



Conversations w/Tino

Guests	Bruce Howard
	General Manager
	Valley View Casino & Resort
Airdate	Monday, August 5, 2019

Tino Magnatta: Hello and welcome to another episode of GT Radio with myself, Tino Magnatta, and tonight, I have a very good friend and a recurring guest on our show. He's always fantastic. Welcome again, to the show, Bruce Howard. How are you, buddy?

Bruce Howard: Great, so thanks for the opportunity to talk to your friends and guests and looking forward to tonight's show.

Tino Magnatta: Great. Now you just had a grand opening. You had four or five days of festivities over the July 4th weekend. Tell us a little bit of how it went and what you had going on and I heard you were jam packed too.

Bruce Howard: Absolutely. Beginning on July 1st, we finished up our two years of planning and organizing and expanding and renovating our entire casino. So, as you know, we added 43,000 new square feet of gaming and dining and public space and we renovated the existing 100,000 square feet. So, on September 1, 2 and then on the 3rd, we invited the media up for a grand tour and lunch with us and we ended up with 80 folks from the media from L.A. to Anaheim to San Diego, all through Southern California. We unveiled the new building to the Southern California press and it was fantastic. Then we went right into July 4th, which is always a nice weekend for us. With it being on a Thursday this year, it worked out really well.

So, from the 1st through the 7th was probably one of the busiest weeks we've ever had in our 18 years history and I look forward to your guest and you coming by to see the finished building. I know you were here not long ago but when it's all said and done, the building looks really, really well. Just a lot more spacious, a lot more sophisticated, everything is pretty much brand new. We had redone the hotel last year, so that's brand new. So, we have a beautiful building in sunny Valley Center, California, just about 10 minutes east of Escondido.

Tino Magnatta: Now, I know that as part of your plan there, you added some pretty spectacular food venues. Can you tell us a little bit about what you added?

Bruce Howard: Absolutely. We opened two new restaurants. Our café, which is our breakfast and lunch and brunch restaurant overlooking the Palomar mountain range, opened up that week and is doing gangbusters business. A little bit more of the higher end I would say with the different types of eggs benedict and different types of stuffed pancakes, waffles, lox and bagels for brunch and breakfast and then we also have a full Asian menu in there. So, we're opening that restaurant every day 7:30 to 2:00 p.m. Then in the expanded area, we opened up our dinner restaurant which is an upscale concept of burgers, pizzas, salads, great milkshakes, full bar, craft beers and that one's called Patties and Pints. So that opens seven nights a week at 4 o'clock, goes until 10 o'clock during the week and as late as people want to come on the weekends, usually midnight 1:00 a.m. or so, we're still serving.

We've teamed up a few years ago with a very high end cattle farm in Southern California called Brandt Beef and I know everybody has their favorite hamburger but I'm going to challenge anybody to come to Patties and Pints and tell me if it's not the best hamburger you've ever had, a very proprietary blend that our nice president of food and beverage, Howard Silver and our executive chef, Denis Soriano and myself put together and we have 12 different styles of burgers. We have pizzas. We have salads. We have some unique appetizers, a whole new take on chicken tenders, fried pickles, different types of foods that you haven't seen a lot of done the way we do it. So, again, Patties and Pints is doing gangbusters. It's been open about 30 days and it's just a fun place with a full bar, seating in the bar, food served throughout the venue. So, we're all excited about that one and our guests really love it. It's doing very well.

Tino Magnatta: Now, your differentiator from your competitors is the food and now you have a pretty expensive background in that. Tell us a little bit about that and tell us how you sustained because you do everything in house. You control everything. Give us a little detail on all that stuff.

Bruce Howard: Absolutely. Yeah, I grew up on that side of the business. Spent 10 years at Caesars Palace on The Strip, five years as managers of different restaurants and room service and then my last five years there as a food and beverage director from 1990 to 1995 and Caesars back then was known as probably the highest level of food and beverage in Las Vegas. I grew up in the restaurant business before that with a big chain of seafood restaurants in Miami Beach called the Sea Shanty. So, while I finished up at Caesars and then went on to learn the other parts of the job of being a general manager, particularly the casino and the marketing side of the business, which I learned a lot about in St. Louis and a few other stops before coming here. My passion, I still have a passion for food and beverage. We do do everything ourselves here. We obviously live in Southern California, so the abundance of produce and fresh vegetables and fruits and this Brandt beef who I think is the finest meat purveyor that I've ever worked with including those that we worked with in Las Vegas.

We have a great vice president of food and beverage that I work with, Howard Silver, who was the former executive chef for all of Ameristar Corporation and we have an executive chef, Denis Soriano, who grew up in the Wolfgang Puck chain. He's the one who did, until he came with us last year, he's the one who did the famous Oscars party at the end of the Academy Awards. People have heard of that party. Well, he was the chef for that party. So, again, everything is fresh, including our buffet and café. Very rarely do we open a can for anything or reach into the freezer for anything other than maybe french fries but most of ours is cooked to order. Most of it is delivered six days a week and I think it shows. We've won the best buffet eight years in a row and it is a differentiator. All the Southern California casinos have great food and beverage but I think ours is a notch above and I ask anybody listening to come in and tells us. Tell us how you like it and tell us if there's anything we could do better. We could always do better.

Tino Magnatta: Now, there's been a big change in the way people look at food and the way people eat than 10 or 15 years ago. Can you tell us a little bit about that evolution and what it's meant to casinos and restaurants and how they design their menus and offer food to the public?

Bruce Howard: Absolutely, absolutely. Growing up at Caesars, as most people know, in the 80s and early 90s, a lot of it was about the 99 cent shrimp cocktail and the 2.99 prime rib and just the quantity of food, where now it's all about quality. We buy the highest quality food that can be bought. One thing I do love about our buffet is that just as many people come for the 20 or 30 salad selections that we have and the 8 or 10 fresh vegetables that we put out every day as much as they do for the prime rib or the carved roast turkey or anything like that.

So, yes, there's no doubt eating habits of Southern California are very quality driven, which is great for us because that's what we're all about and people are looking for a little bit less meat sometimes, more vegetables and even in our patties and pints where most of our patties are the beef patty from Brandt, we have a tremendous vegan patty that's probably one of the best I think you can ever taste. So, we are cognizant of that and we do cater to vegans and we do cater to different types of cuisines and different types of palates. A lot of people, obviously what you eat, directly involved with your health, whether you have restrictions, whether you might be allergic to something, we're very, very aware of all that and we'll go out of our way to make sure that what you want to eat is exactly what you get and it's the highest quality that that can be. I mean Caesars did some of that in the 80s and 90s when everybody else was just buying the volume but we've taken it to a whole new level here and I am proud that people come and tell me I come to the buffet just for your salad bar or the six fresh soups today. We make six soups from scratch every single morning out in the buffet. The breads are all made here in our bakery.

Again, not just about the steaks and the prime ribs and the burgers anymore. The side dishes are important. The breads are important. Things like that are really rarely important. As you know, you like the asparagus, you like the rapini. You like all the fresh greens we have on our buffet. So, we cater to that. We cater to those types of people and it's definitely been a dramatic change over my 30 years.

Tino Magnatta: Now, you have quite the infrastructure because you control every aspect of that at your casino. So, in other words, you do everything from A to Z and you have about half of your employees that are dedicated to food and beverage. That's a real commitment on your part. How do you manage all that? I mean that's a big ... Most casinos just rent out their restaurants and what is it that you guys have that down completely?

Bruce Howard: It's a passion. You have to love it and you have to want to do it that way and yes, about 430 of our 950 team members are in F&B, so it is just about half, you are correct and even going back to Caesars that most people remember back in the 80s and 90s, whether it was Terry Lanni or Dan Reichartz, we ran everything

at Caesars too. Where you first saw the third party restaurants is when Caesars built the forum shops and Spago came in but up until then, everything at Caesars Palace was always run by Caesars Palace. We just felt, as we do here, having total control, nothing against the famous chefs and nothing against the chain restaurants, they're all great but to be able to control what our guests' experience is going to be in ever restaurant, at every bar, in addition to at the gaming floor and on the gaming slot machines and tables is really important to us. We like to be able to know what they're going to be experiencing in that whole four to five hours.

Now, Caesars of today is a little different. I know they have that Rao's, the famous Italian restaurant from New York and I think they've got the Homestead, their steakhouse I believe from the Carolinas or from Virginia but back then, it was The Bacchanal, it was the Palace Court, Nero's Steakhouse, it was Primavera. It was all run by our managers and our chefs and our culinary team and our front of the house team and here, because we have Howard Silver and we have Denis and we have a great team of chefs, great pastry chef, great garde manger chef who makes all the salads. She's fantastic. We're able to control it. The key is finding people who are as passionate about food and beverage as we are. They create their own menus. They come to us when they're ready to make changes. We change a lot of menu items here a lot. We print menus all the time. We like to diversify because we see a lot of the same clientele. Most of our guests comes back two times a month and they like to come here for the food.

Over 50% of our guests live closer to another casino but they choose to drive by two or three other casinos, not only for our liberal gaming floor where you do have the best chance to win but a lot of times, it's for the food.

Tino Magnatta: Now, you have a very, very special buffet, and you made a ... And I've eaten there three or four times. Now, you made a commitment with that and tell us a little bit about making that commitment and tell us why that was so important to you and to the team to make it your differentiator.

Bruce Howard: Absolutely. Well, first it came down to, as most people know, seafood night can be on a Friday or something people do it on a Saturday. When we first got here in 2003, and we saw that food was not really the strength of the Southern California casino market, we decided that we're going to do lobster night seven nights a week. It's just as hard or even harder to get somebody to come out to a casino on a Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday as it is on a Friday or Saturday. So, I remember when we proposed lobster every night, and the board of directors that I sit on said you sure you want to do that? That's awfully expensive. I said I think it'll pay off in the long run, and they've always been very supportive, and we've been doing Maine lobster, shrimp, crab legs every night and all day on Saturday and Sunday. We start right at 11:00 a.m. with the brunch on Sunday with lobster and shrimp and crab.

We're the highest user under any one roof of lobster in the country. Red Lobster obviously has a chain that uses more lobster than us but as far as lobster tails

from Maine go, we use almost 300,000 pounds a year and no one single building comes close to us in that. So, you can come here any night of the week and get what you may only get on a Friday or a Saturday at another building and it's just not going to be as fresh and it's just not going to be consumed enough to keep it fresh every night. So, it comes from a love that sometimes the buffets in the casinos are an afterthought. Well, it never was at Caesars and it never was anywhere I was because it's about two thirds of the total amount of diners in the entire building, at least here, eat in the buffet. So, we have our best chef in the buffet. We have our best servers in the buffet.

We have great chefs, obviously, in our steakhouse and everywhere else but we put a huge emphasis on the buffet. Any of those 200 dishes that are out there any given day could be the reason that person came. You may just be coming for the soups. You just like the soups so much or you love the fresh mashed potatoes or you love the pineapple upside cake. We've had people come from L.A. just for our pecan pie, which is a very unique pecan pie.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, I've tried that. That's really great, yeah.

Bruce Howard: So, we put an emphasis on every one of those dishes. Smaller vessels, so nothing stays out there more than 10 minutes. It's always being changed. It's always a new, fresh pan right from the oven, and it's worked, and the buffet has done really, really well and guests never get tired of it. I mean we've had guests that have been here since we opened 18 years ago that are twice a month in the buffet. So, they've been in that buffet 300-400 times, and it never gets old, it never gets tired. We're always changing at least a third of it every few months. There's some staples that we're always going to have, but we try to mix it up, and a little bit of seasonality, so we'll do the heartier soups in the winter time, and we'll do the fresher vegetable broths and things like that in the summertime.

So, we have a pretty good handle and again, Howard and Denis and their team do a phenomenal job, but it is the number one restaurant here even though we've won the best steakhouse in Black&Blue, I don't want to take anything away from them or our other restaurants, but we are known for the lobster buffet, and we want everybody to eat there to tell their friends how good it was. So, that is our number one spot and most, certainly on The Strip, what's your number one restaurant, most strip properties would not say the buffet.

Tino Magnatta: That's true. You're right about that. Incredibly true.

Bruce Howard: They would say the [inaudible 00:19:02] room, the French restaurant. Here the buffet gets a lot of our attention.

Tino Magnatta: Now, you also have an advantage because you're surrounded by farms and people that raise cattle, so you draw from the local community, right?

Bruce Howard: We do. We draw ... Most everything we buy is local, within the region 100% but even tighter than that, within the San Diego market, some of the freshest produce I've ever been able to get ahold of. Even the dairies, I mean even the milk is fresher here than anywhere we've been. So, we have access to, like you said, some of the best vendors, farmers, cattle ranchers anywhere in the world honestly. Yeah, we try to buy as much locally as we can. Obviously, avocado market is right here, the grapefruit market is right here, the asparagus, garlic market, everything is right here. You don't go too far for anything, which also allows us to get six days of deliveries and if we really need it, they'll come on Sunday too. We've had many a delivery on Sunday where we just miscalculated and ran out of something and the vendors were ... We have such a good relationship with our vendors, we sometimes get seven day delivery which really helps food quality.

Tino Magnatta: Let's talk a little bit about that because I'm Italian and in Italy, our ... The saying "farm to table" does not exist because it's always been like that but as far as I can remember, when I was a little kid and also when my dad grew up too. Explain to the audience how important that freshness is of everything that you get because you say the top of this interview, we don't open a can, we don't use the freezer. How important is that to the taste of the food?

Bruce Howard: Oh, vitally important. You could have the greatest chefs in the world and I think any of the ... From Wolfgang Puck to Emeril to Paul Bocuse will tell you without a doubt and you know from Italy with the famous ... The tomatoes in Italy are like candy, they're so sweet and that's how they are here and just the ripeness and the freshness of the oranges and the grapefruits. Most people are pretty food savvy now.

I mean with the advent of these Trader Joe's and Major Market and the markets have changed. Even the big names, Albertsons and Smiths, they're all tremendously fresher than they were when I was growing up. You would get vegetables that looked like they had been in the grocery store for a long time. So, I credit a lot of the national food chains as well. They have made it a point that they're going to have to do better or they're going to lose out to these Trader Joe's and Major Markets and all these different fruits and vegetable stands that we see in Southern California but there is no chef in the world who can do anything unless he or she has the freshest produce because you eat with your eyes first.

Anytime when you come in our buffet and you see green vegetables, they're all bright. When you see the squash and it's like really bright yellow or you see the tomato basil soup is a bright red, it just makes such a difference because before we eat with our stomachs or forks, we eat with our eyes and if things look dull, they're just not appetizing. So, I mean first impressions on food are everything and we all know if you put a plate of food down in front of you in a restaurant, you're going to look at it and you're going to smell it. If it smells fresh and it looks good, you can't wait to eat it. If you can't smell the freshness, then it's just going to be an average meal. That's all it's going to be. So, I think it makes a

huge difference and when you come by our salad bar, even just our salad bar with our 40 toppings, everything is bright. Everything looks bright. That's what we're always going for.

Tino Magnatta: Where did your love for food, where was it born? How did you acquire this passion way before people were even into it like that?

Bruce Howard: Well, certainly my parents were always into that. My brother was a food executive for years in the restaurant business on the fast food side but even he would talk about his days at Burger King and Wendy's and Kenny Rogers and then Wingstop. Now, he's got his own chain of fast food restaurants down in South Florida called Huey Magoo's. So, we learned at our dinner table because we were just middle class, so we had to eat a lot of fruits and vegetables and a little bit of steak and a lot of pasta, but when the meat sauce is fresh and the ground beef is fresh and the tomatoes are fresh, we were pretty happy with spaghetti and meat sauce. There's nothing wrong with that at all. So, I've always had a passion for it.

I really developed it at Caesars where I got to be in a place that really cared about food and beverage. Caesars Palace was a great training ground for me and just reiterated how I felt about food. Armeni was my vice president and he was also Italian. He's a big name in Las Vegas. So, was my boss as the vice president. I was the director. Even the president, Dan Reichartz from the Waldorf Astoria, he had some food and beverage and his background, Terry Lanni, our COO has food and beverage passion, so when everybody feels that way, it's easy to feel that way and at Caesars it was nice because we were able to buy the freshest and we were able to buy the best, so there was no handcuffs on buying cheaper tomatoes or cheaper lettuce.

We never had to do that and I never asked anybody to do that here. Even in our employee dining room, the same tomatoes and the same chicken and the same prime rib that the guests eat, we don't buy a lower quality for our team members. We buy high quality for everybody. Everybody eats the same. There's no reason to buy a lesser quality broccoli or asparagus because at the end of the day, what you save in trying to stock another 20 different products doesn't pay off. It just doesn't. So, I've been lucky in my casino career that I've been at a lot of places and every one of them, Ameristar had a passion for food and beverage, so I've never had the handcuffs that some people have had. If you're working at maybe a downtown casino, they don't have the budget and they can't charge what you can charge on The Strip, so you have to buy different quality stuff but I've been lucky in my career. I've never had to do that and it's made for an appreciation of how much you can get when you buy a little bit fresher and a little bit better.

Tino Magnatta: Tell me a little bit about Caesars because that was a defining era in your career. How old were you when you got the job? What was it like when you first started and what are some of the things that you learned because that was kind of like a dream job for anybody at the time, right?

Bruce Howard: Oh yeah. I moved from Miami and put my resume out at a few different properties. In 1984, I was 26 and was able to be hired as an assistant manager in room service, grew up through the ranks and I felt honored to be there. I was there for 11 years and it was just the ultimate to go in food and beverage, then I grew to be a manager of the restaurant, assistant food and beverage director, then food and beverage director and I always felt it was a privilege to work there. Back then, there was only one really high end casino. So, everybody wanted to work at Caesars Palace. It just so happened my timing, I guess, was good when I put in my resume and somebody liked my resume from Miami in the seafood business and I got hired but now there's the Venetian, there's Bellagio, there's Wynn. There's a lot of high end places but back in the 80s and early 90s, people got dressed up to come to Caesars Palace.

We had the big fight nights with Hagler and Hearns and Leonard and I'm just a guy in my 20s having a ball. I mean it was pretty magical back then to watch that casino on a New Year's Eve, on a fight night, on a July 4th, Evel Knievel back in the 80s jumping over the fountains at Caesars Palace. We did an outdoor hockey game I remember at Caesars Palace. I think it was the Rangers and the Kings, and we had that famous outdoor arena. So, I loved every minute at Caesars and I probably would have still been there if they didn't sell it out to, I think it was ITT [inaudible 00:28:56] maybe back then. They immediately wanted to cut the quality and wanted to do something, so that's when I moved on in my career. As long as I was there, it was owned ... I mean it was run by Terry Lanni and Henry Gluck and Dan Reichartz and they were all great guys and all they cared about was making the guests happy. It was never really about food costs or expenses because we all were casino employees. No matter what department you worked in, it was about getting people into the casino and whatever would happen in the casino would happen. So, again, it was a great time. So that was from 26 years old to 36 years old.

Tino Magnatta: Wow, that was pretty [crosstalk 00:29:42] Yeah, yeah, that's pretty amazing. Now, I've always loved the stories because the special nights were the fight nights and you said that-

Bruce Howard: Oh yeah.

Tino Magnatta: When you had those fights, you had the most affluent people in the world. What was that like? What were the fight nights like?

Bruce Howard: The fight nights, I guess, were as close to maybe an Academy Awards night as you can get because every car pulling up was a Lamborghini or a Rolls Royce and the amount of diamonds and jewelry and gold and everybody, I think, at that time, even back then in the 80s, at least in the main casino, before we built the floor casino, on fight night, you couldn't make a bet less than \$100 bet. The only chips in the casino were black chips, \$100 and up to \$10,000. You couldn't even bet \$50 on a hand. You had to bet a minimum of \$100. Everyone was there in long gowns and tuxedos. People would go outside to the fights in suits and all kinds of ... It was a time probably never to be seen again. It felt good just being

in the building. It's where everybody wanted to be. So, there was nothing like it and I remember many New Year's Eves, you didn't even try to leave until 5:00 a.m. because The Strip was gridlock. So, if you came into work New Year's and you were in management, you knew you were there at least until 5:00 a.m. because that's when The Strip first started to break up a little bit but nothing like those big nights, you're right, and we had a lot of them.

Caesars wasn't just a one-time, there were five or six fight nights, six or seven ... They used to have those toga parties where people dressed up like roman gods and goddesses and things. So, every night was pretty much a special night there. We had the greatest entertainers in the world, Diana Ross, Julio Iglesias, everybody who was anybody seemed to want to stay at Caesars and it was relatively small then. When I first got there, I think we only had 1200 rooms before we built the other towers. Now, I think there are 3500. So, for those people in the casino business, it's unusual. The casino took every room.

So, every weekend, even if you wanted to pay whatever the rate was for a room at Caesars, you could not get a room. You had to go through a casino host and you had to have a pretty big credit line, especially on the fight nights and Caesars was the first with those mega suites. I remember walking into that 10,000-ft suite and obviously food and beverage played a big role in it because we had to stock the suite with stuff. So, I was fortunate. Food and beverage is one of those departments where you deal with everybody because everybody's got to eat and very few people who stayed at Caesars ever left Caesars to eat. Now, people walk around those four corners and they walk here and there to eat but if you were at Caesars on a Friday night and you were leaving Monday, you ate all your meals at Caesars and you really didn't see the rest of the world until Monday morning when you left. So, that is something different that is not the case now.

If you stay at Caesars, you'll walk to Bellagio. You'll go to Bally's & Paris, you'll go to the Aladdin or the Planet Hollywood or the Cosmopolitan. That was not the way it was in the 80s and 90s. Nobody ever left the casino. Nobody ever left the building.

Tino Magnatta: Now you told me that Terry Lanni had a policy for fight nights. You could have whatever you wanted. Is that true? You could order whatever you wanted?

Bruce Howard: On fight nights, yeah, we had a lot of people with \$100,000, half a million, \$2 million credit line. Yeah, on the big fight nights, it was Dom Perignon and caviar and shrimp and crab and we were bringing pretty much whatever anybody wanted back then. Terry Lanni just wanted them to come back. He just wanted them happy. He was a great boss. He was our mentor and someone we all miss, passed away too young quite a few years ago now but he was a good friend to all of us. He lived in L.A. but stayed at Caesars every weekend with his family. I met his wife Debbie and their kids who are probably all grown now. Great kids, great family and he was never a penny pincher. He was never ... Nobody ever sweated a bet at Caesars. Win, lose or draw, just as long as the games are fair.

Nobody really cared whether ... And plenty of people won a lot of money and you wouldn't know it from any of us and for those in the business, they know what sweating a bet is. We never did that. We just ... Whatever they wanted to play, they played, win, lose or draw. We treated them great and we had guests like that too.

Guests would leave after a weekend and you really wouldn't know whether they won or lost a million dollars. We had phenomenal guests. We just had a different caliber of person and now they're spread out obviously all over The Strip, all over Macao, New Jersey, it's just different times now. The gaming's spread all over the world. So, we were a destination resort back then and I guess in some regard, The Strip still is with the higher end, Caesars, Bellagio, Venetian, Wynn but it's different now. It's different now. Most of it now is just regular working people, which is great for us here. That's who we cater. We try to make you feel like Caesars Palace. When I came here in 2003, that's what I told everybody. I want to turn this into Caesars Palace of Valley Center. So, we try to emulate some of the things we learned from Terry Lanni.

Tino Magnatta: Very cool, very cool. Tell me some of the-

Bruce Howard: Terry Lanni had one of the best sayings [inaudible 00:35:47] ever had. If you ever ask Terry Lanni ... Somebody asked him once, why was Caesars Palace built, because when it was built in 1966 at like \$50 million, that was a lot of money. Nobody had ever spent more than \$10 or \$20 million and he said there's one main reason why Caesars Palace was built, because rich people want to hang out with rich people and poor people want to hang out with rich people. That's why Caesars Palace was built. He was right.

Tino Magnatta: I love that.

Bruce Howard: He's a smart man.

Tino Magnatta: [inaudible 00:36:18] right. Yup, yeah. He was right. Tell me a few of the most unusual requests that you've had over the years. I guess a lot of them must have come from Caesars but what are some of the most unusual requests that you've had?

Bruce Howard: A lot of them did. Caesars was famous for those, what actually ended up getting the name, those Rain Man suites, those two-story suites that were featured in the Rain Man movie with the gigantic jacuzzi and bar in the middle of the room overlooking The Strip up on a little terrace. So, we've had those jacuzzis filled with everything from champagne, peanuts, jelly beans. One guy wanted it filled with seafood so he could just eat out of the ... Shrimp and crab like you see them in a metal bowl full of ice. This was a whole bathtub filled with ice and seafood in it. So, there's crazy, crazy requests over the years but probably none more than what went on at Caesars Palace. People just came to escape their lives and be as decadent as they could be and a lot of things that went on there

would never go on again anywhere in the world today but that was then and the requests were all easy ones. Easy. I had to buy like I think it was 10,000 pounds of jelly beans or something. Jelly beans don't take up much room, so to fill that gigantic jacuzzi with jelly beans was a chore but we had it ready for him when he walked in. So he was happy.

So, you make the guests happy, they come back. Same whether it's The Strip or San Diego or I've been in Missouri, I've been in Mississippi, Louisiana. The casino business is relatively the same, exceed everybody's expectations, set high standards. Hire people who appreciate high standards and you'll get loyalty. You'll get loyalty. If you don't, you're mediocre, you don't deserve loyalty and you shouldn't get it. So, I've taken all the lessons from Caesars and learned that they work all over the country.

Tino Magnatta: Now, in terms of the future, what are some of the things that you see, especially in the food and beverage area that are evolving, some of the trends that you see now that could catch on. Like I know there's a company called Beyond Meat and they make like these meatless products that taste like meat. [crosstalk 00:39:04]

Bruce Howard: There's a lot of that going on obviously as the medical profession gets more in tune with what's good and what's bad because not that many people know but their meatless hamburger really is not less calories. It's not about calories, it's about, I think, what's in the calories and how your body digests certain things. Like you see a lot more olive oil than you've ever seen. Even places, not even Italian places bringing olive oil instead of butter. I think there's been a pretty big outbreak of some of the Middle Eastern foods, the hummus and the different Middle Eastern foods that are served now and again, a little bit less on the meat, so it might be a kabob but it's got a lot of peppers and onions and things that are very good for you and a little bit less meat.

So, I think the trends are for all people to try to eat once in a while what they used to eat all the time and learn how to enjoy just as much fruits and vegetables and I think there's less late, late night type eating where a lot of people are now conscious about not eating past 8 or 9 o'clock which is actually our market here. A lot of our restaurants are fullest at 5 or 6 o'clock. Now, on the weekends, a little bit different, but I think it's all about living as long a life as you can live being as healthy as it can be. I think there're trends toward Indian food, there're trends towards again Middle Eastern food, trends towards different pockets of markets in the United States that are becoming more popular and everybody is into food and beverage which I think is fantastic. It's great for us and great for me because there's no request that you can give us, if it's anywhere in this country, we're going to get it for you.

We used to get that all the time at Caesars. They set long laundry lists of dietary things and we always had it for them. We always had it for them and we used to have entertainers who they ordered six courses from six different restaurants and they liked the appetizer from Primavera and they wanted the salad from The Bacchanal and they wanted the main course from the Palace Court and we

would gather it all up and bring it all up to their rooms and they'd have a meal from six different restaurants right in front of them. So, if you understand the importance of food and beverage and you like food and beverage, it's easy to be good at food and beverage. Food and beverage is a very straight forward logical department that if you love it and you understand that a guest is just requesting it because they like it, they're not trying to inconvenience you, then you'll have fun with it and you'll always be able to have a good business because people know ... Some people don't do it but they really don't want to do it, we're not like that. Whatever you want, we'll get it for you. We're happy to get it for you.

We're up in Valley Center, California. It's not on the I-15. You have to come off the highway to get up here about 10-15 minutes and drive by other casinos. So, if you like a certain brand of water or soda or vegetable and you give us a little bit of time, it'll be here when you get here. That's never an issue with us and never was on The Strip either.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, it's pretty incredible. I mean if you look at me growing up going to Italy almost every summer since I was three or four, all the outdoor markets back in the 60s and in Italy, it was a very ... Everybody always shopped every day and now you're seeing that here. All the markets and the outdoor fruits and vegetables and the local growers. It's really great to see the evolution.

Bruce Howard: Yeah, like you said, you grew up part of the table. It just wasn't called that maybe back then. It was called the neighborhood market.

Tino Magnatta: That's it. Yeah, and most of the time actually, because a lot of our families were farmers, you'd just show up on the farm, and they'd just pick and-

Bruce Howard: Pick whatever's fresh.

Tino Magnatta: And get everything ... Yeah, everything there. It'd be cooked on the spot, and prepared on the spot, which is ... Those were and are still the best meals that I can remember, right on the relative's farm. So, should we take some calls?

Bruce Howard: Sure.

Tino Magnatta: Great. You know what? You've made me really hungry. So, I got to eat something and not just this.

Bruce Howard: Food's a big part. Food's a big part of life. No doubt about it.

Tino Magnatta: Oh, absolutely. Especially in our culture and in your culture too. Yeah, I mean I think the idea ... I think especially the millennials I've seen, they're the ones that'll go out and they'll spend \$20 on a cup of coffee. I mean they've really busted out in terms of their tastes.

Bruce Howard: Made food a big part of their lives and there's no doubt if it's as fresh as they think it should be, and it's what they're looking for then yeah, they're not necessarily the generation that pinches pennies. They like to make every night an event. They like to make every meal a feast and every meal a memorable occasion with everybody putting their food on social media and snapping pictures. We love that because we love impressions of what's good when it comes to a table, really good.

Tino Magnatta: This is Tino Magnatta, do you have a question for Bruce?

Oz: Yes, hi, good afternoon. So, [inaudible 00:45:00] can you hear me okay?

Tino Magnatta: Yes, we can. Not to worry my friend.

Oz: I'm very well, thank you. Good to be back and listening in and pleasure to hear you as well, Bruce. Yeah, your background is really interesting and fascinating, particularly the Caesar years and I'm based in Vegas right now and I kind of long to have been here back then and it just sounded amazing, like the golden era in a place such as Caesars Palace.

Bruce Howard: It was. It was amazing.

Oz: Yeah. Yeah, and I have to say, you're right, we do kind of ... We tend to eat with our eyes first. Today, I have to say it's been the exception. I've been eating with my ears and like Tino said, you've got me real hungry right now. So, [inaudible 00:45:46].

Bruce Howard: Well, food [inaudible 00:45:54].

Oz: Absolutely. All right, so here's what I've got for you. A question in two parts, it's similar, first part being from food and beverage, what would you say that the three most rewarding elements that have sort of shaped your career and then on the flip side, what would you say are the three biggest misconceptions that people outside of food and beverage have about the food and beverage industry?

Bruce Howard: Okay, the biggest misconceptions is that it's really complicated and it's really hard because I don't think it is, and the misperception that you have to be really, really well-read and well-versed and go to a lot of colleges and all that to learn about food and beverage is a misconception. The [inaudible 00:46:50] about what makes a successful food and beverage director, as I say in my career now and will say in my career forever is hire [inaudible 00:46:59]. Hire people, men and women, that share a passion in what it is you're trying to accomplish. More than the technical skills, we call it here at Valley View is we hire for the 80% which is the person. Their values and how they feel about hospitality and never to underestimate the technical skills, which are very important but here we really call that only 20% of the [inaudible 00:47:31]. So, the easiest thing that

made my career I think a pretty good one and well-versed is the idea that you hire people from the [inaudible 00:47:44] to make decisions. You coach them and mentor them the best you can on what it's about and it's all about repeat business. That's all the casino business is. It's not about anything else but what would you want to happen to you for you to go back to the establishment.

Our average guest comes here 24 times a year. A lot of it is food and beverage. Very few places I think that any of us go to 24 times a year unless it's for the service side. It might be your favorite nail shop or your favorite bank or your favorite hair cutter but it's always for a person. It's not necessarily for an inanimate object. We go to places because we like people. People have their salespeople at Macy's or they have their salespeople here but you're always going back to a place when you think about it for a person. Whenever you think about somebody in your past, you don't remember what they taught you about how to operate a computer. If anybody is asked, well, who's your favorite boss and you say Suzy or Joey or Terry Lanni or Dan Reichartz, it's because of something that they did to you that struck a nerve in their people skills. How they had patience, respect or an understanding that they wanted you to reach your full potential. So, anybody that I hire here, which are mostly the vice president and directors, I try to see something in them that lets me know that they're coming to coach and mentor their managers and supervisors.

All we're trying to do in this business is bring people to their full potential. That's all we're trying to do. So, without a doubt, the best part of my career has been the ability to hire good people, understand [inaudible 00:49:43] mentoring and understand the importance of what it takes to get repeat business back into your establishment. Without repeat business, there's no casino in the world that would survive more than a year. Any casino in the world, if they only get guests one time and they never come back, I don't care if you're Bellagio or Caesars or ... If you don't get them back, you will be closed in less than a year. That's-

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, that's the truth.

Bruce Howard: I appreciate the question. That was a good one.

Oz: Thank you and just [inaudible 00:50:20] because obviously you mentioned about mentoring as well, Bruce. From your point of view, what are the key points for you that are crucial as a mentor and also for the individual, whatever their level, if they're coming at perhaps an entry level or an executive SVP level that you identify something in them [inaudible 00:50:38]. So, from the mentor and then the individual that's being mentored, what would you say are the key attributes in your opinion?

Bruce Howard: One word that's universal, whether you're in the Las Vegas Strip or San Diego or Louisiana or Mississippi or Missouri is respect. You have to be able to respect everybody. Everybody has value. Everybody is important and I don't care what your [inaudible 00:51:09] is or socioeconomic or [inaudible 00:51:13] everybody knows if they're being respectful. [inaudible 00:51:18] on the mentor side, my

side, I really try hard to get people ... I really do feel that I have the easiest job in the building, even though it's the general managers job, I'm not parking a car and I'm not washing dishes and I'm not cleaning ashtrays and if I didn't show up tomorrow, the building would run fine. If we didn't have a kitchen crew and nobody to wash dishes, we'd be closed. So, the idea never to judge anybody by the amount of their paycheck or never to judge anybody by what particular job they have is really important in building a team. It's one of the reasons why I'm very proud that everywhere I've been has always had one of the lowest turnover rates in that market.

Today, at Valley View, we have the lowest turnover rate of the 60 California casinos because we showed enormous amount of respect and it's [inaudible 00:52:22]. It's not made up. People know whether you're sincere or not and they know whether you have a feeling of respect for them or not. As far as being mentored, I think it's just an open mind to understand nobody would be telling you anything unless they thought it was for your good. I'm not here to hurt anybody. If I don't mentor people in a way that I help them, it's not going to help me at all. It's not going to help our business. So, it's a mutual respect I would call it and it's a mutual understanding that you're going to get to your full potential if you just come on this journey with me a little bit and try something, and oftentimes I'll say to somebody I'm mentoring, just try it for 60 or 90 days so we've put in small time frame, small increments, try it. Come back in 60 days and tell me how it was. If it didn't work, we'll try something else. It's a trial and error.

Oz: [inaudible 00:53:26] that's fantastic.

Tino Magnatta: Great. Thanks so much, Oz, really appreciate it.

Oz: I really appreciate it. Thanks very much, Bruce.

Bruce Howard: Thank you, sir.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you. Bye-bye.

Oz: Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Okay, that's some good questions there.

Bruce Howard: Yes, he was very good.

Tino Magnatta: Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Bruce?

Brian: Hey, good evening. Can you hear me okay?

Tino Magnatta: Hello? Yes we can.

Bruce Howard: Yes, sir.

Brian: Hey, Brian Franz here, Rio Rancho. Bruce, very good to hear your conversation and just a little snapshot. Back in the early 90s, I worked for Howard Silver in the Flamingo Hilton days and he really kick started my career to where I am right now and I appreciate him and the [inaudible 00:54:05] and the [inaudible 00:54:05] and all of those game players back in the day but really glad to hear that you are all doing extremely well in the expansions and I'm really looking forward to place a visit to see your property. Now, my question kind of is borderline on the generations and the gap of generations within the gaming. Obviously, the suites boss are in the 50s on up in age and what are we doing in California since I'm not too familiar with the California market to capture the younger generations in gaming or is it all about the restaurants?

Bruce Howard: Great question. I think California is waiting for a little bit of some of the results out of Las Vegas and other markets as to what exactly will draw the millennials and the X generation to casinos. You are correct. Definitely starts with food and beverage but I know Las Vegas is doing these eSports game rooms and they're doing different types of socialized gaming and I'm not sure even the experts on the Las Vegas Strip have figured out what exactly tickles the fancy of the 20-30 year old group or even 30-40 year old groups other than the different night clubs and restaurants and things tied to food and beverage. So, your question is a really good one. I don't have the answer yet.

Our market is basically 35-75 here that just likes a really good gaming floor with an excellent chance or a better chance than anybody else to win and seven restaurants that offer a big diversity of food and beverage cuisines. What's going to replace slot machines and blackjack tables is an excellent question and I think even the folks way smarter than me haven't figured out yet. There seems to be a proclivity for 20-40 year old to slightly prefer the table games market from what we're seeing and what I know about Las Vegas but I don't know that that alone is going to be the answer to gaming 30-40 years from now. I don't have the answer for you. If I did, I'd be happy to tell you but other than food and beverage, I'm not sure what else is out there or coming out there and I know the biggest companies in the world from MGM to Caesars are trying to figure that out too, how to get what used to be called the gaming budget for those 40-70 year olds, what will the millennials spend that budget on other than food and beverage. I'm not sure that answer has been written yet.

Brian: Right, right. I understand very well and I think we'll always have that sweet spot in age regardless when millennials turn to the 40-50 years of age, always be that gaming entertainment desire. Thank you very much.

Bruce Howard: I believe you're [inaudible 00:57:07].

Tino Magnatta: Thank you and have a good night. This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Bruce?

Michael: Hey, good evening, Tino, it's Mike Savino from Resorts World.

Tino Magnatta: Hey, Michael, how are you?

Michael: Very good. Good evening, Bruce.

Tino Magnatta: Hello?

Bruce Howard: Hello?

Michael: Hello?

Tino Magnatta: Michael, we lost you. Are you there?

Michael: I can hear you. Can you hear me?

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, now we can. Go ahead.

Michael: Okay. So, Bruce, I was reading an article earlier today on American Builders Quarterly and there's an interview you gave back last July and you talked [inaudible 00:57:47] the first 30 seconds the guests experience. Can you expand upon that a little bit in how you work with your team to keep that top of mind for them?

Bruce Howard: I got most of it but I think you many have quoted me from the article in there and I just want to hear it again, so I make sure I got the right point.

Tino Magnatta: Go ahead, Michael. Say it again.

Michael: Yeah, it was in American Builders Quarterly, you were talking about the first 30 seconds, the [inaudible 00:58:09] of getting-

Bruce Howard: Oh, okay, sure.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Bruce Howard: Well, I read a little bit and actually studied a little bit of psychology in my younger days at the University of Florida before going into the finance world and the business school and what most experts say is within your first 30 seconds of anywhere you walk into, a home you're looking at, a business, a restaurant, a shopping mall, 90% of your impressions will be made of that business regardless of how long you stay after the 30 seconds in the first 30 seconds. So, your question, like we used to do at Caesars. It did not start when you walked into the building at Caesars, it started when you were on Las Vegas Boulevard and making sure those fountains were working and making sure the entrance was working and making sure all the lights on all the floors were lit because that first impression for us starts here on the main road that gets you

into Valley View Casino. So, we'll go out on the main road that's not even our property and make sure that looks good and make sure everything looks good and make sure our garage is always immaculate, our valet parkers are out front in the drive waiting to meet you, not coming to you after you park your car but being ahead of the game.

So, again, I did say that and I believe that 100% and we have changed a lot of the first impressions with this renovation and expansion and you will now turn the corner because you don't see us until you actually turn the corner and now the building looks like a building that I want to go to and I want to get to. So, again, whether it's the buffet, way before you eat the first bite at the buffet, you've made your decision about this buffet. As soon as you walk in, is the floor cleaned? How are the tables set? Same with a casino. If you look at a row of slot machines and all the chairs ... Half are pulled in, half are pulled out, half are turned away, there're ashtrays with cigarette butts in it, you're not going to play there. You're just not. It could be the game you've been waiting to play but your first impression, I don't want to be here. So, that first 30 seconds is something that we talk about all the time. It's something that I believe in. It's something that I think the experts will tell you is the truth. It's true even when you walk into your own home. How's the day going at my house, you'll figure it out as soon as you walk in the door.

So, again, we just talk about it a lot. We do keep it top of mind. I do appreciate that question. That American Builders Quarterly was a great experience, really nice people. They called about a year, year and a half ago and heard we were doing the expansion so I was fortunate enough to meet up with them. They came out here. We did a lot of video conferencing and that 30 second rule is a big one. It was in Caesars and it is everywhere I've been. You've got to feel good when you walk in a place. If there's nobody in it, that's another indication it's not really where I want to be, especially a restaurant. So, I think that's another trend. Those days of 400-500 seat restaurants are over. Most restaurants now are 100 to 150 seats because they need to look busy because nobody wants to be the first one in a restaurant and if you're in a slow restaurant, the logic says the food's not turning over. It may not be fresh.

So, again, when I was growing up, most restaurants were big, 300-400 seats. They would tell you it's much more efficient and all that but now you're better off building two restaurants at 150 seats each. It's a much better concept.

Michael: One of the things we struggle with, I think, sometimes is we can put a value on our gaming with coin in and we certainly can put a value on the F&B whether it be register receipts or covers. How do you measure the experience quotient if you will? That experience coming in the door?

Bruce Howard: By talking to your guests, I mean that's how we do it. We talk to everybody here. We send out a lot of surveys. We do a lot of emails. We do a lot of, again, what restaurant did the guest want here? We send them a questionnaire with 20 or 30, do you want barbecue? Do you want Asian? Do you want ... They

wanted burgers and beer. That's what they wanted. So, we built the best burgers and beer and I'm going to put our burger and beer place up against any you've ever been to. You will have a fantastic time. It looks out at the casino floor. People like to watch people. It also looks out on the backside to the front entrance of the casino, so it's all enclosed in glass.

People don't want to be cluttered. People don't want to be claustrophobic. So the whole idea of walking in a restaurant, tables aren't up against each other. They're not in our restaurants and it makes a difference but I mean, at the end of the day, the best indicator is do they come back? Of course, point in matters and covers matter but you're going to know before then. You just have your managers and the host people talking to the guests. We're going to know how we're doing way before we read the guest comments. Way before they stop coming. So, again, I think it's just all about knowing your guests, knowing their expectations and exceeding them. Meeting expectations is not enough. Everybody meets expectations. Everybody's pretty good.

If you don't exceed them ... That's what we've had in the first month. I knew you were building a nice restaurant, Bruce, I never thought it would be this good and the prices are extremely reasonable as you know, nobody makes money in food and beverage. Maybe on The Strip they do with their pricing but everything here was built as Caesars Palace was built in the early day. Make it all through the casino. Win, lose or draw, that's what we want. We don't want people that come here and pay a lot of money for the food. Our buffet at \$32 is every bit as good as that Bacchanal for \$90, I'll tell you that right now, and I know. I was in The Bacchanal before it was a buffet but I saw some of the prices, eh, and I'm happy. I'll always love Caesars Palace but they get \$90 I think on the weekend for their dinner, good for them.

Tino Magnatta: Wow, yeah.

Michael: Yeah, I appreciate all your candor, Bruce, thank you very much.

Bruce Howard: Thank you very much.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you so much, Michael. I appreciate it. Have a great night. Bruce, that was fantastic. Thanks so much for coming on and we're going to have you on again for sure. I mean that's-

Bruce Howard: I appreciate [inaudible 01:05:28]. I love talking as your guest. I hope to be-

Tino Magnatta: Thank you so much.

Bruce Howard: If you're ever in Southern California, stop on by. Valley View Casino and Hotel.

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

Bruce Howard: You too. Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you, bud. We'll see you later, buddy.

Bruce Howard: Bye.

Tino Magnatta: What a great guy. Great interview. He's something else. I'm looking forward to having him back on the show. Thursday, I have Kari Stout-Smith, and she's the GM of Cash Creek and she has a very interesting story, especially how she was able to get the job there. Remember everybody's got a story to tell, you just have to have time to listen. Have a good evening and stay cool. It's really hot all over the country. Take care of yourself. Goodbye.

END