



Conversations w/Tino

Guests	Kathy George
	CEO
	Firekeepers Casino Hotel
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Tino Magnatta: Hello, and welcome to another episode of GT Radio, Conversations with Tino, and boy, I'm so excited about this episode tonight. We have an amazing woman and it continues our series of Wonder Women of Gaming. I talked to Kathy before the interview, we do these pre-interview calls, and it was just such a fascinating story. Kathy, welcome to the show.

Kathy George: Hi, good evening. Great to be here, thanks for having me.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks for coming on the show. Now, you're a res girl, and you, when you grew up there wasn't much going on in the res except a lot of hardship. Paint us a picture of the Seneca Indian Reservation at that time, when you grew up.

Kathy George: Sure. You know I grew up on the Cattaraugus Reservation, it's about an hour south of Buffalo, New York, and you know, it was a nice, simple life back in the '70s and '80s, but there wasn't economic development, there weren't a lot of industry going on. We did open, we did have a bingo hall on the reservation that opens, I think in 1980, so at least we had started a business, and there was a few gas stations, but really it was just small town America out in the country. Like I said, Buffalo was about an hour away, so we were kind of off the beaten path. But it was a quiet, simple life, the small school we went to, so it was definitely different than it is today, that's for sure.

Tino Magnatta: A lot of people that I've talked to growing up on the res they said that they kind of miss that lifestyle, because there's a really sense of community and closeness, right?

Kathy George: Absolutely. You know I think we've all heard the term is, it takes a village, and I think, when I think of growing up that's how it was, it really was a village. It wasn't just your parents that looked out for you, it was the whole neighborhood. And if you were a kid and you got in trouble with one, well you got in trouble with everybody, but you also got helped by an entire village. And I think that that was very unique. I wouldn't ... You know, you talk to friends when you move away or go to school, and they didn't have that. They didn't have that sense of belonging to an extended family where everyone was your auntie or uncle, whether they really were or weren't, and I think that that helped prepare me to get out and spread my wings and make family wherever I went.

Tino Magnatta: Now, life was rough because you grew up before gaming. Can you tell us a little about how rough it was?

Kathy George: Well, you know, I think before gaming, a lot of reservations had a rough time, you know? I just think it was way different. We didn't have the resources for people to go to school and get funding for it, or having the health care benefits provided for you, or have the job training. It really was a struggle for almost every Indian tribe I think prior to gaming, or other economic development. But we didn't know it was a struggle, that's how everyone lived. My father was an

iron worker, he worked when there was work, but when there wasn't we just learned to live lean I guess. But we didn't know any difference because everyone went through the same thing.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, it was kind of like, like you said it was your own world, and you had a sense of family and community, and that was good enough.

Kathy George: Absolutely. It was a great world. I think I would really think back ... You know, I didn't know that we didn't have a lot of money until I was probably in junior high or high school because it was a great life. I knew I was loved, and it was close, and I had great family obviously through school, but through church and the whole reservation. It was a really, while it was tough at times financially, it was still a really great life.

Tino Magnatta: Now, you have an amazing story about education, because you went to Cornell, and you were the first Native American woman to graduate from Cornell. Tell us how that all came about. How did the Cornell opportunity come about, and what was your experience there when you got there?

Kathy George: Sure. You know, I was afforded a tremendous opportunity, and I think that ... But how it all happened, you know, in your high school you go to all those college nights at different, you know, where they try to go to their school, kind of like a trade show I guess now, and I was speaking to a lady that, she had graduated from the hotel school at Cornell and she ran a catering business, and she told me what she did, because like most 17-year-olds I had no idea what I wanted to do, I just knew I either had to go to school, or my parents said if I didn't go to school you had to go in the military. And I was not cut out for the military, so I knew I was going to school. Luckily she told me, the lady told me what she did, and what a great school Cornell was, and I said okay, I can do that. I applied, and fortunately I had good grades and good test scores, and one of my mandatory interview for Cornell, and it turned out I was given an acceptance, and from there I think it was amazing. I guess I would just say it's crazy.

When you grow up in a small town, you know it took three towns to make up our school and I graduated with 87 kids, so there's 1100 kids kindergarten through 12th grade. I get to Cornell, and there's 21,000 undergraduate students, and I was like, wow! And there were 69 Native Americans in the whole campus. So I mean, it was a huge change from a small school and a small community, but you know, I found my home. There was an American Indian program there, they looked out for us, and then the hotel school itself is a small family, and I was very fortunate to get some advisors and teachers that really looked out for me and helped me adjust very well. So the experience of Cornell was great.

Tino Magnatta: This comes up a lot when we talk about leaving the res, and spreading your wings and everything. Talk to us a little bit about how important that is, and how important the education part of it is.

Kathy George: You know, I was very fortunate to have parents that had always told us, you know, go out, go get your education, get your training and all of the knowledge and experience, then you can come home and help. Then you can come home and teach, or do whatever it is that you went to school for. And that's something that was instilled in us, and I was fortunate that it worked that way. I went out and got the best education at the best hotel school in the world, and I went and got all this great experience so that I could go home and help run Seneca Gaming, work for them for five years. So it really was kind of a dream come true, but it was something that was taught to us as we were growing up, that you want to give back, and it's important, but you have to go out and experience it.

With my first move across the country, I remember I wasn't so sure about it, and my dad said, "You can do anything for a year, Kathy." And he says, "Just go." He dropped me off at the Buffalo Airport, didn't come in the airport. At the front door he put my two suitcases on the curb. My younger sister was sitting in the backseat waving at me as they pulled away and I was like, okay, I'm moving to Seattle. Here we go.

Tino Magnatta: Wow. That's amazing!

Kathy George: And it was the best 16 months I ever did. But it is hard to leave home. It's hard to go a place where people don't look like you, they don't have the same customs as you, but the best part is you get to teach them that. You can always go home for a visit. Planes and trains will always get us home. But you know, it was important to go and get new experiences.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, they encourage that. That was pretty major. Tell me a little bit about going to Cornell and having to maintain the workload and the grade average to succeed, because obviously you had never experienced that kind of level of education and not many people have. Talk to me a little about that, and what it takes to achieve the level of education and to absorb all that and be successful in a university like that.

Kathy George: Sure. You know, I think, I guess the best thing to say, I will say my first semester I was overwhelmed, but again, I had a great small network of people who said, keep on going. When you do really good in high school, or maybe not even really good, when you do well in high school sometimes you don't even know how to study properly, or you don't know, because it just comes naturally or easy, so when I got to Cornell, which is this huge, tough university it was like, ooh, I better learn how to study better. I better learn how to take better notes. And so you learn quickly what works and what doesn't.

I think once I got over the intimidation factor of who some of my classmates were, or who their families were, and realized you know what, I'm here for the best opportunity, and I just learned, and my grades definitely got better as the years went by, you know, my freshman year compared to my last semester, they're night and day different as my confidence grew and my ability to learn

differently. It was a challenge, but life's a challenge. I knew I had to put in the work. I think I had an opportunity though to learn a lot, and I also had to work to keep myself there. That's a pretty expensive school, and at the time we didn't have funding through different tribal resources. So between loans and work study and great alumni giving a lot of money, but I still worked 30 to 40 hours a week, so I just learned to manage my time and balance everything very well.

Tino Magnatta: That's incredible! Now, here's the other incredible thing, because you have incredible after incredible going on. After you graduated from Cornell you got a job with Wyndham Hotels when they were in their infancy, not like they are now, this huge conglomerate, and you went into the manager program. Tell us a little bit about that, and then tell us, you said you became the opener person. So tell us what happened after that. How did you get recruited?

Kathy George: Sure. So I was in my final semester at Cornell, kind of like every school, all the companies come back to campus and recruit, and I was working at the front desk that evening when I met the woman that was doing the recruiting for Wyndham, and we just started talking as she was checking in, and I knew I had an interview with her set up for the following day, and we just talked, and I found it unique that she was a vice president, and she was a woman, and back in the early '90s, late '80s, early '90s, that really wasn't very common. And I said wow, if she's a vice president and she's a woman I bet you that ... I had already looked at the company, and you know what, that's who I really want to work for if I get an interview, or get an offer letter.

And so throughout the whole interview process I did receive an offer from them, and so I joined it, and they asked you when you start, what are the three cities you'd want to live in, and the one city you don't want to. So I listed three cities on the east coast, and I put Seattle as the city I didn't want to go to, and it was only because it was 3500 miles away from my family, and I had never been that far away from home. That is where the woman that hired me, Mary, placed me. And I remember thinking, why would she place me someplace I said I didn't want to go? But I took the job, as I said, my dad said, "Go do it," and I said, "You're right, I'm going to go do it, there must be a reason."

So after a few months, Mary actually came to the property to do some training, and we were talking, and I asked, why in the world did you put me there? And she said, "Because that's where the woman general manager that I thought would best meet your needs." And she was right. My learning experience that I had, my first two general managers within Wyndham were women, strong women, and they were very influential in my career, and it all started with her making me go outside of my comfort zone and putting me somewhere where I said no. But the experience was wonderful.

Tino Magnatta: Now that was revolutionary at the time, right? Because most corporations didn't put women in powerful positions. They were very forward thinking, is that correct?

Kathy George: Oh, they absolutely were. I think I joined, to have joined Wyndham at the time when I did, it was just the perfect timing. It was a small company growing, and it grew exponentially very fast, which allowed me to grow very fast, and become who I am. I learned every department, and then I kind of made a niche where I would get moved to either open a new property, or maybe it was a Marriott one day and we're going to convert it to a Wyndham, I would go in and do all that, and put the systems in place, and then once it was up and going I'd move on to the next place. That kind of became my niche, and I loved it, I loved the excitement and knowing that I'm leaving an imprint somewhere. And I was just afforded a tremendous opportunity with Wyndham that really formed my foundation.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, 14 years, and like you said, small when I joined and huge when I left, and I became the opener person and the problem solver.

Kathy George: Yep. So it was an incredible opportunity.

Tino Magnatta: There's an interesting fact though, about the dress code, right? They weren't forward thinking in their dress code for women, correct?

Kathy George: They weren't, as much as everything was supported, and we had great programs like Women on Their Way, and all these different great programs for women in business, but yeah, women weren't allowed to wear pants until 1996. And I'm like, how does that even happen?

Tino Magnatta: That's amazing. That's incredible. I still laugh about that. You've told me that three or four times and I still laugh about it.

Kathy, you're an extraordinary woman. What is your advice to women coming up in the business?

Kathy George: I think some of the advice I like to give is be true and be genuine to who you are no matter what. I think one of the things that I've utilized in my interviews, or the few times I have interviewed, is I've said that line, don't take my kindness for weakness. I will never not be kind, I will never not be who I am, but it also allows me to be a better listener and a better leader. So my advice is, be true to who you are, because then you never have to wonder what you said or what you did. And persevere. If someone tells you no, whether it's because you're a woman, or because, whatever the reason is, doing what you do and learn everything you can, because at some point they can't keep saying no. You're going to prove to them that you can do it. And I think that perseverance is a ... I'm sorry, go ahead.

Tino Magnatta: Is an important thing, right? Perseverance is one of the most important things, right?

Kathy George: Absolutely it is. We've all been told no, or we've all made mistakes, or we've all done something that we have to recover from, but we persevere through whether it's personal or in the workplace. And I've had some things, like when I was younger and I lost my parents, or at work when I've made big mistakes, or missed a deadline or whatever, whatever it is I had to go home and look at myself in the mirror and say, you're better than this. You gotta persevere and make it better. And I did, and that's my best ... You know what, tomorrow's a new day so you can't dwell on it, on what went wrong, you just gotta fix it and move on. Persevere.

Tino Magnatta: You said something to me that's pretty impactful. Adversity happens, but it's how you react to it.

Kathy George: Absolutely. The world is not perfect. You look, I guess in life we all look at someone's life and say, they have such a perfect life, or it's so easy for them. Well, no, everyone has adversity, everyone has things that they go through. The people that appear that it's perfect, they just know how to react better to it. They know how to put that smile on regardless. They know how to put that, you know what, it's still okay, I've still got my health, I've still got my family, I've still got all the great blessings in life, and I think those are the people that I always looked at and said, I'm going to be one of them, and every day I work to make sure that I am.

Tino Magnatta: Kathy, what motivates you?

Kathy George: You know, a few things. I think the memory of my parents motivates me. I think probably the biggest, the second part is just my whole support system, whether they're my direct family, the best brothers and sisters that I could ever have, but I want to make my aunts, I want to make my community proud of me. I want to make sure that I leave it a better place wherever I am, and I think that that's the motivator in me. You know, I've got a lot to give, and that's my job in life, to give, and this motivates me. It excites me every day to get up and know that I'm going to make an impact on somebody in some way, and hopefully positively.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, yeah.

Kathy George: That really motivates me, because if someone can, at the end of the day say, you know, she's a really great person, she's a great leader, she just has a kind heart, then, you know, I've done the right thing that day.

Tino Magnatta: What do you say to young native women coming up through the ranks?

Kathy George: I say you can do it. Put in the time. Don't try to short circuit it. You have to put in the time, and as they say, pay your dues, because you have to understand the different facets of being a good leader, and experience the highs and the lows, and tough economic times and great economic times, because they each teach you things. So take that ... Everyone staring out now or growing in the industry

has such a huge opportunity. Use the resources out there, and if you talk to anyone, I can't think of a single leader that would not sit down with anybody and try to help them and teach them. So use those resources, and just know that yeah, you're going to have all these resources, but you still gotta do the time and do the work.

Tino Magnatta: Now, after Wyndham you returned home to Seneca after 20 years, right? To help them out.

Kathy George: I did.

Tino Magnatta: Tell us a little bit about that.

Kathy George: See now, as Wyndham was getting sold, and parts were sold off, and it was changing, it was a perfect opportunity at home where the casino in Niagara Falls had opened and we were opening a hotel to go with it, and so I moved home to open that hotel and I did that, worked through construction, and did all that great stuff, and at the same time, we have a casino on the reservation, we were building a hotel there, and then we opened a third casino in downtown Buffalo which I got to be a part of, and I think it was a tremendous experience. I learned so much about gaming. I think one of the best parts, they recognized I was just a strong leader, I just had to learn some of the gaming side of it, but I was a great leader, so they wanted me to come back and help there. I definitely know that I did do that. I assisted the tribe I grew up with, and was able to help the business a lot. It was amazing. To open two hotels and two casinos was a wonderful experience.

But then there was some time where I recognized that I had become, I wasn't true to myself at a point in time. You know, I was sitting in a meeting for 40 hours before I talked to a guest or an employee, and that made me sad. Or I'd wake up and go, oh my gosh, I don't want to do that anymore. So it was a very tough decision, but I made the decision where I took a sabbatical and I left, and I went and traveled and I went to every-

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, I was just about ... I talked to you about that. You took some time off, right, reinvented yourself. Tell us a little about that.

Kathy George: Yeah. So I recognized I had become someone who I didn't really like, and that I wasn't going to be good to anybody if I became worse. So I took time off and I traveled. I went to baseball games, and dance recitals, and softball games to nieces and nephews that I had missed my entire career, moving all over the country. I got to go to more family events and I became healthier, and I recognized okay, I'm good again, I'm back to who I am, I'm back to being Kathy, and I'm ready to give back again, and then I went back to work. But I recognized I needed that time to rejuvenate.

Tino Magnatta: And you landed-

Kathy George: I went to work for Hilton Hotels.

Tino Magnatta: Uh-huh? And then the second day-

Kathy George: So on my second day, I had looked for a job for about nine months, and I finally got a job and I was excited, and on day two my phone rings, and it was the CFO and the lawyer for a tribe in Michigan, and they called and said, "Hey, we're building a hotel, your name and resume came across our desk from three separate areas, so we need you to come open our building for us. Build it and come." And I said, "That is great, I'm honored, but I just started a new job yesterday." And I said, "So I can't go anywhere." I said, "I need to work here for 16 to 18 months is what I have committed." And they said, "Okay, well, okay." So they called me maybe every six months, four to six months just to check in, and I started here in Michigan 16 months to the day of that phone call.

Tino Magnatta: So you fulfilled your obligation.

Kathy George: I absolutely did. I wouldn't change it. I learned a tremendous deal working for Hilton for that time.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, Hilton's a good brand.

Kathy George: It really is, and I learned a great deal, but I definitely learned that I definitely like the tribal gaming, I like this environment, and I knew that I needed to go and do that and make my mark for myself here.

Tino Magnatta: So when you got hired at Firekeepers what was your position?

Kathy George: I joined as the vice president of hotel operations, so I was doing that, and then I of course, just me being me, I kind of take on opportunities, or if a department needed a home or a new leader I would take them under my wing. And then there's just extra projects I took along, we do in the community that were important to me as well as the tribe, and then I was fortunate enough that in 2017 the CEO position came open, and I wasn't sure, you know, I really loved being the vice president of hotel operations. I had come from being the GM of Seneca Gaming and being used to being in charge of the whole thing, and I was like, you know what? I really enjoyed the hotel side, and I'm just going to stay doing that.

But I was provided a tremendous opportunity where my fellow vice presidents, all 10 of them get together and they said no, we want you to apply for it. We need you to be our leader. Let's get someone from inside as opposed to out of the house. So I did, and I interviewed, and there was a huge process, they interviewed lots of people, and fortunately for me it was an easy transition into that position here. So I was very glad I did apply, and I have the best team around, and they support me, and it's working out really well so I'm really glad to have changed into the CEO two years ago. So it's a great thing.

Tino Magnatta: Congratulations!

Kathy George: Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: What were some of the things that ... You're welcome. What were some of the things that were very different, and how did life change in some aspects, because I know it was very different when you became the CEO.

Kathy George: It is. You know, you think you're working in the same building, it's not going to be that different. I think your time constraints are just, they're exponentially different. Instead of a couple hundred people that I knew very intimately, whether it's through working in food and beverage, or the hotel, or anywhere like that, so all of a sudden I've got, okay, we've got 1800 employees that I need to get a better handle on, which you know, it multiplies the amount of meetings you go to, but at the same time it also, I think the time adjustment was the biggest thing to get to know. Because I had been in the building and I had worked, walked and worked on so many different projects I knew people across the areas and I had already worked at a casino and knew what was entailed in it, it just was adapting to okay, this is my decision, I'm going to make it. I don't need to go anywhere else. This is my responsibility, so just run with it. I think there was a lot of changes, but nothing insurmountable.

Tino Magnatta: What were some of the most difficult things for you to get used to?

Kathy George: You know what? I think because I always work to treat everyone the same no matter who they are, what they do, I think one of the biggest things that may be hard to adapt to is people, a few people treated me differently because of my new position. And I didn't know how to always react to that. Like, if you didn't have time to talk to me in the industry before, but now you do, I thought that was really weird. Does that make sense?

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, of course. You weren't used to that.

Kathy George: Yeah, I'm not. I'm still Kathy George from Irving, New York. I don't require a lot of, I don't know, pomp and circumstance and stuff, and I think huge adjustment, and sometimes I forget that a CEO is a bigger position, and I think sometimes I, not downplay it, but it's my job and I love it, but it's not who I am.

Tino Magnatta: How do you feel about your accomplishments?

Kathy George: You know, I'm proud of what I've done. I have more to do, I can always get better, and I can do differently, but I'm proud of where I've come. That's it. I think I've achieved a lot of goals. I've exceeded any goal that I think I ever thought I had in my career. But I'm proud of what I've done, and what I do as a leader, and who I am as a person.

Tino Magnatta: How do you see the future of our industry?

Kathy George: Oh, there's so much to grow. I think the future of our industry, we have to adapt. We've changed so much over the years. Some of us still will hold on to, well we used to do it this way. Well, times have changed a lot, and we're now adapting to sports betting, and we're all adapting to the potential of internet gaming, and how do we market to the next generation. So I think it's exciting, because we get to utilize technology to our benefit, and I think that that's the stuff that's going to keep our industry growing. Some people be like, it's all online, we don't need brick and mortar. We do. We're always going to need brick and mortar because we're entertainment. We're really in the entertainment business, and that's what we have to keep the focus on and just adapting it to our new generations of gamers.

Tino Magnatta: Do you see any red flags because of all the proliferation of gaming that's happened?

Kathy George: Well sure. I think that just like in any business, the pie is only so big, and I think we have to be cognizant of it and make sure that we don't over saturate anymore some of the markets that are saturated, because then we're not adding new jobs or more revenue, we're just dispersing it across more venues. And then people then get the bad taste in their mouth where they'll say, see, I told you nothing good was going to come of that. And you know, we can't have that. So I think we all, I think in each market it's different but we gotta look at that and say, hey, you know, I know everyone wants a piece of the pie, but it's just going to make the pieces smaller.

Tino Magnatta: Now, because there's so much expansion, because there's so much proliferation, the employment pool seems to be a lot harder out there. How do you overcome that?

Kathy George: You know, I think you overcome it by ... Well, it's difficult. I think employment across many industries is tough, but I think the hospitality industry is definitely very challenging. I think you become it by having the commitment. Like we have the commitment from our ownership, you know the Nottawaseppi here, a band of the Potawatomi are phenomenal owners of Firekeepers, and they support all we do, but more importantly, they put the goal out that they wanted to be the employer of choice. So that is our goal, is to make sure we are, and that's how we keep attracting and retaining our employees. By making sure we are the leader in the market in terms of benefits and pay and environment, and I think that that's how we overcome it. It's not just all about that hourly wage, which yes, has to be at the leader front, but more about the rest of the ancillary benefits that they get, and really treating them properly, treating them as ... They get the same customer service that our guest gets, and I think that that is important for attracting more people. As we're expanding we're starting to look for more staff, and you know, it'll be a challenge, but I'm very confident that we will be able to add in all the additional resources that we need.

Tino Magnatta: Should we take some calls?

Kathy George: Sure, that'd be great.

Tino Magnatta: Okay, great. Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Kathy?

Caller 1: Yes, hi Tino, hi Kathy. Kathy, your story is inspirational, and Tino, your description of Kathy as superwoman is definitely spot on as a woman, especially a Native American woman who has made it to the top, while most importantly, staying true to yourself. So kudos to you, Kathy.

Kathy George: Thank you very much.

Caller 1: I've had the good fortune of working in the Seattle area many years back, and hope that when you were up there you were able to enjoy the 45 days of perfect weather without any rain, all 45 days of it, right?

Kathy George: Excellent. It was wonderful over there.

Caller 1: I've got a question. Gaming has obviously helped the Native American landscape in a tremendous way, which is wonderful. However, how do you encourage the Native American world, so to speak, not to get overly dependent on the gaming/hospitality business? And the second part of that question is, what secondary business outside of gaming and hospitality shall we call it, might there be out there for the Native American world? It's hard for me to imagine anything that can be as impactful as hospitality and gaming, but what, you know, I've seen tribes go the route of tobacco, obviously gas stations, but what's on the future of a secondary business outside of gaming and hospitality in the Native American world do you think?

Kathy George: Sure. I think that the diversification of their economic development is so important. I think some of the industries, I know some tribes are working at and successful that we need to continue to tap into is communication. Whether it's the satellites or whether it's, whatever it is, the cell towers, there's so many different avenues, but communication is never going to go away. Everyone needs to communicate, so I think to get into that market is something that I think tribes can certainly do. As we continue to look at different energy sources I think that that's something that some tribes have been successful at diversification into, and I think more of us need to look into that. I also think maybe getting into the industries of, maybe the people that manufacture the parts for our gaming stuff, for the actual machinery and that kind of thing, if you get into manufacturing of some of those parts and pieces, well you're going to be pretty, that business is going to continue to grow. I think it's really looking at that type of market, or looking at that type of industry.

Caller 1: Okay. I appreciate that.

Kathy George: Because we have to diversify. We can't be solely reliant on, even though I think the hospitality field is the best field in the world, even I know we have to diversify.

Caller 1: Hotel's always more important than gaming, right?

Kathy George: I don't know. The entertainment business is important. How's that?

Caller 1: Well I appreciate your time, and thank you.

Kathy George: Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you. Great questions. This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Kathy George?

Vince: Hey Tino, it's Vince Manfredi. Kathy, I have enjoyed listening to you just immensely, and I'm particularly fascinated by the way that you spoke about your quest to always be true to yourself and how that's guided you. I just think that's outstanding, and I think it probably relates to the way you manage, and in our business I think nothing is more important than guest service, and you can be proficient, and you can deliver the dish in front of the guest correctly, or deal the cards correctly, or pay the jackpot, but if you don't have that smile, you don't have that genuine ... It's when you have that sort of culture in an organization I think where you really have opportunities to set yourself apart from competitors. So I'm wondering, how do you manage the culture of Firekeepers and making ... Do you have a personal effort in the way that you manage the guest service development of your team?

Kathy George: Vince, thank you for the great question.

Vince: It's a long one, sorry about that.

Kathy George: No, it's great, thank you. You know, I take the customer service very seriously. As I mentioned, the tribe, the Nottawaseppi Huron band really started with a great culture, so it was very easy for me to step in and just continue it and kind of take it to the next level. I think I am someone that ... You know I mentioned one of the reasons, I didn't like sitting in meetings and not talking to our guests or an employee all week, so I definitely do that here. I make sure that I am on that floor, I am in the back offices, I am in the hotel every day because I, A, it gives me a pulse of what's going on, but if my staff sees me saying hello, and remembering their names, and learning something about them they're going to do it with our guests. And that is what keeps them coming here, to drive past casinos in Toledo or drive back casinos in Indiana to come here because of our people, then I'm willing to, I will meet at night, in the morning, on weekends, any time if that means I can spend more time giving the service to my employees.

Vince: I like that. I like that a lot. So I was a little confused trying to back you out of the Hilton job and the 16 months, and one hour and 15 seconds. Were you there when Firekeepers actually opened, or did you come shortly thereafter, or what was your timeline?

Kathy George: The casino was open, and then I arrived during construction of the hotel project, and the event center, when we added in the restaurant and the hotel.

Vince: I see. I was actually at your opening of the casino. I was with IGG at the time, and we saw the system and did the system promotions and things like that together, but I guess I didn't meet you if you weren't there yet.

Kathy George: Nope. Well that was 10 years ago in August, so come back, we'll be having a great August this year celebrating our 10th year anniversary.

Vince: Oh, that's awesome. I just enjoyed listening to you talk so much. Thank you and continued success to you.

Kathy George: Thank you so much Vince.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you Vince, thank you so much. Have a great night.

Vince: You bet.

Tino Magnatta: Bye. Okay, great questions. See who else we got here. Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Kathy George?

Michael: Hello Tino, how are you today? Good afternoon Kathy.

Kathy George: Hi.

Michael: This is Michael. How's it going?

Tino Magnatta: How are you Michael?

Michael: Good. Good. Hey, you know Kathy, it has been a great story. I know everyone's been saying that each time they call in, but I love to hear it, and especially love the hotel and hospitality background and creating that culture, I think it's an important thing that we've all been focusing on more and more these days, creating the right fit for everyone to want to join.

You know, moving forward, as you look at your next five years, and you look at, you already talked about expansions there at the property, where do you see Firekeepers, and how do you want to establish it in the market?

Kathy George: You know, we've been very fortunate in the past nine and a half years to really make a name for ourselves, and we are expanding, you know we're looking to

break ground in June on an additional hotel tower and more meeting space and things, so I really think I see us as growing so that we can obviously bring more business to Michigan, but I think to go further, we do a lot in the community. We're provided opportunities to give back to the community, so we have the community's support to help us grow. But you know, where exactly we're going to go after the next few expansions we're not sure, but it's all in support of making sure we support the tribe of the Nottawaseppi Huron band of the Potawatomi, but the whole community. So I don't have the specifics of exactly what our master plan is of are we opening X or Y next, but we're getting there, we're coming up with our strategic plans to do so. I think right now our next goal in the next five years is get these expansions opened and keep giving the great service so that we are able to give back to the tribes and also the community.

Michael: That's fantastic. How do you keep the culture, keep the energy up in your culture? You know how sometimes going into the same jobs, even though we all know it can be a different story every day, how do you keep that energy up with your teams?

Kathy George: You know, I think I'm fortunate, I have really just a phenomenal team. I know in the casino industry a lot of vice presidents typically stay two, three, maybe four years. Well, we have people that are here, seven of them have been here for 10 years, all 10 years. And at first you're like, well is that going to get stale? Well it's not. They're energized by the changes we're going through, they still have a lot to give back to the employees. So I think it's how we keep energized, I think you can tell, I have a lot of energy myself, and I tend to keep that energy going. I think people, we have, again we work for a phenomenal tribe, and everyone just really wants to do the right thing for them and the community, so it keeps us energized. And by being able to do these expansions or opening restaurants, or we've built and run a food kitchen, and we built greenhouses to provide food for schools, and we run fresh food initiatives every week, so I think there's so much excitement of my team that they really energize each other. So it does make my job a lot easier.

Michael: That's great. That's great. You know, you did mention one thing I just wanted to ask real quick. You talked about some of the opportunities that you've had with mentors in your career. How do you identify that next generation, and what kind of structure do you provide to help them kind of find those mentors themselves?

Kathy George: Well as a company we have a great training and track program we call it, so as we do identify people coming in and saying they want to learn, and they've demonstrated sound skills, there's a whole track training program for them to go through, and one part of it is they do pick a mentor somewhere, from a director or a vice president, or a CEO level, and we literally spend time with them, as much or as little as they want, but at least monthly, but I meet with one of mine every two weeks. And I think we encourage them to adapt, ask their mentors of people that are not in their department, because we want

them to learn different skills than what they see every day. So we're really just pushing that I think.

And then from the personal level, I get calls from people, younger people just starting out, whether it's through their alumni association, they reach out and I will always mentor people, and I think it's important as leaders that we all do that. We all have extra time. We don't think we have time some days. We all have 30 minutes to sit down and talk to someone and show them how to read a P&L or just big leadership stuff, and just talk to them. And I think that I encourage it, and I lead by example, so my team does it as well. I think I've probably pushed some people outside of their comfort zone doing it, but at the end I think they're all thankful that they were given that opportunity to do it.

- Michael: Great answers. Hey, thank you for the time, appreciate it, and your continued success to you.
- Kathy George: Thank you very much.
- Tino Magnatta: Thanks Michael, have a good evening. Aloha. Great guy, he's an old friend and-
- Kathy George: Aloha.
- Tino Magnatta: Aloha. Yep. He's Hawaiian. We call him Hawaiian Mike. And he actually goes way back-
- Kathy George: Oh, I think we should go visit him.
- Tino Magnatta: Yes. And he goes way back to the flamingo days, when I started my career and my business partner. So he's an old, old friend and a great guy.
- Kathy George: Excellent.
- Tino Magnatta: Yeah. Hang on one second. Alrighty. Hello, this is Tino. Do you have a ... Message. A question for Kathy George?
- Katie: Tino, good evening. This is Katie [inaudible 00:48:36]. How are you tonight? And Kathy? I am wonderful.
- Kathy George: Wonderful, thank you. Good.
- Katie: Kathy, I recently had a couple of your ladies from Firekeepers in NIGA in one of my sessions, and the wonderful Rachel Hayes, and they all had such great things to say about you, so I'm really glad I get to speak to you this evening.
- Kathy George: Awe, well thank you so much. I know they enjoyed their entire experience, but they did speak about your session, so thank you.

Katie: Thank you. So I have an idea for diversification for your tribe. I think they should manufacture a vitamin pill called Kathy George.

Tino Magnatta: That would be a huge success. I'd buy it.

Katie: Absolutely. I would love to take that pill, because you have infinite knowledge, and it seems like a lot of energy. And Tino referred, as you've been incredible after incredible, but I certainly believe that you made those incredible opportunities come your way.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah.

Kathy George: Thank you.

Katie: So I want to start, Kathy, by asking you, what are some of the typical mistakes, maybe you could just give me one or two, that you have seen women make moving up the leadership ladder in gaming.

Kathy George: Sure. You know, when you start out, sometimes I think in the past women felt that they needed to be really mean, or really tough. They come across that way because they thought they needed to compete that way. I think that's not a good thing, because being kind, like I said, does not make you weak, and I think that that's a mistake some people make, is that they try to change one component of who they are, and then it's not natural. That's not genuine. So I think that's a big mistake.

I think the other thing is, you know, that whole balance in life and people say they can't have a balance, and they can't have a family, and they can't do work all at the same time. Well, you know what? Can't is just a limitation we put on ourselves, and you can do all of it, you just gotta balance it differently and make decisions at the time that's appropriate for you. We can't compare ourselves to others, we have to compare ourselves to what we were yesterday, and I think that that's a mistake sometimes we make as leaders.

Katie: I love that. I love it. And I love, you come across as a very kind, and you have this peaceful energy about you. I can't ever imagine you losing your cool in business.

Kathy George: It happens, but not often.

Katie: So I'm also writing an article that will become a presentation called Three Things that Successful Gaming Leaders do Every Day. And you have worked with such amazing people in the industry as well. Can you share one or two things that you do every day, or you've seen really successful top gaming leaders do?

Kathy George: Yeah.

Katie: Consistently, that's what I mean. Consistently.

Kathy George: Sure. I think consistently communicate, I think would be key. Whether it's communicating our goals and objectives and making sure our plans are in order, or really is it just communicating, it gets me going when I get to communicate with employees and guests every day. So I really make sure I walk that floor, and I go through the offices no matter what, because that's important to the business. That's important to me personally. But I think communication, I would say that's something you have to do every day in every direction.

Katie: Right. Right. And I've tracked on LinkedIn your career path, and I was very interested to know that between when you went from CEO to GM, and you said there was so many people competing for that position that they interviewed, what do you think they saw in you that made you get that position?

Kathy George: You know, I think because I had been on property for the five years prior, I think I had already demonstrated that I was a great leader, and there was a comfort level with how I managed, and they knew that I would continue that. They knew that I would always be true to me, and I think they liked that, they knew that my staff would react well to it since they heard from my fellow VPs, so I think it was just a natural fit. Like I said, I was very fortunate to walk into a position that the casino was doing well, and I just got to step in, tweak a couple things, and make it a little better.

Katie: Absolutely. And I believe, like you mentioned before, your perseverance and probably your consistency as well did it for you.

Kathy George: Absolutely.

Katie: Wonderful Kathy, thank you so much. Enjoy, and I'm hoping to speak in person very soon, and thank you Tino.

Kathy George: Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: You're welcome. Have a good evening.

Katie: You too.

Tino Magnatta: Have a good evening. Thank you so much. Okay, great. Some great, great questions. Great questions.

Kathy George: Yes, thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Hello, this is Tino Magnatta from GT Radio. Do you have a question for Kathy George? Hello?

Speaker 7: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Do you have a question for Kathy George?

Speaker 7: Hello, this is [inaudible 00:54:37].

Speaker 8: Hi Tino.

Tino Magnatta: Hey [inaudible 00:54:39], how are you?

Speaker 8: Hi, good. Hi Kathy. We worked with you for the campaign for the hotel grand opening.

Kathy George: Yes. Hello.

Speaker 7: So we have, you know Shree, who you met, and myself always, but one of our biggest questions is, you know, we've worked for hundreds of organizations, 70 tribes now, but how do you recalibrate I guess, to reset yourself and keep building your career like you're doing?

Speaker 8: I guess kind of what do you do in your spare time?

Kathy George: I was going to say, how I recalibrate is I definitely, I say I can squeeze more in two days off than most people can. I definitely utilize my time off. I love to travel and see my family, and moving 15 times in my career I always have a city to go visit, people I'm friends with, and see them, but I'm a big sports fan, so I go to events a lot. But I also read, I take a lot of time for myself to read and just do some downtime stuff for me. I do water aerobics at the Y, and one lady says, she goes, "You're very quiet, you don't ever speak." I'm like, "I talk all day, so I'm good."

Speaker 8: Awesome. Thank you, that's so important.

Kathy George: It's a good balance. I've learned as we all do at different times in our career, to develop a balance. I have a close knit circle of friends that I rely on, and I'm there for them, and I think I just, so I recalibrate and regroup. Hey, we all need our time. I'm the first person, when a report comes out and says people are approaching their max number of PTO hours and they start losing them, I'm like, don't ever do that. So I think that that's important to regroup. Because if I'm not energized, then my team won't be, so I make sure I take that time.

And then you know, I also, as you said, like to continue my career, I'm always looking for opportunities to learn, attend conferences, obviously I go to G2E and NIGA, but I went back to Cornell for a conference two months ago, and so it's just a part of all of our learning and seeing what we can learn next.

Speaker 8: That's great. Thank you for that feedback.

Kathy George: You're welcome.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you so much. Thank you for [inaudible 00:57:18].

Speaker 7: Yep, thanks for your time.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you so much, have a good evening.

Speaker 7: All right, you too.

Tino Magnatta: Great questions. Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Kathy George?

Speaker 9: Yes. Good evening. Kathy, I have a long career in the music industry and producing shows, and booking entertainment, and to change the subject a bit, I am knocked out with your spirit and your heart. I think you touched on it earlier, I think your family obviously was amazing, and you took, you mentioned the word love early on, and you took that love and security and developed a confidence to go and achieve amazing things. Do you share your history, career history with new staff at all on orientation, or do they know that you came in and you worked your heart to become what you are?

Kathy George: Yes. I'm provided a great opportunity. We do speak to new hire orientations every other week, and then we also do that track program I mentioned earlier, training programming, and each week a different department speaks on what we do, and how we got to where we did, et cetera, and it shows them some jobs if they ever wanted to transfer, what they can do, and I start out the series every year, every time we do it, and I share with them my background and how I got to where I am, because it's important for them to get to know me as a person in addition to just their leader.

Speaker 9: Very, very inspirational. And it hit me more probably today than it would have any time because last week I was driving with a young man who has been my little brother from Big Brothers for 11 years, and he's washing dishes at a restaurant, and I said to him, I think, let's move you to the next level. Why would you not want to go and apply for a next position someplace where we can get you in the tap to bigger and better things. And after a minute of silence he turned to me and he said, I don't want to fail.

Kathy George: Right.

Speaker 9: And I said, let's just talk one minute about, and I'm in Wisconsin, let's talk about Aaron Rogers. Aaron Rogers gets paid huge money, runs down a football field and doesn't make every pass that [inaudible 01:00:14] pass. He fails more than he wins. But the experience is priceless, and your experience and upbringing emotionally affected me because I just think it's so awesome for you to be able to have the history, the past, and the eyes and energy to see the opportunities, and then to achieve them. So thrilled to get through and talk to you. I know you're probably running out of time here, so I probably should get off, but thank you so much for being here tonight.

Kathy George: Oh, well thank you so much. I hope he moves on up to his next position quickly.

Speaker 9: Well I'm going to send him over to you, then he'll become a manager, or a CEO.

Kathy George: Rock on. Let's go.

Speaker 9: Don't be surprised if he knocks on your door.

Tino Magnatta: Let's do it.

Speaker 9: Yeah. He knocks on your door one day. "I'm here to be the boss."

Kathy George: I look forward to it.

Speaker 9: Thank you. Thanks again.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you, have a good evening. Kathy, we've run out of time but I tell you-

Kathy George: All right.

Tino Magnatta: It's been just an amazing show and I really appreciate you coming on, and I'll definitely want you to come back on and we'll probably team you up with someone else, but I'm just really glad that you came on, and it's been an incredible experience for me.

Kathy George: Well, and it's incredible for me. Thank you so much. I look forward to talking to you soon.

Tino Magnatta: Sounds good. You have a great evening.

Kathy George: Thank you, you too. Bye-bye.

Tino Magnatta: Bye-bye.

Wow! What a great show, and such a great person. You've done so much and gone so far, and it's really a great story. Monday I have Ray Pinault, CEO and GM of Mohegan Sun out east, and he's got a pretty fascinating story too. You know what I say, everybody's got a story to tell, you just have to have the time to listen. Everybody have a good night, and God bless. I'll see you Monday.

END