doing. People won't take you seriously if you don't look the part. If you can put yourself together, then you'll look like someone who can take care of any job.

**What does it mean to be a Rebel?**

People who graduate from the Hotel College are nontraditional. We're not going to be the people working traditional 9-to-5 jobs. We go out and make an impact in the community and industry in ways that guests will enjoy. We're the people who are always throwing the parties.



## ON-AIR FLAIR

### JC Fernandez '97

Co-Host, "Mercedes in the Morning"  
on Mix 94.1  
LAS VEGAS

**J**C Fernandez has always gone the extra mile.

Working at a hotel as a teenager, Fernandez frequently made notes of guests' preferences and would go out of his way to surprise them. One particular couple who complained about the quality of toilet paper was delighted to find upgraded rolls upon their next check-in.

"I always tried to pick up on little things that would make their stay better the next time around. It formed a bond between us," Fernandez says. "When I first arrived at UNLV, one of the guests actually sent me care packages."

Who knew Fernandez's passion for customer service would turn out to serve his future career in radio. After transferring to the Hotel College in 1995, the Philadelphia transplant worked as a volunteer host with the university's radio station, KUNV. The summer after graduation, Fernandez landed his first gig in promotions at Mix 94.1, occasionally

lending his talents to now co-host Mercedes Martinez of "Mercedes in the Morning."

"I jumped at every opportunity to be on-air," he says. "Anytime they needed help with a live segment, I was all for it. I loved doing anything that brought attention to the show."

In 1998, Fernandez was promoted to producer, but it didn't stop his quirky desire to go above and beyond. He once crashed the outdoor filming of *The Mexican* starring Brad Pitt and Julia Roberts in hopes of getting the stars on-air; although he was chased off set by security, Fernandez ran into Roberts at a local bar later that week.

"I asked if she could call the radio show, and she said, 'No, but I've heard about you,'" Fernandez says. "That was all the validation I needed. I felt so vindicated that she knew about my shenanigans."

While Fernandez foresees a lifelong career in radio, he continues to champion the same customer service habits he picked up from his early days in hospitality.

"I got so much from the degree and education itself, but the biggest takeaway has been the relationships I've made with so many people," Fernandez says. "Being a Rebel means being a part of a community and supporting one another while making lifelong connections."

FIRST-GENERATION  
REVELATION

## Martha Morales '09

General Manager, Nobu Hotel  
at Caesars Palace  
LAS VEGAS

Martha Morales knew from an early age that education was the answer to a better life; her family, however, took some convincing.

"We came from a village in Mexico where the highest level of education offered was fifth grade," Morales says. "My parents just didn't understand the value of education." The fact that Morales was a teen mother presented further challenges. "I had to beg my parents to help me with my daughter so I could finish high school."



Morales' mother reluctantly agreed on one condition: She had to earn good grades and do something with her life. Morales didn't hesitate to agree to her mother's stipulation, because she knew precisely what she wanted to do with her life. "I started working in hospitality at 16, and I fell in love with it," she says. "I fought to get into a tech school that specialized in hotel so I could learn more."

Working against the odds, Morales graduated high school with a full-ride scholarship from the Epicurean Charitable Foundation (ECF). While studying in the Hotel College, she continued to climb the ranks in the workforce.

"UNLV taught me to embrace diversity and people from all different backgrounds," she says. "As I grew in my career, I really learned to appreciate people and see them in a different light because of the Hotel College."

Having come full circle, Morales now serves on the ECF board, awarding scholarships to students who are under-resourced as she once was. "These are the people who will go out and make a difference," Morales says, "so it's great to be able to give them the gift of education."



## ALL BUSINESS

## George Maloof '88

Casino Owner/Operator, Entrepreneur  
LAS VEGAS

Over the past two decades, George Maloof and his siblings have been major players in numerous high-profile, high-stakes business ventures, investing in everything from hotel-casinos to the Sacramento Kings NBA franchise.

Despite the deafening swirl of money and celebrity that has engulfed him (think Fiesta Casino, circa 1994 and Palms Casino, circa 2002), Maloof says he stays grounded by focusing on what matters. "When you own these type of assets, being in the public eye is part of the territory," says the Albuquerque native. "But it's not my favorite thing. I'd rather operate casinos, create jobs, and give [back] to the community."

Whether in the context of supporting local charities or helping to bring Las Vegas its first major professional sports franchise with the

NHL's Golden Knights, Maloof's generosity toward Las Vegas can be traced to an early connection with the city. "I used to come here with my father when I was kid and fell in love with the city—the glamour, the lights, and more particularly ... the casinos."

By the time Maloof arrived at the Hotel School, he was serious about absorbing the business side of hospitality. "I liked that you could come [to UNLV] and learn all of these

different aspects of the casino business, and then immediately apply them," he explains. "When I got out, it was very helpful for me to have all of that knowledge, particularly the accounting skills."

Today, Maloof freely encourages students to pursue hospitality careers, but is careful to inject some hard-earned wisdom: "It's early mornings and long days; you've got to persevere; you've got to love it!"



## AN OPERATOR AT HEART

## John Ceriale '75

President and Founder, Prospect Hotel Advisors  
NEW YORK CITY

You can take the man out of the hotel, but you can't take the hotel out of the man.

This is what comes to mind when talking to John Ceriale. The hotel adviser to Blackstone and other private equity companies says he caught the hotel bug at a young age.

"I was on the Boardwalk in Atlantic city with my parents when I was in the 11th grade," Ceriale recalls. "I went to find a restroom at the Traymore Hotel, and I saw a glass door with a man's name on it which said General Manager. I said to myself, 'That's what I'd like to be one day.'"

Ceriale's infatuation with the hotel business solidified when he entered UNLV Hotel School after graduating from Loyola College in Baltimore. "I

wanted to work," says Ceriale, whose blue-collar background meshed well with the worker-centric Vegas of the 1970s. "I got a great introduction to the basics of the hotel business working at Caesars Palace, which was my first job after graduation."

Ceriale's name could have ended up on many C-suite doors at major hotel companies around the world. However, in 1997, the opportunity came to work for Blackstone, and for the past 20 years he has served as the private equity company's lead consultant on the hotel industry. "Soon after I started with Blackstone, they bought the Savoy Group in London, which was an amazing deal," he says.

As an adviser to Blackstone, Ceriale has also been involved in many headlining hotel deals, from the company's purchase of Hilton Hotels to the sale of New York's Waldorf Astoria, as well as the purchase of Las Vegas' own Cosmopolitan hotel.

Despite his shift to private equity, Ceriale remains true to his first love: the hotel business. "I'm a pure hotel operator," he says with conviction. "It's all I ever really wanted to be."

**"I got a great introduction to the basics of the hotel business working at Caesars Palace."**

VEGAS OR BUST

## Bill Hornbuckle '84

President, MGM Resorts International  
LAS VEGAS

**B**ill Hornbuckle's cross-country trek to UNLV in the 1970s was anything but glamorous.

"I paid \$100 for a station wagon that was going to take us to Las Vegas, and it died before we even got out of Connecticut." A loaned van ended up taking him and his two friends the rest of the way west.

Only a few weeks earlier, Hornbuckle's future had been up in the air. A good bartending job and community college classes were keeping the 19-year-old busy. But his infatuation with the hospitality business along with UNLV's growing national prominence led him to ask one of his professors about the Hotel School.

"He said he could get me a meeting with the dean," Hornbuckle says. "Two weeks later, my friends and I were on a plane to meet with Dean [Jerry] Vallen. He was the most warm, hospitable guy," he recalls. "The dean said, 'I would love to have you guys at the school.' The fact that he was willing to take a shot on us was simply amazing."

The son of a military intelligence officer, Hornbuckle traveled extensively with his family before settling in Connecticut. His fascination with the world, he explains, would have almost certainly taken him out of Las Vegas after graduation had it not been for the Flamingo Hilton. "I worked

**"I paid \$100 for a station wagon that was going to take us to Las Vegas, and it died before we even got out of Connecticut."**



as an assistant hotel manager. There was such an appeal to the overall environment, I wanted to stay."

Some 35 years later, Hornbuckle sits at the pinnacle of the hotel business, grateful he made that decision to stick around. "Think of the amazing things that have been accomplished in this city. And UNLV is a founding staple," he says. "I feel blessed. I mean, my story is pretty incredible. UNLV got me here."

FROM PASSER  
TO PREACHER

## Randall Cunningham '04

Senior Pastor, Remnant Ministries  
LAS VEGAS

**H**e shattered 18 school records during his three seasons as UNLV's quarterback and punter, then went on to enjoy a stellar 16-year NFL career in which he dazzled fans and frustrated opponents with his rocket right arm and nimble feet. And as his career took him from Philadelphia to Minnesota to Dallas to Baltimore, Randall Cunningham proudly told anyone who asked that he was a Rebel alum.

Except, well, he wasn't.

"I always said that I was a UNLV alumni," Cunningham says. "But until you graduate, you're not official. So I became official."

Indeed, he did. Three years after his second and final NFL retirement in 2001—and nearly a quarter century after he first arrived on campus as a prized recruit in



NEVER  
LOOKED  
SO  
GOOD

FIFTYx FIFTY



**“Graduating was like a big exhale. It was like I’d been elected to the Hall of Fame.”**

1981—Cunningham completed a series of online courses and earned his Leisure Studies degree from the Hotel College. It’s an achievement he at first didn’t believe was necessary, but one for which he is now immensely proud.

“Janice Henry, who was the academic adviser for the football team, said, ‘Randall, have you ever considered going back to school and getting your degree?’ And I said, ‘Well, I’m an entrepreneur now; I really don’t need my degree,’” Cunningham recalls. “She said, ‘You should talk to your wife and think about going back.’ And I decided, all right, let’s get it done.”

“Graduating was like a big exhale. It was like I’d been elected to the Hall of Fame. ... I wasn’t summa cum laude or magna cum laude—I was thank you laude!”

Aside from completing his education, Cunningham’s post-football career has been filled with faith. What started as regular bible studies blossomed into Cunningham becoming an ordained minister in 2004—just one day after his 41st birthday—and opening his own church, Remnant Ministries. As Remnant’s senior pastor, Cunningham leads weekly worship services to overflow crowds (and an online audience), and while the former All-Pro quarterback says this wasn’t necessarily his initial post-career game plan, he’s nonetheless grateful to be leading a different kind of team.

“This is a humbling experience, becoming a pastor,” says Cunningham, who was born and raised in Santa Barbara, California, but has called Las Vegas home since coming to UNLV. “It’s just a continuing maturation process. I’m always maturing and evolving into what God wants me to be, and I have to remain humble.”

Not surprisingly, that’s the one trait Cunningham encourages this generation of Rebels to embrace. “You’ve got to walk in humility. Don’t ever think you’re too big for your pants. Don’t get to the place where [you feel like] you’ve arrived and think that you’re all that. Because I got to that place in life, and you think you can relax. But there’s no time for relaxing. ... There’s always something else God wants you to do.”



## Hoop Dreams

Alumni reflect on the rise of the Runnin’ Rebels

**The first year coming to UNLV in 1977, athletics was one big family. That year we got the Final Four. We lost to North Carolina by one point I think. It put us on the map. We were a school to be reckoned with.**

**Debby Jacobs ’81**

I can still remember those days of cheering in the stadium quite vividly; by the way, when I went to cheer for our team, we always won.

**Jung-Ho Suh ’82**

My first game, I was with my dad in the old convention center. The lights went down, the band was unleashed, fireworks, cheerleaders. No one did a pre-game like they did. The hair stood up on the back of my neck.

**Kirk Posmantur ’84**

When I look back at memories, it was one of the greatest times in my life. There was so much energy and excitement. Sports made it so much more fun to go to school and be part of UNLV.

**Scott Sibella ’88**

When I was at UNLV, we won the NCAA Championship. Having that experience ... being part of history ... my buddies and I can still reflect on this. The era, the timing, it was a real special thing.

**Guy Fieri ’90**



## IN REBELS SHE TRUSTS

## Melissa Maher '95

Senior Vice President, Global Partner Group at Expedia, Inc.  
ORANGE COUNTY, CA

As she was wrapping up her high school career in Kokomo, Indiana, Melissa Maher wasn't sure where she was headed for college, nor had she settled on a major. That all changed when Maher arrived on the UNLV campus and met then Hotel College Dean Jerry Vallen.

"He [Dean Vallen] absolutely sold me on hospitality management," Maher recalls. "I was in Las Vegas, clearly the Entertainment Capital of the World, and there was no other place I wanted to go to school."

Maher so enjoyed UNLV that after completing her undergrad degree, she returned and earned a master's. In between, she remained in Las Vegas and worked for Bally's, Paris, and the Las Vegas Hilton before landing a gig in the local offices of travel website Expedia, where she has climbed the corporate ladder for the past 16 years and is currently one of the company's most senior female leaders.

Along the way, Maher—who relocated to Southern California three years ago—has paid it forward: She says 15 Rebels are currently on her team at Expedia, all working out of the Las Vegas office. To Maher, that's a testament to the Hotel College and its partners in the local hospitality industry, who join forces to give students valuable hands-on knowledge.

"For me, the difference between UNLV and some of the other hospitality schools is absolutely the focus on experience," Maher says. "At Expedia, we hire a lot of students from Cornell, and they have book experience and they're really bright kids, but they don't have the real-life experience that a lot of the students we hire from UNLV have."



## VEGAS' NATIVE SON

## Scott Sibella '88

President and COO, MGM Grand  
LAS VEGAS

**Y**ou could say Scott Sibella learned the hotel business from the ground up. As a boy, he often tagged along with his construction superintendent dad, who had a hand in building some of the Strip's most iconic hotel casinos.

But while calling Las Vegas home made sense for the Sibella family, it was a curiosity to out-of-town friends and family. "People would always ask, 'Where do you live? The Strip? Do you have churches? Schools?'" Sibella laughs. "They didn't get it, but I did. I became immersed in the industry at a young age just by living here."

Following two years (post-high school) in Reno, Sibella moved back to Vegas, began working in the industry, and dove into a UNLV career. Although he wasn't sure where he would end up in the hotel business after graduation, he knew he could go anywhere with his degree.

"UNLV is such a big factor in the success of Las Vegas," Sibella says. "It has direct access to some of the best properties in the world, and a number of executives and leaders are alumni. If you look at the top universities we are compared with, no one has what we have."

Thankful for the front-row seat he's enjoyed while watching the city and the university grow, Sibella continues to call Vegas home and reflects on his alma mater with pride.

"UNLV has done so much for me on a personal and professional level," Sibella says, "and I'm proud to be part of what the Hotel College means to the city."

# All in the Family

More and more Rebel stories are about families: mothers, sons, grandparents, siblings—all who have made a collective commitment to UNLV. Here are some truly intriguing examples ...

## A VEGAS STORY

### The Ross Clan

**David Ross '95, '05 MS**  
(CEO, Gaming Asset Management Advisers)  
LAS VEGAS

**P**atricia Ross knows a thing or two about the casino business. She was just six months old when her parents moved the family to Las Vegas in pursuit of casino work, and she would later marry casino executive Thomas Ross.

But when her son David launched his career at the Barbary Coast in the 1980s, Patricia sensed the industry was changing. So much so that she recalls urging him to consider college: "I said, 'Take a class ... start somewhere.'"

David was understandably hesitant to commit to school full time given his quick rise through the ranks under mentor and casino mogul Michael Gaughan. "I was making good money as a pit boss/assistant shift supervisor," he says. "Mr. Gaughan allowed me to participate in a management development/training program that would be the cornerstone of my practical experience."

Ultimately, David followed his mothers' advice and enrolled at UNLV while continuing to work. "I was able to bring a lot of work experience to my education, which was helpful," he says.

Part of David's inspiration came from his mother's belated college run.

"I had an empty-nest feeling after the kids left," Patricia says, "so I enrolled in one community college class, then two, and then I decided to transfer to UNLV." The former stay-at-home mom went on to graduate from the UNLV College of Education, teach elementary school, and return to UNLV for her master's at the age of 50. David followed with his master's degree in 2005.

Now a third-generation Ross—David's daughter, Rebecca—is carving out her own path at UNLV. "My dad is a genius when it comes to casinos," says the hospitality management major, "but I want to focus on hotel operations." Between studying, interning at the South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa, and working at the J.W. Marriott, Rebecca is well on her way.

A proud father, David Ross says the family wouldn't trade their collective UNLV experience for anything. "We believe in education," says David Ross, who continued to climb the corporate ladder at several Coast properties before starting his own consulting company. "It's what you need to compete in a global economy."

You can't beat a mother's advice.

From left to right: Patricia '86, '92 M.Ed., David '95, '05 MS, and Rebecca Ross (Graduating in May of 2018) at the South Point Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas.









50 INTRIGUING ALUMNI

BLISSFUL SISTERS

## Jill, Jennifer, and Jessica Emich '97

Owners, Shine Restaurant and Gathering Place  
BOULDER, CO

**O**wl Eyes, Three Laughing Monks, and Fairy Bubbles may sound like something out of a *Harry Potter* novel. Actually, they're the whimsical names of Shine restaurant's signature potions, crafted by Boulder, Colorado, restaurateurs Jill, Jessica, and Jennifer Emich.

"Our potions are delicious herbal beverages made with specific intentions," Jill says amid a backdrop of incense and the clanking of post-lunch cleanup.

The triplets, who have been in the restaurant business since age 24, speak in tag team.

"Owl Eyes is for clarity," Jennifer explains, "Laughing Monks is for a heightened state of being, and Fairy Bubbles brings about joy and mirth."

"They also mix well with booze," Jessica chimes in. It's worth noting that in addition to operating a restaurant/bar, the sisters run one of the only female-owned breweries in the country.

As creative merchandisers, business owners, and authors of a new lifestyle cookbook titled *Eat, Drink, Shine*, the Emich triplets are an indisputable triple threat. But it doesn't take owl eyes to see that the siblings' success comes from a true passion for serving others—a passion that can be traced to a long bloodline of teachers, shopkeepers, and bread breakers.

"We come from a big Italian family," Jill says proudly. "We love to eat, and we love to cook."

Above: "We worked hard and we lived big while we were students, and we continue beating to our own drum today," says Jill Emich, left, with sisters Jessica, right, and Jennifer.



"When we decided to start running a restaurant," Jennifer adds, "it was a natural progression."

Though inseparable for most of their lives, the New Jersey-born, self-proclaimed "Blissful Sisters" briefly entertained the idea of attending separate universities. Realizing their bond was too strong to break, the three set off to UNLV together; Jill and Jessica fell naturally into hospitality, while Jennifer followed in their mother's footsteps and majored in education—a skill that has not been wasted. "Jen is still teaching every day," Jessica says.

"We're all bringing different strengths to our work," Jennifer responds, "which helps our business."

Underlying the sisters' commitment to health, life balance, and each other is a Rebel spirit. "We worked hard and we lived big while we were students, and we continue beating to our own drum today, living life with passion and purpose," Jill says.

Adds Jessica: "We've never gone by the playbook. We may be called the Blissful Sisters, but we're definitely Rebels."



## REBEL LEGACY

### The Fieris

**Guy Fieri '90 (Celebrity Chef,  
Restaurant Owner)**  
SANTA ROSA, CA

**P**icture this: It's the late 1980s, the Runnin' Rebels are a championship basketball team, and Vegas is on the verge of unleashing the megaresort. California-bred Guy Fieri walks onto the UNLV scene and surveys the Las Vegas culinary environment.

"At that time, it was like ... who has the best buffet?" Fieri laughs. "Now, hotel-casinos are filled with the greatest chefs from around the world. It was a different time, but it was such a critical time. I still am in awe of the experience."

Fieri's determination to learn the business side of the culinary industry is what brought him to UNLV. The cooking part? Well, that started at an early age: "Cooking is all I've ever done," Fieri says. "It's what I did at home when I was a kid."

It's also what he did as an exchange student in France—an experience, Fieri says, that fueled his passion for cuisine. "It gave me an opportunity to try a wide variety of new foods and meet interesting people. When I came back, I wanted to continue these things and someday be a chef and restaurant owner."

But Fieri's dreams of culinary greatness didn't come easy. For the better part of two decades, he has worked at a feverish pace, honing his skills and building a brand that now boasts 67 restaurants worldwide, a line of barbecue sauces and cooking equipment, a boutique winery in Northern California, and four TV shows and dozens of specials.

Despite his very public success, one gets the feeling Fieri is most at home in the kitchen cooking with his wife and two sons,

with whom he often shares the stage. Guy and his son, Hunter, now have something else in common: They're both Rebels.

"UNLV is known for having a great hospitality program," says Hunter Fieri, who is a junior year at UNLV. "And that's what I'm interested in, so coming here was a smart choice for me—not to mention the fact that Las Vegas offers endless opportunities to learn, gain experience, and succeed in the industry."

Today, both Fieris are walking, talking examples of the Rebel spirit—an essential character trait, Guy says, if you want to thrive, be it in the restaurant business or life.

"If you're going to be great in a consistent, special way, you've got to be creative, innovative, and willing to go against the grain. That is what UNLV is. It's a little school in the desert that started something big."

**"If you're going to be great in a consistent, special way, you've got to be creative, innovative, and willing to go against the grain."**



PHOTO COURTESY FOOD NETWORK

From left: Lori, Hunter, Guy, and Ryder Fieri



## THE WINE MASTER

## Kevin Vogt '93

Vice President and Partner, Wine Country Connection  
NAPA VALLEY, CA

**“The main thing that I’ve learned is that you have to dedicate yourself.”**

**L**ong before he had his own wine shop ... or was the wine director for Emeril Lagasse’s Las Vegas restaurants ... or was certified as a master sommelier ... or even a Hotel College student, Kevin Vogt was attending community college in Austin, Texas, and headed down a much different career path.

“My initial degree plan was computer science,” Vogt says. “Then I went into the field one summer and realized I don’t have the temperament to sit in a cubicle banging on a keyboard all day long. I had to be out among people and constantly be doing different things.”

So Vogt logged off of computer science, discovered a love for wine as a hotel bartender in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and eventually landed at UNLV’s Harrah Hotel College, where he continued

to vigorously pursue his new passion. He credits his alma mater for instilling the kind of disciplined study habits that helped him earn certifications as a sommelier, an advanced sommelier and, ultimately, a master sommelier. At the time he reached the latter threshold in 1999, Vogt was just the 88th person in the world and 38th American to earn the distinction.

Not long after earning his degree from UNLV, Vogt embarked on a 20-year career as Lagasse’s right-hand wine man in Las Vegas. As successful and satisfying as his time with Lagasse was, Vogt felt the urge to strike out on his own. He did just that last spring, relocating to Yountville, California, in the Napa Valley, where he and a partner took over an existing wine shop, rebranding it Wine Country Connection.

There he continues to live out his life passion, while offering advice to current students: “The main thing I’ve learned is you have to dedicate yourself. A lot of people these days don’t want to put in the kind of work it takes to get to that next level. Almost everybody who works is content to spend 40-plus hours a week working for somebody else, but they won’t spend four hours a week working for themselves—working on their own plan, on their own future.”



## A TOUCH OF ELEGANCE

### Kathy Dyke '94

Event Designer, ByDzign  
LAS VEGAS

**K**athy Dyke readily admits she knew very little about UNLV when she decided to transfer from Iowa State in 1989. She even readily admits that what she did know—that the university was home to a world-renowned hotel college, which was precisely what she was looking for—she only learned from doing research in Iowa State's library. "There was, of course, no Internet back then."

Dyke's research was so hyper-focused, though, that it failed to reveal two important facts about her soon-to-be new home: that Vegas is a tad on the warm side in the summer and that UNLV had a powerhouse basketball program. "I was a big college basketball fan," Dyke recalls, "and when I arrived, I was like, 'Oh, these guys are really good!'"

Thus began Dyke's love affair with her university that exists to this day. In addition to being an ardent supporter of Rebel athletics, Dyke has given back to her alma mater by serving on the UNLV Alumni Association Board and serving as the go-to person whenever a UNLV-sponsored gala needs a little extra flair.

For all that, and more, Dyke was named the 2017 Hotel College Alumna of the Year. Humbled by the honor, Dyke is quick to acknowledge that it wouldn't have happened without the continued blessing of her employer. "I'm just super lucky that I have a boss who supports it," says Dyke, who has been with ByDzign since 2012. "He didn't go to UNLV, but he's said, 'It's the university that's in our town. It's the right thing to do.'"



## A BREWING PASSION

### Junghoon Yoon '03

Co-Owner and Brewmaster, Platinum Brewing Company  
SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

**Craft beer expert Junghoon Yoon was undeterred when his home country of South Korea denied his request to establish a brewery—a privilege reserved only for the larger beer companies.**

But when Yoon turned his focus to East China, he encountered new obstacles.

"The Chinese government thought anything at the craft level was shady business," Yoon says. "I had to show them American and European protocols to prove craft brewing is part of a legitimate industry."

After three years of planning, Yoon was granted permission in 2010 to open a craft production brewery in Yantai, China. He imported his products into South Korea until early 2017 when he was finally given the OK to launch a second brewery in Seoul, the Platinum Craft Brewing Company.

Yoon's passion for beer making was evident during his early years as an international student in the United States. Introduced to homebrewing through a friend, Yoon studied at UC Davis Extension's Master Brewers program and then earned a hospitality degree at UNLV.

"My education as a brewmaster allows me to understand the science and recipe behind each beer," Yoon says, "but my hospitality education allows me to understand how beer plays an important role in the industry."

Sharing his craft with others is also important, says Yoon, who teaches a "beer sommelier" course to hopeful hospitality students at the Doemens Academy in Seoul.

"This is where my UNLV education comes into play, because I understand what these students want to do," he says. "The Harrah Hotel College has one of the top programs in the world, so I'm very proud to share my education with these students."

REINVENTING HIMSELF

## Tim Haughinberry

Owner, Back Bar USA and Gold Mine Tavern  
LAS VEGAS

Tim Haughinberry developed an affinity for hospitality at a young age. He began working a fast food job at 15, and by the time he graduated from community college, he was the assistant manager for a restaurant.

Still, the southern Californian wanted to learn more about the restaurant business, and UNLV proved to be the right place at the right time.

"I arrived in '87, and the town just exploded," says Haughinberry of Las Vegas' burgeoning hospitality scene some 30 years ago. "I was fortunate to take advantage of that and grow with the city."

Fresh out of college, Haughinberry's passion for hospitality shifted from restaurants to the beverage industry when he landed a job with Southern Wine & Spirits. It was a calling that would help inspire the creation of Montecristo Rum as well as his consulting and marketing firm, Back Bar USA.

Haughinberry recently stepped down as president and CEO of Back Bar but remained the owner, a decision that he says allows him more time to connect with clients and concentrate on what he loves most: being creative. "Sometimes you just have to leave your comfort zone," says Haughinberry, "and know that if you're passionate about something that the money will come later."

Much like the city of Las Vegas, Haughinberry's story is about embracing change.

"While I've stayed on the path of hospitality, I let every opportunity just guide me into whatever direction was best at the time," Haughinberry says. "As long as I work hard and don't give up, good things happen in the end."



GRACE UNDER FIRE

## Vida Chow '87, '06 MHA

Hyatt Director, Talent Management, Asia Pacific  
HONG KONG

From hosting presidents and celebrities to resolving guest and employee grievances, Vida Chow knows working in the sleepless hospitality industry requires a certain level of patience and empathy.

So when things inevitably get tense, Chow calls upon her favorite mantra: "Keep calm and carry on." Those words have served Chow well throughout her nearly 30-year career with Hyatt.

Chow's ability to stay composed in the face of pressure impressed Hyatt management from the start. Early on, the organization trusted the young professional to take



## CHARTING HIS OWN COURSE

Timothy Lam  
'04 MSExecutive Director, The International  
School of Hospitality

LAS VEGAS

**Y**earning for a new career in the early 2000s, Timothy Lam decided to tap into his love for travel and hospitality. So the Hong Kong transplant—already equipped with a master's degree in international business—set about comparing various hospitality programs around the country. He quickly felt drawn to the Harrah Hotel College.

"My campus tour as a prospective UNLV student underscored the generosity within the college and the industry," Lam says. "I felt an instant connection with everyone at the Hotel College. I knew it was the place for me."

The word "hospitality" soon took on a new meaning when former Hotel College Professor Ellis Norman offered



Lam a spare room after learning that the new student's living situation—a seedy motel—was less than ideal.

"His wife opened the door, and she had no idea who I was," laughs Lam, who arrived at Norman's house with suitcases and a bottle of wine. "Ellis hadn't told her I was coming, but apparently he took in stray students all the time. They both were so welcoming."

Lam's academic work with Norman and other Hotel College faculty, including former professor Patti Shock, inspired him to establish The International School of Hospitality in 2005, which caters to career changers interested in specific areas of hospitality.

"There are no books out there that teach you how to open your own school, so I relied heavily on my UNLV education," Lam says. "I thought my friends would only be my classmates, but I found a family within the faculty as well."

on leadership positions that went beyond her "events" experience—roles such as front office manager and, later, human resources director.

Now in charge of talent management for all of Asia Pacific, Chow is quick to reflect on how her early challenges served to push her professionally. "You should always be ready to step out of the comfort zone, take risks, and persevere," she says. "When you least expect it, something great will come along."

Which leads her to cite one of her other favorite quotes: "Be patient. Be smart. Stay focused."

Now three decades into her career, Chow says she continues to be charmed by the hospitality industry. And she credits her alma mater for giving her a solid start in the heart of the industry.

"I picked UNLV because of its great reputation, and it helps that you have great access to the Strip," she says. "Hotel administration is a fun and global environment where I can meet a lot of people from different backgrounds and cultures."



## LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Jeffrey Yedlin '02, '08  
MHA, PhD (MAY 2018)Director of Food and Beverage, Hilton Worldwide  
HONOLULU

**W**hen Jeffrey Yedlin left his high-ranking hospitality position at MGM Resorts International in Las Vegas to work for Hilton Worldwide in Hawaii in 2016, he was trading the fast-paced atmosphere of the Strip for the calm beaches of paradise.

Although it doesn't sound like a hard sell, walking away from a great job and uprooting a family to move to an island 2,700 miles away was a risk—albeit a calculated one—for the seasoned food and beverage professional. "It felt like a whole new career change," Yedlin says. "People usually leave to escape something, but I was very happy with what I was doing, so that made the experience feel very different."

Yedlin owns two degrees from the Hotel College, with a third on the way, and he says he had a specific intention in mind for each. His bachelor's provided practical information to launch his career, while a master's strengthened his skill set during the recession. And his Ph.D.? Well, that's a personal goal.

"I never do things just to say, 'I did it,'" he says. "I do them because I want to do something meaningful. I want what I do to have a purpose."

Active in teaching and mentoring, Yedlin passes along those same words of wisdom to students and young professionals. He also encourages them to study their surroundings before making big decisions.

"I have always been fortunate to have good mentors," Yedlin says. "Teaching is a natural extension that allows me to give back, similar to others who taught me in the earlier stages of my career."



# The Pioneers

In 1967, when UNLV was still referred to as “Nevada Southern,” a group of adventurous young men gathered in the desert to try their luck at a fledgling hotel school just east of the Las Vegas Strip. Little did they know they would be on the ground floor of something big.

*These excerpts were taken from interviews conducted in October 2017.*

**Above: The gang celebrates following graduation in 1969. From left, Bill Paulos, John Porter, Larry Griewisch, and Bill Sanderson.**

**E**xcept for Roger, you all came to UNLV from the East Coast. What inspired you to travel across the country to attend college?

**PAT MOREO:** Several of us from community college in Brooklyn applied to Oklahoma State University and were accepted. In April of 1967, our director comes to see us all and says, “Don’t you want a management program?” We did, but we couldn’t afford Cornell, and it was hard to find a place that would accept our credits. He said, “You should apply to this new program in Las Vegas.” I thought, You got to be kidding me. This is April; we’re starting classes in September! We all applied [to UNLV] and got in. We bailed out of Oklahoma State.

**BILL PAULOS:** One of our favorite teachers, Sam Douglas [from State University of New York], said, “Listen, I was just hired as the new dean of the hotel school out in Las Vegas. If you go, you can have all your credits accepted. You can get a bachelor’s in two years.” We [Paulos, John Porter, Jay “Bill” Sanderson, and the late Larry Griewisch] looked at each other and said, “Sure, why not?” So we arrived here [at UNLV], unpacked, went downstairs and

immediately asked for Sam Douglas. They said, “There’s no Sam Douglas here.” So, we wound up here not knowing a soul, and the one guy who recruited us here was a no call, no show.

**What did your parents think about your going to school in Las Vegas?**

**PAULOS:** It got us out of the house. We were 2,500 miles away from our parents. They were pretty happy.

**JOHN PORTER:** I think my parents were concerned I was moving so far from home to “Sin City.” They didn’t understand it.

**MOREO:** We had never been west of Buffalo. They were surprised.

**How did you make your way to UNLV, Roger?**

**ROGER WAGNER:** I came to UNLV on a track scholarship, but I had no real major in mind. I had been working the graveyard shift at the Dunes Hotel as a room clerk. I said, “You know what? I love the environment where





Above: From left, Bill Paulos, Roger Wagner, and Bill Sanderson in the new Hospitality Hall. Center: Pat Moreo. Right: John Porter.



What are some of the things this college should be proud of as we celebrate its 50th anniversary?

**PORTER:** The school should be proud of going from its humble beginnings to the top hotel school in the country—in the

people want to come spend their money, not because their water heater broke or they got sick and needed a doctor. This is where people wanted to come and have fun in a hospitality environment. I want to be a part of that.” And I joined the Hotel School.

**You five were part of the new “Hotel” program’s very small inaugural class. Give us a sense of what the UNLV campus was like when you arrived.**

**PORTER:** Bill [Paulos] and I flew out together. I’m a country boy, and Billy’s a city boy. We’re landing in Las Vegas, and Paulos leans across and says, “Port, there are no buildings.” I leaned over and said, “Willy, there are no trees or grass.” It was pretty sparse. One dormitory. It was just us and a few other kids from New York and California.

**“It was pretty sparse. One dormitory. It was just us and a few other kids from New York and California.”**

**PAULOS:** Ninety-nine percent of our classes were in Grant Hall, weren’t they?

**MOREO:** Our classes were in Grant Hall up on the second floor, and we were with the College of Business, Department of Hotel Administration.

**WAGNER:** Then we had the education building, and the library was one story in those days.

**JAY “BILL” SANDERSON:** Yes, the library was right in the middle.

**PAULOS:** Well, these guys never knew where the library was anyway, and it was only the third building on campus. [Laughter.]

**MOREO:** Tonopah Hall [dorm] had just been built. We were the first to move in.

**SANDERSON:** We [Sanderson, Paulos, Porter, and Griewisch] pledged a fraternity pretty quickly because rent was only \$35 at the fraternity house. We didn’t pay very often, but we didn’t owe much.

**PORTER:** We took the house [Kappa Sigma] over. Meetings and parties were held there. We had a blast. The four of us had a pact: If any of us won at poker, we’d split the money four ways. We got accused of pulling down the grade-point average of the fraternity. We were not the guilty parties.

**When you came to UNLV in 1967, was there any sense that the Hotel School was going to eventually be one of the top programs in the world?**

**WAGNER:** I don’t know that at our age in those days we were looking that far ahead. My goal was to get a degree from an accredited college that would help kick down the door to a job opportunity—that would take me beyond my front desk job at the Dunes. By the way, it makes you look so obsolete when you see that all of us worked in joints they blew up years ago, and we’re still around.

**MOREO:** I think we knew that something special was cooking.

world. A lot of people deserve a lot of credit.

**MOREO:** And continuing its focus on bridging between academics and industry. That’s the strength of the college.

**WAGNER:** I’d bet you that for vice presidents, presidents, CEOs, and top-level positions, [the Hotel School has] one of the best rosters. At the end of the day, what you turn out in graduates and how they do tells you how good the school is.

**SANDERSON:** I agree with that. It is amazing what [the Hotel School has] done, considering where it started. UNLV was very supportive of young people. I keep going back to the internships, because they got [students] away from their desk, and they actually saw what was going on in the hotel business and how it ran. It gave them the confidence when they got into a position.

**PAULOS:** People from all over the world want to come to UNLV to go to the Hotel School. To think that Jerry [Dean Jerry Vallen] did that, going from almost nothing to what we have today, and to look at this unbelievable new building [UNLV’s new Hospitality Hall] that will be the standard for buildings on campus—let alone the Hotel School—it’s pretty special.

**Pat Moreo ’69 is a former professor at UNLV and current professor and dean at the University of Southern Florida, Sarasota-Manatee. He is a New York City native. Bill Paulos ’69 is the co-founder and former owner of Cannery Casino Resorts. He grew up near New York City. John Porter ’69 is a managing partner of Benbow Historic Inn. He is a native of upstate New York. Jay “Bill” Sanderson ’70 is a table game director for Boyd Gaming. He is a native of upstate New York. Roger Wagner ’69 is a former hotel/gaming executive. He grew up in Boulder City, Nevada.**

THE MASTER OF SERVICE

## Jerry Inzerillo '75

CEO, Forbes Travel Guide  
NEW YORK CITY

Jerry Inzerillo's knack for turning the good into the magnificent is well known, if not legendary, in hospitality circles. For five decades, Inzerillo has launched some of the world's most notable hotel-resorts and managed some of the biggest names in entertainment. His list of devoted clients is outmatched only by his collection of lifelong friends.

It was this devotion to hospitality that got Inzerillo accepted into the prestigious Cornell University School of Hotel Administration in the early 1970s. But when the young New Yorker arrived for orientation, he encountered a problem. "My family was poor, so I had been working since I was 13," recalls Inzerillo, whose future at Cornell lived and died on the promise of in-state tuition and a job. "[The professor at orientation] informed me that students were discouraged from working. That threw me into a panic. I thought, 'How am I going to support myself?'"

Inzerillo soon identified another glaring issue: "Even if I was allowed to work, there were no hotels!"

UNLV's up-and-coming Hotel School—in the shadows of the Las Vegas Strip—proved to be the answer for Inzerillo, who was wowed by the city's abundance of luxury hotels and world-class entertainment. "I told my parents that I was going to the same place Sinatra is—Las Vegas," he says. "My mother cried, because she thought of Vegas as a place for prostitutes and the mafia." It wasn't long, however, before his parents' worries were assuaged. "I was there [at UNLV] for a week and got a job at the Flamingo on graveyard."

Still, the budding hotelier kept pushing himself, working full time and taking on a heavy credit load while maintaining his place on the dean's list. "Dean [Jerry] Vallen was worried that I was putting too much pressure on myself," Inzerillo recalls. "He said, 'Don't you think

you deserve a little fun?' I said, 'Dean Vallen, I'm on a mission. Don't worry about fun.'"

Inzerillo's fun would indeed come later in the form of five distinguished decades in service and entertainment, which was recently celebrated as part of the Forbes Travel Guide 2017 Star Awards in New York. The fact that Inzerillo is enjoying 50 years in the business at the same time the Hotel School is celebrating its 50th anniversary ... well, it feels like cosmic symmetry.

"It [UNLV's College of Hospitality] has become one of the most prolific producers of leaders within the American and global hotel community," says Inzerillo, who was named the college's 2014 Industry Leader and Alumnus of the Year. "The college is No. 1 for gaming. It's in the top three for hotel administration. To achieve that in 50 years? Well, that's something incredible."







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# The Most Important Meal of the Sports Calendar

Chef Mark Sandoval is leading an interdisciplinary pilot program to feed the basketball team breakfast. And that might just be the tip of the omelette.

by Jason Scavone

**W**hen you're worrying about hitting three-pointers, three squares can take a backseat.

Between classes, practice, extracurricular activities, and some semblance of a social life, student-athletes can't always line up the right food at the right time to meet the level of caloric needs that should make anyone over 25 weep for their metabolism.

A pilot sports catering program developed by UNLV's colleges of Hospitality and Allied Health Sciences is aiming to seamlessly integrate nutrition planning and meal



Sandoval, seen here with part of his catering team (from left: Steven Relucio, Mark Sandoval, Stephanie Bogert, and Sean Young), runs a full-service catering program for both on-and-off campus clients.



preparation, starting with the Runnin' Rebels Basketball team and expanding to other student-athletes on campus.

Hospitality College Executive Chef Mark Sandoval, in conjunction with UNLV Director of Strength and Conditioning Damon McClure, is starting with just a few breakfasts a week at the Mendenhall Center, but the plan is to expand to five-day-a-week breakfasts and dinners, supplemented with grab-and-go healthy lunches that student-athletes can pack with them before a day of darting hither and yon.

"Healthy" is a jumping-off point, but convenience may be the overriding factor for student-athletes that may require 3,000-4,000 calories per day, depending on their sport.

"The biggest issue is not that they eat unhealthy foods, but they're not eating enough food," Sandoval says. "The calories they burn are almost exceeding what they're taking in."

Breakfast menus rotate between different types of eggs, starches like French toast, pancakes and hash browns, fresh fruit, and both pork and turkey bacon, chicken apple sausage and the like.

Students studying in UNLV's nutrition and kinesiology program work with coaches and student-athletes to determine goals, calories needed to gain or lose weight, and the macronutrient ratios to balance it all out.

In the long term, Sandoval envisions serving all student-athletes in a dining complex where foods are labeled with their caloric and macronutrient contents.

Of course, that doesn't necessarily obviate the age-old struggle of getting everyone to eat their vegetables. Feedback comes in the form of clean plates and empty chafing dishes.

"I watch what they put on their plate – what they don't eat, what they do eat," Sandoval says. "We're trying to get them things they like that work for what we need to do."

**"The biggest issue is not that they eat unhealthy foods, but they're not eating enough food. The calories they burn are almost exceeding what they're taking in."**

For hospitality students, this type of program offers a valuable outlet for their gaining practical experience in the service industry, which is a degree requirement. Currently, about a dozen volunteer students and seven to eight paid student workers are involved, with student chefs starting to work into the mix. As the program expands, more opportunities will come to the college's 140 food and beverage students before they embark on careers.

"They love it in that they're learning," Sandoval says. "So they'll come in, and I'll say this is your timeline, this is everything you've prepared, and now you have to cook it in a progression that makes sense. Everything needs to come to the table when it's hot and ready to go, and you need to be out the door by 8:30 a.m. They're learning the process and timing, a sense of urgency. You have to move quickly, you have to be calculating."

Once basketball gets fully established in the next several months, Sandoval plans to pitch this catering service to other programs, tailoring each plan to the sport and athletes involved.

It's a mutually beneficial arrangement between the Hospitality College, the School of Allied Health Sciences, and athletics that delivers both practical experience and financial savings for the team by moving their dining program in-house.

But it's an arrangement that has intangible benefits, as well.

"Hopefully our basketball team this year is really awesome, and (the hospitality students) kind of feel like they're a part of it," Sandoval says. "I think their feeling is 'Hey, if these guys are awesome this year, I'm helping.' It's school spirit. It provides a lot more than just experience, those kinds of lessons."



**FOR THE TERRINE**

4 leeks, white part only,  
blanched

3 red bell peppers, roasted  
& peeled

3 yellow bell peppers,  
roasted & peeled

8 leaves rainbow chard,  
stems removed & blanched

3 medium yellow beets,  
roasted, peeled & cut into  
1/8-inch thick slices

3 medium chioga beets,  
roasted, peeled & cut into  
1/8-inch thick slices

12 ounces virgin soft  
cheese

**FOR THE BAGNA CAUDA**

¼ cup parsley,  
minced

¼ cup garlic, minced

1 cup extra virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon chili flake



## Vegetable Terrine

Prepared and served by Chef Mark Sandoval and students at the 555 Dinner, benefiting Create a Change Now, which helps to promote sustainable changes within the community.

*Equipment: Terrine Mold*  
*Prep/Cooking Time: 2 hours*  
*Makes 12, 3- to 4-ounce portions*

**FOR THE TERRINE**

Line the terrine mold with plastic wrap. Place blanched leeks on the bottom and sides of the mold so that all sides are covered. Make sure to let the longest pieces hang over the sides so that they can be used to cover the top when finished.

In the bottom of the mold begin to layer the vegetables, alternating colors and placing some virgin cheese between layers. Season each layer with salt and pepper.

Once the terrine mold is filled to the top, fold the leeks over the top and press down firmly with weights to pack everything into the mold. This should be done under refrigeration. Remove the terrine from the mold and slice into half-inch thick pieces.

**FOR THE BAGNA CAUDA**

Make the bagna cauda by heating olive oil in a small pot until hot. Add the remaining ingredients, remove from heat and cool in an ice bath. Pour the bagna cauda over each slice of the terrine before serving. Garnish with baby greens.





# Checking In

NEWS, TRENDS & INNOVATION  
IN GUEST EXPERIENCES

The psychology of online travel reviews p.58

by Angela Ramsey





WHAT'S NEW IN RESEARCH

## The Psychology of Online Travel Reviews

Dr. Sarah Tanford creates a virtual world to test factors that influence decisions

by Angela Ramsey

A well-known expert in the area of hospitality consumer behavior, Dr. Sarah Tanford's research has been featured in several top tier hospitality journals, at major hospitality conferences, and in news outlets such as the *New York Times*. As part of her ongoing work with doctoral students, Tanford recently received support for a fully funded three-year graduate research assistantship through UNLV.

**I**'ve heard good things," a friend says after learning of your tentative plans to stay at a certain beachside resort. You smile, still gripped with doubt. After all, this is your one big trip this year, not counting the summer's family reunion (which everyone knows doesn't count as a vacation), and it needs to be postcard perfect.

Refusing to leave your booking decision to chance, you take to your laptop to consult a more reliable friend—your favorite travel review site. Here, you will scrutinize amenities and weigh the opinions of a mostly anonymous lot whose experiences may very well become the blueprint for your vacation.

"Like you, these travelers have invested time and money selecting an experience that matches their expectations," says Dr. Sarah Tanford, associate professor at the Harrah College of Hospitality. "Their perspectives feel like free advice ... a glimpse behind the curtain."

But while consumers may be empowered by the world of the online travel reviews, the service industry often struggles when confronting complicated questions, like "just what exactly do our customers want?"

That's where Tanford comes in. Over the past five years, Tanford has been plumbing the depths of online travel review sites, mixing and matching elements to see how they affect customer decisions. Her methodology? Setting up mock review sites and presenting potential travelers with different scenarios to test how they react when choosing where to stay and what to eat (names of actual restaurants and hotels are not used).

"Simulating the online travel review

space means that I can control the variables, which cannot be done using real sites like TripAdvisor and Yelp" Tanford says. In her own virtual world, she can control the way photos appear, she can test the effectiveness of different styles of rating systems, and she can experiment with the way businesses communicate and promote factors like sustainability, reputation, location, and price.

Having previously worked as a manager in the casino industry and a senior analyst in travel distribution marketing, Tanford knows the stakes are particularly high in the self-conscious world of hospitality.

"There's a thing called the negativity bias," says Tanford, whose work is heavily rooted in social psychology theory. "Even a single negative review in a series of positive reviews can cause someone to choose a different hotel or restaurant."

Positive reviews, on the other hand, have a measurable effect when it comes to price: "People are actually willing to pay more for a resort with positive reviews while remaining hesitant to book a negatively reviewed resort, even at a steep discount."

So why, in light of your friend's glowing endorsement of the beachside resort, do you still feel the need to seek the opinions of strangers?

It is our affinity for "word-of-mouth" interaction, which Tanford calls one of the most persuasive forms of communication according to research. "Even though these reviewers are strangers, we think of them as just regular people like you and me," Tanford says. "Their word-of-mouth advice is viewed as more objective than advertisers or professional travel experts."

Ultimately the online review is just one of many powerful tools in the arsenal of decision making, says Tanford, who notes that consumers sometimes fall into the trap of blindly following the pack.

"The bottom line is consumers should consider their specific needs when making travel choices," she says. "Online reviews are just one piece of the puzzle."

After all, this is your trip ... not theirs.





# On the Job

INTERNS REPORT



“

A unique opportunity that I was given was being the lead instructor for one of our weekly junior camps. It was my responsibility to get the kids to and from the practice area while making sure they practiced golf, remembered how to be safe, and most importantly, had fun.”

AUSTIN SNOW

Interned with **South Fork Country Club, Hamptons, New York**

**W**ith the help of the college's Boughner Career Services and PGA Golf Management offices, 310 students were placed in internship positions last summer. Over the course of the academic year, that number will increase to more than 600.

The student interns worked in various fields, ranging from gaming to golf, and traveled to six countries, including China, South Korea, and Canada. Hear what a few had to say about their internship experiences.



“

One of the most interesting components of my internship was the **Arena and Equestrian Center**. This practical experience allowed me to gain the unique perspective of augmenting hotel occupancy using this one-of-a-kind venue.”

REBECCA ROSS

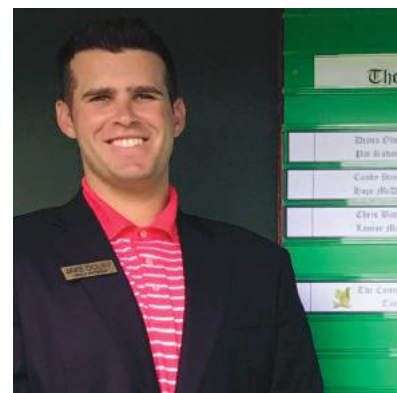
Interned with **South Point Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, Nevada**

“

I value the camaraderie and mentorship from the team at The Country Club. I was fortunate enough to meet one-on-one with our head professional every six weeks for a half-hour discussion about career, personal life, and my golf game. “

JACOB DOLBY

Interned with **The Country Club, Brookline, Massachusetts**



COMMUNITY MATTERS

# Say 'Yes' to Building Bridges in the Community

UNLV and Core Academy join forces to provide a once-in-a-lifetime learning experience for some stellar high schoolers

by Shekinah Hoffman

Over four weeks in June, 20 local high school sophomores were immersed in the Young Executive Scholars Hospitality & Tourism Program (YES) - an academic development program that offers behind-the-scenes tours of Strip properties, team projects, and face-to-face instruction from some of the industry's top experts.

"Our mission was two-fold," says Dr. Bo Bernhard, whose team at UNLV's International Gaming Institute spearheaded the project with the local educational advocacy group Core Academy. "Inspire the next generation of Las Vegas entrepreneurs to pursue careers in hospitality, and show them that UNLV can help them get there."

Modeled after the University of Nevada, Reno's Executive Development Program (EDP), YES takes the EDP's concepts of mentorship, team collaboration, and peer analysis and tailors these components for underserved students in the Clark County School District.

"Our hope is that through exposure and access to successful executives and leaders, we can open the minds of these students

**"Our mission was two-fold: inspire the next generation of Las Vegas entrepreneurs to pursue careers in hospitality, and show them that UNLV can help them get there."**



to new possibilities," says Core Academy executive director Lindsay Harper.

In addition to day-to-day projects, the students worked with such industry giants as Paul Steelman, CEO of Steelman Partners, and Jan Jones Blackhurst, executive vice president at Caesars Entertainment. Their final challenge, which was to create a business plan for Las Vegas' next integrated resort, came with impressive results.

"These students represent the best and the brightest from environments that often lack much by way of resources, says Bernhard. "But this has not stopped them from excelling, and indeed producing work that inspired our celebrity judges to want to hire them on the spot! But what was more inspiring was the way in which these students leaned on each other, bonded with

their teams, and delivered presentations with a boldness, braveness, and intelligence far beyond their years."

As for the students, they say they'll never view the hospitality business and their hometown the same. "I learned a lot about Las Vegas through the YES program," says West Prep Academy student Jimena Hernandez Duran. "I started to see my hometown differently when I really started to look close. Las Vegas is a place that opens up many doors for those who want to learn more."

**Above: Students receive a special tour of the Ká Theatre at MGM Grand.**





BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

## They Came, They Interviewed, They Conquered

Interview prep event gets hospitality students ready for the real world

by Angela Ramsey

**“W**hen I first saw the room, I was a little intimidated because there were so many executives and students interviewing in one area,” says sophomore Paola Lopez.

Lopez and some 175 Harrah Hospitality College students participated in mock interviews at the 2017 Hospitality Prep Interview Event, for which 39 hospitality executives from Las Vegas companies came to campus to serve as volunteer interviewers. Rows of tables filled the Student Union Ballroom, where practice interviews took place throughout the day.

“It was a unique opportunity for the students to get to meet industry professionals and have a sense of what it could be like to be interviewed,” says interviewer Fe Allen,

the director of talent acquisition for MGM Resorts International. “On the flip side, it was a distinctive opportunity for me to meet students who are interested in the hospitality industry.”

The interview prep experience was just one portion of Harrah Hotel College’s Career Week, organized by the college’s Boughner Career Center. Students engaged in numerous career-building activities throughout the week, including mock interviews, company information sessions, internship interviews, and the Spring Networking Mixer, which brought in 350 student attendees as well as 60 companies recruiting for hotels and restaurants around the world.

For students preparing to enter the

**Above: Senior Alexis Miranda was among the students who went through the interview process with executives from local businesses. Participating organizations included Alon, Caesars Entertainment, Clark County, Diamond Resorts, Enterprise Holdings, Estiatorio Milos at Cosmopolitan, Four Seasons, MGM Resorts International, Southern Glazer’s Wine and Spirits, Station Casinos, and Venetian|Palazzo.**

workforce, Career Week is an opportunity to fine-tune presentation skills and seek feedback.

“I am so grateful that career services provides us with these types of events,” says Lopez. “In just 30 minutes, I became a better interviewee.”

# Giving Back

## Be part of the Hospitality Hall Donor Recognition Wall.

The Harrah College of Hospitality is delighted to recognize all of the alumni, industry partners, and friends of the college who have joined in our efforts to build a state-of-the-art academic facility devoted to the discipline of hospitality. In honor of these supporters, Hospitality Hall will feature a special donor recognition wall, located on the second-floor Alumni & Friends Veranda with the names and giving levels of each key contributor.\* As fund-raising efforts continue, we invite you to consider making a gift to the college so that we can maintain and nurture our status as the world's premier hospitality school.

### Why I wanted to contribute to Hospitality Hall ...

**"[Hospitality Hall] gives us a place to celebrate what we do. And I'm personally so excited to have my mom's name on a conference room. It's a tremendous legacy to her, and it's been a dream for me to find that opportunity."**

– Cindy Kiser Murphey '80,  
*Funded the Kay Kiser Conference Room*

\* Key contributors are donors making a gift commitment of \$25,000 or more to Hospitality Hall, which includes multi-year pledges.

**"I think it's very important for me to give back to what was so important to me in the early years. When people come here and take a look at where we're training our students and how we're training our students, it should be a #1 incentive. And this building is truly a #1 incentive."**

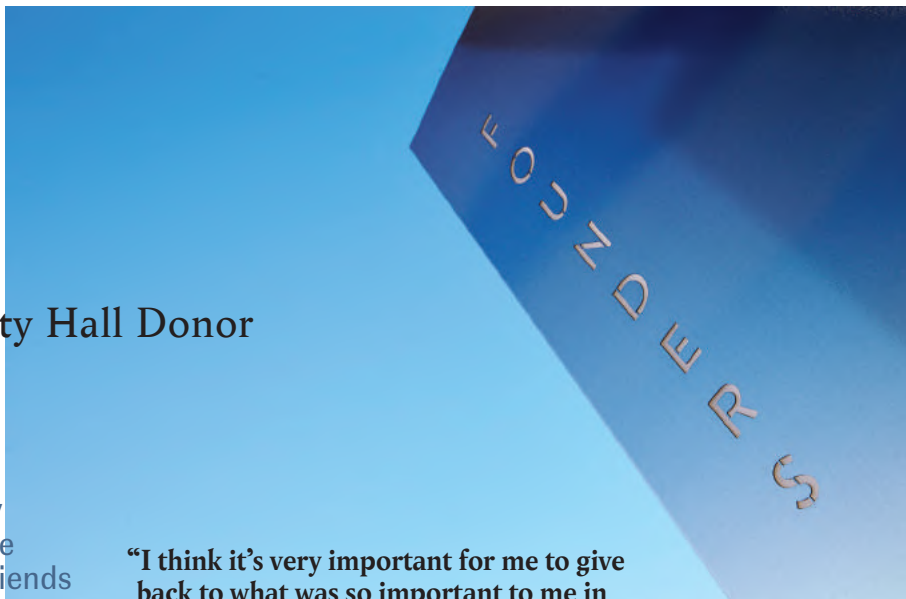
– Bill Paulos '69  
*Funded the Nicholas Paulos Garden*

**"First of all, I'm lucky I have a company that can do this. Seriously, how many times in a person's lifetime do they see the opening of a new building? This is your name attached to a building, forever! This was a one-of-a-kind opportunity."**

– Marco Benvenuti '02  
*Platinum-level Donor*

**"As the college turns 50 and we reflect on those who gave before us, our mission is to continue their proud legacy of providing financial support for the education of the next generation of hospitality leaders."**

– Paula Eylar-Lauzon '89  
*Bronze-level donor*





# Donor Honor Roll

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Whether it's contributing to Hospitality Hall, the Dean's Leadership Fund, or student scholarships, there are numerous ways to support the Harrah College of Hospitality. To learn more about available giving opportunities, and to explore the option that is right for you, contact Alexandra Liebman, Director of Development, at [alexandra.liebman@unlv.edu](mailto:alexandra.liebman@unlv.edu) or 702-895-3148.

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# Class Notes

ALUMNI SUCCESSES & INSIGHTS

Reflections on the college's founding dean Jerry Vallen, stories about favorite professors, general college memories, and career updates.

## 1960s-70s

**John Porter '69**, who is a managing partner of Benbow Historic Inn in northern California and a member of the college's first graduating class, has fond memories of interacting with Dean Vallen:

**"I always got the impression that he was a gentleman, easy to talk to, and a fair guy. I think we were thankful that he accepted us, and we were appreciative."**

met with Dean Vallen on several occasions. His door was always open to the out-of-state students to make us comfortable in the new environment."

**Donald Boone '78** works in independent slots sales. He recalls the first time he visited UNLV's Hotel College when he was a student at UNR: "I drove down to Las Vegas, got a \$15 room at the Stardust, and checked out the program. I was only there a few minutes when I was introduced directly to Dean Vallen, who was so gracious and excited about the college that I made a decision that day to join in!"

**Gary Vallen '79** is a professor at Northern Arizona University's School of Hotel and Restaurant Management. He is the son of Jerry Vallen and considers the Hotel College to be a large part of his life: "After work each evening, Dad would share stories of his day. I always took to heart the personal touch he had with so many people. Even as the program grew, Dad had a way of staying close to faculty and students."

## 1980s

**David Bloom '83** is the chief development officer for Capriotti's. One of his favorite college memories is when he met Sheri Woodward, who served as president of the Hotel Association in 1982: "It took me months to convince her to go on a date, and even then, it was at one of the association's events. We married in 1984 and have been married for more than 30 years." David now has a newlywed daughter and is happy to be living back in Las Vegas.

**Jay "Bill" Sanderson '70** is a director of table games at the Gold Coast Hotel & Casino. Celebrating the college's 40th anniversary proved to be one of Sanderson's favorite memories involving Jerry Vallen: "At the 2007 Vallen Dinner, Bill Paulos, Larry Griewisch, John Porter, and I were rounded up for a picture with Jerry! It had been nearly 40 years since he had seen us all together."

**Kraig Kubik '76** is very proud of his UNLV degree and knows it made a difference in his career. He also remembers Jerry Vallen's warm personality: "I

**Glenn Plantone '83**, who is owner and founder of Plantone's Italian Restaurant in Las Vegas, thanks the Hotel School "for giving me the opportunity to work in the world's best hotels in the Entertainment Capital of the World."

**Perry Todd '84** is a casino relief shift manager at Boulder Station. He remembers the day the university broke ground on Beam Hall: "After taking a photo, Dean Vallen walked over to us who were watching and said, 'You all are going to be part of something great.' I will never forget that summer day."

**Tami Friedman '89** works as consultant. She remembers Jerry Vallen as "a kind man" with a "sweet smile." She says [the Hotel College] "defined a time in my life when there was complete chaos in the world. There was a recession in the country, but we were insulated in Las Vegas as the city was booming!"

## 1990s

**Stacey (Pagan) Purcell '90** is the assistant director of sales for Caesars Entertainment. She describes the Hotel College as her second home away from Maui, Hawaii, and felt that she was part of something groundbreaking: "I was fascinated with Donald Bell's knowledge and charisma in the industry. I have a great degree of respect and admiration for his expertise."

**Harris Neophytou '91**, who is a senior officer at the Higher Hotel Institute of Cyprus, is a great admirer of Jerry Vallen: "He was much respected, and every time I saw him, I felt secure and proud I was attending the college. He was always kind and approachable to everybody. He was always ready to help."

**Brian Slipock '92** is married to fellow hospitality graduate **Robin (Harris) Slipock '93**. The couple recently took ownership of 7 Sinful Subs in Las Vegas. They also own Jackson's Bar & Grill and the Mad About Hair salon.

**Diane (Watanabe) Deyerler '93** founded a meeting planning business, Deyerler & Watanabe LLC, before joining the Washington State University Professional Education team in June 2017 as a conference manager. She reconnected with her childhood sweetheart after 40 years and got married in June 2016.

**Micah Richins '93** was recently promoted to chief commercial officer of revenue management for MGM Resorts International. In his new role, Micah will provide strategic leadership over the revenue management and direct marketing organizations to maximize revenue and profits for domestic operations.

**Carola Raab '93, '03 Ph.D.** grew up under communist rule in East Germany before immigrating to Canada, where she owned a restaurant and attended the University of Alberta. She later transferred to UNLV and earned two degrees – one from the Harrah College of Hospitality and an MBA. After graduation, she worked in Hong Kong and New Hampshire before returning to Las Vegas. "My dream was to always return to UNLV and be a professor in its famed Hotel College. I was hired in 2005, and I am now a full professor, doing my very best to carry on the traditions that drew me to the college in the first place."

**Mahika Chandrasena '96** is the director of public relations for Shangri-La Hotel in Colombo, Sri Lanka. After graduation, she moved back to Sri Lanka, earned her master's degree in public administration, and held numerous communications positions for SriLankan Airlines, GMR Airports, and various hotels. She believes students can make the most of their college experience "by not sacrificing three things: your family, your heart, or your dignity."

**Debra (Duston) Lehr '97** is now the executive director for Main Street Gardnerville, the longest running Main Street program in Nevada.

**Maria Donnalini Maliwat Bugay '98** has a daughter named Carmella Gabrielle Bugay, who recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in health care administration. Her son, Anthony Emmanuel Bugay, is currently a freshman pursuing a nursing degree.

**Wanda Jong '98** recalls her 1996 summer internship working with the food and beverage management department for the Olympics in Atlanta as "the best summer of my life." She thanks the college for giving her the tools to thrive in the workplace:

**"The UNLV Hotel College prepared me to be a kind, successful, and well-rounded manager. I'm forever grateful for all of my professors, mentors, and fellow Rebels who have helped shape my mind-set."**

**Chris Smith '98** is the vice president of people and culture for Harrah's Resort Southern California. His favorite classes were labor relations with Vince Eade and a capstone class with Stowe Shoemaker: "Both classes pushed me out of my comfort zone and challenged me to explore new fields and ways of thinking."

**Elliot Dubin '99** was recently promoted to senior lecturer at the University of North Texas.

## 2000s

**Sherman Wiggins '00** is the director of dining services at Southwest Foodservice Excellence (SFE). His favorite college memories involve all the fun homecoming football games.

**Marc Bromley '01** is a general manager for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. The class that influenced him the most was taught by Al Izzolo, who gave him instruction on how to interview, exchange business cards, and write a resume: "Many of us worked while attending school, unlike students from another school that will remain nameless (but rhymes with Bornell)! At UNLV, we were trained to roll up our sleeves and contribute with our hands *and* our minds."

**Zhuo Wang '04** MS is a senior manager in finance for Expedia. His favorite college memory was being able to work as a graduate assistant: "I had the opportunity to interact a bit deeper and more broadly with the faculty. I enjoyed being able to hear about their latest research and ask questions."

**David Mocerri '05** is the president of Veneration Capital. One of his favorite UNLV memories is of a vending machine that would dispense two Cherry Cokes at a time: "I remember jumping benches and climbing planters, wrestling with my best friend Brandon Manill to get the free Cherry Coke that would inevitably drop seconds after someone bought one and walked away."

**Jennifer Oshiro '05, '08** was promoted to senior sales manager for Cirque du Soleil, Resident Show Division, and Blue Man Group Las Vegas. She recently got married in Zion National Park to Kurtis Rivers, whom she met while working with Blue Man Group. Her hobbies include traveling, visiting new breweries, gardening, and volunteering for the Hotel College.

**Debbie Pattni '06** is an academic advisor for UNLV. Her favorite faculty member was Pearl Brewer: "She was intimately involved with making sure we worked as a team and had the resources we needed."

**Jacob Montoya '08** recently moved back home to Santa Ana Pueblo, NM, and is now an environmental services manager at the Santa Ana Star Casino.

## 2010s

**Christian (Dane) Terry '12** is currently working in commercial real estate as a sales agent for Virtus Commercial. His advice to students: "Network! Network! Network! Also, work hard in class and be involved in extracurricular activities."

**David Mikowski '12** is the general manager of Wifi Wine Bar and Shoppe, which opened in September 2017 in High Point, North Carolina. The tech savvy bar serves small plates, craft beer, and wine by the glass.

**Melinda Stewart '17** is the assistant spa manager at Vail Resorts Keystone Lodge and Spa in Keystone, Colorado.

**Cong Tran '17** is a food and beverage manager for Boyd Gaming. Her favorite professor was Donald Bell: "His classes were tough but full of funny stories. I will never forget the knowledge he shared in his lectures."