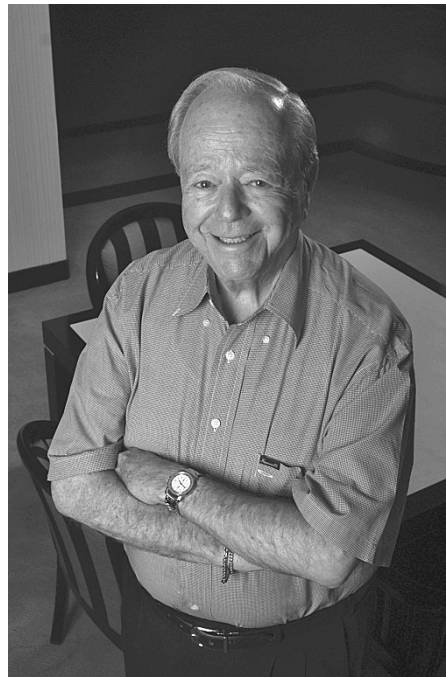


# THE ORAL HISTORY OF BURTON COHEN

BOARD OF DIRECTORS, MEMBER: MGM RESORTS INTERNATIONAL



*Photograph provided by the Las Vegas Sun*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Burton Cohen is a storied Las Vegas hotel executive who spent the better part of four decades shaping the Las Vegas gaming industry into what it is today. Mr. Cohen arrived in Las Vegas in 1966 as co-owner and general manager of the Frontier Casino.<sup>1</sup> Following his time at the Frontier, Mr. Cohen held a variety of prominent positions including: president of the new Flamingo Hotel Casino in 1971; manager of the Thunderbird Hotel in 1973; Caesars Palace vice president and member of its board of directors in 1977; and president and general manager of the Desert Inn & Country Club in 1978.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Gaming Hall of Fame: Burton Cohen*, UNLV CTR. FOR GAMING RES., [http://gaming.unlv.edu/hof/1995\\_cohen.html](http://gaming.unlv.edu/hof/1995_cohen.html) (last updated March 10, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> *Executive Profile-Burton M. Cohen*, BLOOMBERG BUSINESSWEEK, <http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/people/person.asp?personId=28441349&ticker=MGM&previousCapId=286798&previousTitle=MGM%20RESORTS%20INTERNATIONAL> (last visited Sept. 26, 2013).

In the following decades, Mr. Cohen served as president and chief operator of the Dunes Hotel and president and chief executive officer of the Desert Inn.<sup>3</sup> In 1995, Mr. Cohen retired from hotel-casino management and was summarily elected to the American Gaming Association's Hall of Fame.<sup>4</sup>

Following retirement, Mr. Cohen consulted within the hotel and gaming industries and served as a director for Golden Nugget, Inc.<sup>5</sup> As an active member of the Las Vegas community, he has served on the boards of the Southern Nevada Drug Abuse Council, Boys' Club of Clark County, and the Nevada division of the American Cancer Society.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Mr. Cohen has led a successful Las Vegas Valley United Way campaign and has been an active member in the Anti-Defamation League.<sup>7</sup> Currently, Mr. Cohen is a member of MGM Resorts International's board of directors and serves as chairman of the board of trustees of Sunrise Hospital.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Cohen has seen it all throughout his illustrious career. The following is an interview in which Mr. Cohen relates some of his favorite memories, life lessons, and advice for the future.

## II. EARLY LIFE

*Can you tell us about your life growing up?*

I grew up in South Florida, Miami, and I went to school there. Before I served in World War II, I graduated from the University of Florida. After the war ended, I came back to Miami Beach and enrolled in law school, graduating in 1948. I am still admitted to practice in Florida. However, I haven't actively practiced law there since I came to Nevada over 50 years ago.

My father, Joe Cohen, was one of the leading real estate brokers in Miami Beach years ago. His specialty was in hotels and if anybody wanted to buy or lease a hotel, they had to see my father. So, I grew up in the hotel business. My father and his brother owned a small hotel on Washington Avenue, Miami Beach; it's still there, the Clinton.<sup>9</sup> That's where I learned to work the bell stand, the front desk, the switchboard, the night transcript, the whole ball of wax, and that's where I fell in love with the hotel business.

*Besides your father, who else had an influence on you growing up?*

There was one man that had a great influence on me as a young adult; his name was R.B. Gautier. "Bunn" was his nickname, and he was a state senator

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Steve Green, *Retired Gaming Exec Joins MGM Mirage Board*, LAS VEGAS SUN, Apr. 14, 2010, <http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2010/apr/14/retired-gaming-exec-joins-mgm-mirage-board/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Executive Profile-Burton M. Cohen*, *supra* note 2.

<sup>6</sup> *MGM MIRAGE Elects Burton Cohen to the Board of Directors*, PR NEWSWIRE, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/mgm-mirage-elects-burton-cohen-to-the-board-of-directors-90825639.html> (last visited October 31, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> See CLINTON HOTEL, <http://clintonsouthbeach.com/> (last visited Oct. 18, 1013).

from Miami.<sup>10</sup> We became very close, almost like he adopted me. I had a lot of respect for Bunn and for what he did for South Florida. In those days, if you drew a line from Palm Beach to Tampa, which cut the state in half, the northern part of the state controlled the entire state, so those of us who lived in the south didn't get too many of the plums off the trees. Bunn did a tremendous job in offsetting that, and I've never forgotten him.

*I've noticed you still have a bit of a southern accent, can you tell us about that?*

Don't forget, I was raised in the South and if I'm exposed to a southern accent, in three seconds that's what I'm talking. I remember appearing before the Supreme Court in Tallahassee. In South Florida we spoke without an accent. But, within three minutes up there in Tallahassee, my southern accent was so thick you could cut it with a knife. So occasionally that comes forward.

*What brought you to Las Vegas from Miami?*

Again, I grew up in the hotel business and a lot of my practice was around the hotel business. Some clients and I formed an airport hotel company, which developed and built airport hotels all over the country. We built the one on top of the terminal in Miami. We were working on deals in Heathrow and Orly in France. It was very interesting. We formed a company, took it public, bought some land opposite the LAX entrance and built the International Hotel there. It's still there; I don't know what it's called today. But it was the closest hotel to the airport, completely soundproof. I met a lot of people there and a few of them came to me and wanted to know if I was willing to come to Vegas to help build and open up a hotel there.

I had an opportunity to come to Las Vegas to build and open the Frontier Hotel; an opportunity to have three points in the property. In those days, you sold points to finance a hotel. A point was like a share. But what really pushed me to go was, in those days, a point for the Frontier went for \$35,000, of which, \$15,000 was for stock and \$20,000 was a loan, so they could pay it back sooner. All I had to come up with was the \$15,000; I didn't have to come up with the additional money; that was the push I needed.

My career goal was to be a federal judge. I knew once I came to Las Vegas that was over because my connections were in Florida, not in Nevada. So I went to Washington, D.C. to see a very close friend of mine by the name of Alan Boyd.<sup>11</sup> He was chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board, which is probably the predecessor to the FAA today. I told him about the opportunity in Las Vegas and what they wanted me to do. He said to me that if I didn't take

<sup>10</sup> *Deaths Elsewhere: Former State Sen. R. Bunn Gautier*, ORLANDO SENTINEL, Feb. 10, 1989, [http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1989-02-10/news/8902110207\\_1\\_gautier-dade-county-legislature](http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1989-02-10/news/8902110207_1_gautier-dade-county-legislature) (providing additional information on R.B. Gautier).

<sup>11</sup> Alan Boyd was appointed by Dwight D. Eisenhower to the Civil Aeronautics Board in 1959 and he remained there until 1966. He was the first Secretary of Transportation from 1967-1969 under Lyndon B. Johnson. See *Biographical Sketches of the Secretaries of Transportation*, NAT'L TRANSP. LIBRARY, <http://ntl.bts.gov/historian/bios.htm> (last visited Oct. 10, 2013); *Introducing Mr. Boyd*, Commercial Motor (Dec. 30, 1966), available at <http://archive.commercialmotor.com/article/30th-december-1966/34/introducing-mr-boyd>.

that position, then he would. Everybody knew that Boyd's reputation was beyond reproach, so if he was willing to take the job, it gave me the piece of mind I needed. And that brought me to Las Vegas to build and open the Frontier Hotel.

*Can you tell us about your early days in Las Vegas?*

When I arrived in Las Vegas, Howard Hughes was upstairs at the Desert Inn,<sup>12</sup> and I was running the Frontier. I came to Las Vegas as the transition was taking place. Hughes was here. He was buying hotels. The old-timers that helped build this town were up in years and were selling out, getting more money for their property than they ever thought they would get and were leaving. So, the transformation from the old to the new has to be attributable to Howard Hughes.

Prior to that, the only mortgage you could get, if you were successful, was from the Teamster fund.<sup>13</sup> If you had that in hand, you could go downtown to Valley Bank and Parry Thomas<sup>14</sup> would lend you enough money so you could construct your hotel together with the points that you sold, and that's how the hotels were developed. The Teamsters wound up with mortgages on the Stardust, the Fremont, I believe the Desert Inn, and the Frontier. The Teamsters never lost a dime on any of the loans; all of the loans turned out to be very successful. The Teamsters should be credited as one of the underlying occurrences that helped develop Las Vegas.

*How did those early days in Las Vegas compare to Miami?*

In those days, Miami had gorgeous casinos that would have put some of the Las Vegas casinos to shame. But the Miami casinos were not legal.<sup>15</sup> I called them legal-illegal casinos. The games were legally dealt; meaning they were honest and not bust-out games, but the games were illegally being held. One of the top casinos, the Royal Palm Casino, was right on the water. You could come to it by speed boat at night and it looked like a movie set inside. Every hotel in South Florida had a bookmaker. They usually were located in the cabana area so the tourists could make a bet at the beach.

I don't think I ever had to pay for lunch, because across the street from my school was a bookie parlor that served sandwiches, cold cuts and condiments

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<sup>12</sup> Howard Robard Hughes, Jr. was a famous businessman, investor, and filmmaker. Mr. Hughes invested heavily in Las Vegas and spent many of his final years as a recluse living on the top floor of the Desert Inn Hotel. See *Howard Hughes*, <http://www.biography.com/people/howard-hughes-9346282> (last visited Oct. 31, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Koziol, *Clean Money Making Vegas Into Safer Bet*, CHI. TRIB., Apr. 15, 1986, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1986-04-15/business/8601270586\\_1\\_pension-fund-las-vegas-casinos-teamster](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1986-04-15/business/8601270586_1_pension-fund-las-vegas-casinos-teamster) (providing additional information on the Teamster pension fund).

<sup>14</sup> Parry Thomas is a banker who helped finance the early Las Vegas casino industry. He is often credited with helping build Las Vegas into what it is today. See John G. Edwards, *E. Parry Thomas*, LAS VEGAS REV. J. (Feb. 7, 1999 4:50 PM), <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/e-parry-thomas>.

<sup>15</sup> Jack Kassewitz, *Miami Beach Had Gambling Casinos at One Time*, THE MIAMI NEWS, Dec. 6, 1976, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=FDQ0AAAAIBAJ&sjid=NusFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2623%2C4088579>.

all stretched out across the counter, and since my family knew them, I ate there often.

I'll never forget one occurrence, which involved my school's principal, Sidney Ellison. Sidney wore black and white shoes, charcoal gray trousers, a houndstooth jacket, and a racing form in his pocket. Being a smart aleck, one day he's coming down the hall at my school and I stop him. I say, "Good morning, Mr. Ellison."

He said, "Oh, good morning, Burton."

I said, "Mr. Ellison, who do you like in the third at Hialeah?"

And instead of berating me, he pulled out his racing form and actually showed me his picks. But that was Miami Beach in those days.

### III. CAREER IN LAS VEGAS

*Can you give us the sequence of your employment in Las Vegas?*

The best I can remember. I left the Frontier and went to the Desert Inn. I went from the Desert Inn the first time to build Circus Circus with Jay Sarno.<sup>16</sup> From Circus Circus, I went to the Flamingo with Kirk Kerkorian.<sup>17</sup> From the Flamingo, I went to Caesars, I was on the board at Caesars. They had bought the Thunderbird Hotel and we were going to build the Mark Anthony Hotel on the Thunderbird property, which would have been breathtaking. The property ran from the Strip all the way back to Paradise on the backside, so you could have had entrances on both sides and so on. Unfortunately, Egypt invaded Israel at that time and the oil crisis occurred and money just dried up. I remember spending three weeks in London trying to find funds for that project and couldn't do it.

So I stayed at Caesars until Phil Hannifin, who was in charge of the gaming for the Summa Corporation—that's Howard Hughes's company<sup>18</sup>—brought me back to the Desert Inn.

And then I got a call from the debtor in possession of the Dunes to come back in—it was in bankruptcy—and take over the Dunes Hotel, which I did. We got it into the black and we sold it to Mr. Nangaku for an unheard price of roughly 156 million dollars.<sup>19</sup> In 1991, I returned to the Desert Inn for the third time and stayed there until 1995, when I retired, but not completely. Two or three years ago, I was asked to become a member of the board of directors of MGM Grand, which I am now on. As for community service, I am chairman of

<sup>16</sup> *Gaming Hall of Fame*, *supra* note 1; see generally *Jay Sarno Biography and Projects*, UNLV CTR. FOR GAMING RES., <http://gaming.unlv.edu/sarnoawards/sarno.html> (last visited Oct. 18, 2013) (providing additional information about the life and work of Jay Sarno).

<sup>17</sup> Kerkor "Kirk" Kerkorian, known as the "father of the Las Vegas mega-resort," is an American businessman and long-time casino executive. See K.J. Evans, *Kirk Kerkorian*, LAS VEGAS REV. J. (Sept. 12, 1999), <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/kirk-kerkorian>.

<sup>18</sup> See *People: Los Angeles County*, L. A. TIMES, Oct. 27, 1987, [http://articles.latimes.com/1987-10-27/business/fi-16751\\_1\\_executive-vice-president](http://articles.latimes.com/1987-10-27/business/fi-16751_1_executive-vice-president) for more information.

<sup>19</sup> For another take on the bankruptcy sale of the Dunes, see *The Oral History of Peter Bernhard*, 4 UNLV GAMING L.J. 189, 205–07 (2013); see also *Company News; Japanese Bid Wins Las Vegas Casino*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 5, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/05/business/company-news-japanese-bid-wins-las-vegas-casino.html>.

the board of Sunrise Hospital. I go to at least 30 meetings a year there, I'm very active. So I try to keep busy. I'm scheduled to be 90 next month.

*You did so much, what title would you have applied to yourself over the years? General manager?*

That's difficult for me to answer. I was the chief operating officer. All departments reported to me. I was responsible in those days for every phase of the operation. We used to say it was from the womb to the tomb.

*Can you tell us about working with Jay Sarno at Circus Circus?*

That was an experience that everyone should go through just once in their life. While building Circus Circus, Rob Johnson was the top contractor at the time. But Jay had no relationship to cost. I was kiting checks; I was doing everything to try to get that property open. And it would be nothing to have Sarno in a conference with Johnson down on the casino floor, while it was under construction, saying he wanted to move a poured reinforced concrete ramp three feet regardless of the cost, but I wouldn't let it happen.

Jay used to look at me and say, "Why do you fight me on everything I want to do?"

I said, "If I don't, who will?"

He said, "You're right," and threw his keys on the ground and walked away. He was a great character.

I didn't stay at Circus Circus long. The opening of Circus Circus was on The Ed Sullivan Show on national television. Gina Lollobrigida was one of the stars. It really got off with a big bang. The inside of Circus Circus became a giant TV studio. In those days, Circus did not have a roof over the casino. You could actually be in the pit, look up and see aerialists jumping and flying. I'll never forget in the middle of the craps table, Norbo the ape man would come down chasing a phony ape, shooting, and customers would look up and go, "Oh, my god." This was all Sarno. After Circus was sold to Bill Bennett,<sup>20</sup> the first thing he did was put a roof over that casino. In Sarno's days you had to walk up circular stairs to the second floor, which was a ramp. You could look down on the casino, but you didn't come into the casino.

I remember having a discussion about that with him. I said, "Jay, you've got to bring the people in on the ground floor."

Jay said, "Why?"

I said, "Jay, that's where the casino is; that's where we have a chance to get a belly touch from these people." I should explain, a "belly touch" is a gambling expression for a customer; he'll either touch the twenty-one table or the craps table or the slot machines up against him while he's playing. So we just refer to that as a belly touch.

Jay said, "Why? You're like everybody else; you want to do it the way it's always been done."

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<sup>20</sup> See Jeff Simpson, *Bill Bennett, Developer of Circus Circus and Excalibur, Dies at Age 78*, HOTEL ONLINE (Dec. 24, 2002), [http://www.hotel-online.com/News/PR2002\\_4th/Dec02\\_BBennett.html](http://www.hotel-online.com/News/PR2002_4th/Dec02_BBennett.html), (providing additional information on Bill Bennett).

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I said, "But, Jay, walking up circular stairs from the outside to come into the casino and being on a ramp where the children's games are, is not conducive to table gaming."

Again, Jay said, "Why?"

So that was one of the reasons I didn't stay too long. After we got it open, I went to the Flamingo.

*Can you tell us about working with Kirk Kerkorian at the Flamingo?*

Kirk Kerkorian to this day is one of my closest friends. They threw the mold away when they made Kirk Kerkorian. He is probably the most humanistic individual you'll ever meet in your life. Unassuming. You can't comp him in any of his hotels. The best example, we had dinner one night down at Bellagio. I forget the name of the restaurant. But he said, "Come on, let's take a walk around." So we're walking through the Bellagio and he looks up. He's looking around and he says, "Thank God for Steve Wynn."<sup>21</sup> Kirk is just a remarkable person. He never tells you what to do. He never tells you what not to do. He doesn't tell you who to hire or who to get as entertainment.

His statement always was to me, "Well, you know where the Flamingo is, don't you?"

I would say, "Yes."

He would say, "Okay."

But he sure knows the bottom line and he sure knows the figures. Just a rare individual.

*Can you tell us about working at Caesars Palace?*

I worked with Billy Weinberger<sup>22</sup> at Caesars Palace. He was probably one of the great humanistic operators. Billy was a hands-on guy like me. He was warm and cordial. He knew the food business. He had been in the restaurant business in Cleveland. Billy Weinberger really set the tone for Caesars. Don't forget, Caesars in those days was considered the number one. Harry Wald was his assistant, but Harry didn't have that type of approach. Harry, loved his property, never wanted to go home, but was more like a field general than anything else; in fact, he was a general in the U.S. Reserve.<sup>23</sup> But Billy, I think, was the epitome of what a good hotel operator should be.

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Alan "Steve" Wynn is an American businessman and developer. He played a vital role in the modern expansion of the Las Vegas Strip. *See Steve Wynn*, <http://www.biography.com/people/steve-wynn-201198> (last visited Oct. 31, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> In 1966, William "Billy" Weinberger was the food and beverage manager at Caesars Palace. In 1968, he became president of Caesars Palace. David Cay Johnston, *William S. Weinberger, 83, Host to Big Gamblers*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 15, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/08/15/us/william-s-weinberger-83-host-to-big-gamblers.html>.

<sup>23</sup> *See Harry Wald, Ex-Head of Casino and Trade Group, Is Dead at 71*, N.Y. TIMES, May 12, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/12/us/harry-wald-ex-head-of-casino-and-trade-group-is-dead-at-71.html>.

*You mentioned Caesars was going to build the Mark Anthony Hotel, can you tell us more about that?*

The Mark Anthony was designed by some architect in Boston; I don't remember his name. It would be the forerunner of what we would think today as the new type of hotel in Las Vegas. I remember one thing in particular; that on top of the porte-cochere, which was gigantic, was a fountain with water running down into a pond. Of course, in Las Vegas water and greenery always stops traffic. The concept was just gorgeous.

*You mentioned you retired after returning to the Desert Inn. Why did you retire?*

I was 72 or 73 years old.

*After your semi-retirement, why did you decide to return to work?*

I was pulled out of retirement. I retired once before and I was hanging around the Las Vegas Country Club trying to play golf. Jack Anderson, who was the owner of the Dunes at that time, said it was in bankruptcy. I think Hank Greenspun<sup>24</sup> mentioned to Jack, "There's the guy you should try to hire who can probably straighten your property out." That's why I went to the Dunes.

*Can you tell us about your management style when running a casino?*

My management style has always been hands on, seven days a week. I try to see all of the employees including the guys who take out the garbage and sort it at least once or twice a week, sometimes every day. I walk the property, including the back of the house. I tried to know as many of the employees by name as I could. I went to their funerals; I went to their weddings; I went to their kids' bar mitzvahs. I loved my employees. The relationship that existed between me and our employees in my heart was a love affair.

That relationship had to change as I moved hotels. The Desert Inn was a small casino. I think we had 13,000 square feet, only 700 rooms, and you were able to build up that intimacy. However, starting with Caesars Palace, everything went vertical. Prior to that, everything was horizontal and villas and grounds and the casinos got very big. So as much as you might want to maintain that type of relationship, it would be very difficult to do today.

*What are some of the major changes you witnessed from your early days at the Frontier to finally ending at the Dunes?*

Size. Vertical construction and size. In a hotel you have a basic cost of operation, which would be your security, your entertainment, your casino, your dealers, all of that stuff, your restaurants. The expense stays. So what they woke up to was instead of all of that supporting 600 or 700 rooms, why not let

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<sup>24</sup> Herman "Hank" Milton Greenspun (August 27, 1909 – July 23, 1989) was the owner and publisher of the Las Vegas Sun newspaper. Embroiled in various controversies throughout his life, Hank Greenspun is one of the most well-known figures in Las Vegas history. See A.D. Hopkins, *H.M. 'Hank' Greenspun*, LAS VEGAS REV. J. (Sept. 12, 1999 2:00 AM), <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/hm-hank-greenspun>.



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it support 1500 rooms so the cost of that operation can be spread out over 1500 instead of 600 or 700?

*Do you have any favorite stories from your time running casinos?*

I remember one incident at the Flamingo. There was a guy who was gambling and all of his credit was used up and he wanted another \$10,000, and I told him that he couldn't have it. You've got to understand that when a gambler is in heat, the only ones that have the brake to the locomotive are the casino operators. It's up to them to say 'hold it, go to bed.' Well, this guy got incensed; he carried on like a raving maniac. I said, "You're not going to get it." He responded with, "you little this, you little that." I said, "You're still not going to get it."

The next morning, he comes into my office and says, "You didn't give me any more money last night."

I said, "That's right." I thought, well, here comes a fight.

He came over and kissed me on the cheek and said, "Thank you; you're the only one who could have stopped me."

So we do have an obligation to our customers when they get in heat to do what we call cooling them out; go to bed, go get a drink, slow down. Because we know how a gambler feels; that he'll gamble everything that he's got in his possession, a degenerate gambler, not a guy who comes to town and says I want to blow \$500 or something. So, I think that's one of the things that the casinos owe, and to a great deal they practice it when they cut off the credit.

You see, initially in this town credit was infinitesimal; everything was cash. Cash was so prevalent, that's all you saw. But as credit became more prominent, cash started to disappear.

I know when I went to Atlantic City for the opening of the Borgata, I saw a lot of cash play at the twenty-one table.<sup>25</sup> Well, most of that came from mom-and-pop operators who had a delicatessen or a shoe store or something and they had some cash, so they would come to Atlantic City. But we don't see that type of cash play in Vegas anymore.

#### IV. NEVADA GAMING; PRESENT & FUTURE

*Which Las Vegas hotel is your favorite today?*

If I had to choose one today, I would say the Bellagio. It is class personified. It's operated by MGM and they have maintained the property. The flowers, the exhibition that is there is breathtaking. The chandelier in the lobby is just gorgeous. A lot of that was created by Steve Wynn, who probably has the greatest talent at decorating and building a gorgeous facility.

In all honesty, Las Vegas is probably the only place that could overcome the excessiveness of the cost of what is done because when you build something you're thinking about capital return on investment. Well, Las Vegas can overcome that because of the casinos.

<sup>25</sup> For additional information on the opening of the Borgata, see *The Oral History of William S. Boyd*, 4 UNLV GAMING L.J. 145, 165-67 (2013).

*What are the pros and cons of having gaming throughout the country?*

I've always been against monopolies unless I owned a piece of one. We had a monopoly. They come up with a lot of nonsense about gaming in other jurisdictions; "well, you're developing new players out there and this is still the major leagues and they'll want to come to Las Vegas." Well, to a degree that is true, but there's only so many discretionary dollars out there.

I remember we were having a big Super Bowl event at the Desert Inn, and we had one customer who always came in from Chicago. So I called him. I said, "How come you're not coming?"

He said, "Burt, a limo picks me up at my door, takes me to the casino; I do what I want to do; I come home; I'm sleeping in my own bed; I don't have to travel for three hours or four hours on a plane."

So with the proliferation of gaming, a lot of the customers and their discretionary dollars went to their local casinos. Thank God we overcame a lot of it by broadening our market base and with new properties and special events and so on. Overall though, I would have preferred that there wasn't any gaming throughout the country.

I was president of the Nevada Resort Association<sup>26</sup>—that's the association of all of the hotel/casino operators—I think either two or three times. So at one of the Association's meetings, I was talking about my concern about gambling going into Atlantic City, and how if I had some street money, I think we could prevent New Jersey from legalizing. Little did I know, sitting around the table were entrepreneurs who already had options on land in Atlantic City. So the proliferation of gambling has made it more acceptable; you're not looked down upon today. But as I said earlier, there's only so many dollars out there, and if a guy loses it in a casino outside of Chicago, he's not coming to Vegas.

*Who do you think are the most influential people in the Nevada gaming industry?*

Kirk Kerkorian and Billy Weinberger. Gary Loveman<sup>27</sup>; he heads Harrah's. Phil Satre<sup>28</sup> and Bill Bennett. Sam Boyd<sup>29</sup> and Bill Boyd.<sup>30</sup> The

<sup>26</sup> *Burton Cohen*, FORBES.COM, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/burton-cohen/> (last visited Oct. 31, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Gary William Loveman is an American business executive and former academic. He is the current chief executive officer and president of Harrah's Entertainment Corporation. *See How to Survive in Vegas*, BLOOMBERG BUSINESSWEEK MAG., Aug. 5, 2010, available at [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10\\_33/b4191070705858.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10_33/b4191070705858.htm).

<sup>28</sup> Philip G. Satre was a fixture of Harrah's Entertainment for 25 years, serving as Harrah's chairman, president, and CEO. Mr. Satre left Harrah's in 2005, and was named as slot manufacturing giant International Game Technology's chairman of the board four years later. Howard Stutz, *Philip Satre Named Chairman of International Gaming Technology*, LAS VEGAS REV.-J. (Oct. 15, 2009 5:49 AM), <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/philip-satre-named-chairman-international-game-technology>; *see also Philip Satre*, FORBES.COM, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/philip-satre/> (last visited Oct. 18, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Sam Boyd co-founded the Boyd Group, which was one of the world's largest privately held gaming corporations. *See Sam Boyd, 82, a Roulette Dealer who Became a Builder of Casinos*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 16 1993, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/16/obituaries/sam-boyd-82-a-roulette-dealer-who-became-a-builder-of-casinos.html>, (providing additional information on the life and work of Sam Boyd).

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Fertittas.<sup>31</sup> I think that's about it.

*Of those, who has had the greatest influence on the industry?*

First of all, some of them are what we call local casino operators; the Fertittas, Bill Boyd. I can't identify one particular person who has had the most influence. I think it's more like a beautiful stew; each put something into the pot to make it great.

For example, Gary Loveman comes from the educational background; I think a professor or a teacher either at Harvard or one of them. He added a lot of the statistical analysis to marketing. We all did it to a degree, but I think Loveman took it to the umpteenth degree. We all did demographic studies and 'what would you like?' and 'do you play golf?' and all of that good stuff to identify our customers and potential customers. And a lot of this was before computers. I remember I had punch cards that were on an IBM machine. If you wanted customers who liked golf, you would put in the cards and the machine would throw out their names. That's how basic it was in those days. But I think the computer and marketing has added a tremendous amount, plus the statistical data you get on the customer from his likes, dislikes, his playing, his ability. It's all on the computer. You can kick that out in one second.

*How would you describe gaming regulation in Nevada?*

I think we probably have the best regulations in gaming that have ever been conceived.<sup>32</sup> It has maintained the legitimacy of our gaming, the enforcement of it. It has been copied by jurisdiction after jurisdiction.<sup>33</sup> The regulators are excellent; they understand gaming and the philosophies of gaming. I think without regulations, Las Vegas would never have grown.

Casino owners and regulators have an excellent relationship. We're not adversaries; we're all pulling in the same direction. That was a slow evolution. We self-report. If there is a mistake made in the regulations, we report it. That doesn't mean there isn't enforcement out there. But the majority of any of the omissions, the vast majority, are self-reported. When some employee made a mistake or didn't get a marker co-signed or didn't do this or didn't follow a certain regulation, we self-reported that, which tended to keep pimples as pimples and not boils.

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<sup>30</sup> William "Bill" S. Boyd currently serves as executive chairman of Boyd Gaming Corporation. *Executive Bios*, BOYDGAMING.COM, <http://www.boydgaming.com/about-boyd-gaming/executive-bios> (last visited Oct. 24, 2013); see also *The Oral History of William S. Boyd*, 4 UNLV GAMING L.J. 145 (2013) (providing additional information about Mr. Boyd's life).

<sup>31</sup> The Fertitta's are a family of long-time casino owners who currently own and operate several properties under the corporate name Station Casinos. Mary Manning, *Frank Fertitta Jr., Patriarch of Station Casinos, Dies*, LAS VEGAS SUN (Aug. 21, 2009 6:35 PM), <http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2009/aug/21/frank-fertitta-jr-patriarch-station-casinos-dies/>; *Fertitta Family – Inducted 2010*, S. NEV. SPORTS HALL OF FAME, <http://www.sportshalloffame.net/hall-of-famers/fertitta-family> (last visited Oct. 24, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> See generally *Gaming Statutes & Regulations*, NEV. GAMING CONTROL BD., <http://gaming.nv.gov/index.aspx?page=51> (last visited Oct. 24, 2013) (detailing Nevada's gaming regulatory laws).

<sup>33</sup> Wang Wuyi, *Learn from the Nevada Model to Reform Macao's Casino Regulatory System*, in MACAO & SINO-U.S. RELATIONS 167, 168 (Yufan Hao & Jianwei Wang, eds., 2011).

Let me say one thing further. They should have in this town a statue of Senator Estes Kefauver,<sup>34</sup> not General Fremont, because in the early years, Kefauver was holding these investigations all over the country, closing up illegal gambling, and a lot of those gentlemen who had the profession of gambling and of dealing came to Las Vegas where it was legal and that helped give us the employer/employee base to run these casinos today.<sup>35</sup>

*How has the position of women in the industry changed over the years?*

I think for the better. Women have now been indoctrinated into all phases of casino operation and hotel operation. You have a couple of chief executives who are women. There are differences between men and women. However, outside of the technical aspects, there's no difference between a woman and a man in the industry; none whatsoever. It's great, absolutely great.

*What do you see as the future of Las Vegas gaming?*

First of all, I think it's going to be a while for Las Vegas to absorb the inventory that we now have, but I think the future is unlimited. When you refer to Las Vegas today, you're not just referring to the Las Vegas Strip; you've got the Red Rock Casino out there that I'll put up against any as far as hotel service, food, decor and so on, and that's out in the boonies.<sup>36</sup> It's unlimited.

Downtown will also always have the attraction because of the lights and Fremont Street. But in the old days, those of us who lived here who wanted to gamble, we went downtown. Today they don't have to go downtown. There is Palace Station<sup>37</sup> out there. There's the Santa Fe.<sup>38</sup> There's your neighborhood casino. So they go there. They're part of the local business.

## V. FINAL THOUGHTS

*What has been your favorite part of working in the gaming industry?*

Our employees. The relationship with the employees. To this day, if I'm at a banquet or a charity affair, occasionally an old employee will come over and say, "Oh, Mr. Cohen," and hug me and kiss me. You can't take that to the bank, but that's the greatest.

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<sup>34</sup> Carey Estes Kefauver (July 26, 1903 – August 10, 1963) was a US Congressman from Tennessee. He is best known for serving as Chairman of the Special Committee on Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce. *KEFAUVER, Carey Estes – Biographical Information*, BIOGRAPHICAL DIRECTORY OF THE U. S. CONG., <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=k000044> (last visited Oct. 18, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> See *American Experience—Las Vegas: An Unconventional History, People & Events: Estes Kefauver*, PBS (July 11, 2005), [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lasvegas/people/events/p\\_kefauver.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lasvegas/people/events/p_kefauver.html).

<sup>36</sup> See RED ROCK CASINO RESORT & SPA, <https://redrock.sclv.com/> (last visited Oct. 31, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> See PALACE STATION, <https://palacestation.sclv.com/> (last visited Oct. 31, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> See SANTA FE STATION, <https://santafestation.sclv.com/> (last visited Oct. 31, 2013).

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*If you had to do it all over again, would you do it?*

No question about it. It's been an exciting, thrilling, fun-filled lifetime. I've enjoyed every moment of it.

