



Conversations w/Tino

Guests	Sheila Morago
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Tino Magnatta: Hello and welcome to another episode of GT Radio. Tonight I have the most fantastic guest on the show. She's an amazing woman, lots of energy, lots of character, lots of wisdom. Welcome to the show, Sheila Morago. How are you?

Sheila Morago: Oh thanks. I'm doing great. How are you doing?

Tino Magnatta: Good. I hear you've got a few storms down in Oklahoma, right?

Sheila Morago: Yeah. We are in tornado season here. So we've got a few packets of flooding, some tornado watches going on. Always fun weather here in Oklahoma City and the state of Oklahoma.

Tino Magnatta: I heard they shut down River Spirit, right?

Sheila Morago: Yeah, they did this afternoon. The River Spirit, Margaritaville facility is right on the Arkansas River and they [inaudible 00:01:14] a bunch of flood waters. So they're expecting to be pretty flooded. So they closed down, evacuated it, and according to them they'll be closed for three to five days depending on how high the water gets and how long it takes for everything to get dried out.

Tino Magnatta: That's crazy.

Sheila Morago: Yeah, it is. But they got a good heads up and they took care of relocating all of their hotel guests and got people off the floor. It's all about staying safe and keeping people safe, so they did a really good job of making sure that happened.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah and that's part of living in Oklahoma, right? All the storms and tornadoes and everything. It's just part of it.

Sheila Morago: Oh yeah. A friend of mine told me when I first moved here that Oklahoma weather is proof that there's a schizophrenic God. If you don't like the weather it'll change.

Tino Magnatta: I like that. Schizophrenic God. I love that. You crack me up all the time.

Tell me a little bit about where you were born, your roots, what your parents did. Tell me a little bit about that.

Sheila Morago: Well I was born on the Gila River Indian Reservation, was raised there. I was the first of four children. My dad was born playing baseball, pitcher for the University of Arizona. And my dad [crosstalk 00:02:43] department store. Yeah, my dad just got this last year inducted in the University of Arizona Hall of Fame, sporting hall of fame. So that was really good.

Tino Magnatta: Wow he was a pitcher?

Sheila Morago: Yeah. He was.

Tino Magnatta: That's amazing.

Sheila Morago: He was awesome.

Tino Magnatta: Was he the first Native American person to be on the team and be a pitcher or something like that?

Sheila Morago: Well he was definitely the first Native American to get inducted into the Hall of Fame, but he was quite a catch back then for baseball. He went to the University of Arizona right out of a tiny little mining town called Ajo, Arizona where he went to high school and my mom did too. And then was drafted by the Boston Red Sox out of college.

Tino Magnatta: Really?

Sheila Morago: Yeah, he was a really good pitcher back in his time. Doesn't like to talk about it a lot but he was forced to.

Tino Magnatta: How long did he play for them?

Sheila Morago: He actually only made it to spring training and then he messed up his knees, so unfortunately he had-

Tino Magnatta: Oh he messed up his knee.

Sheila Morago: Yeah. Both of them actually.

Tino Magnatta: He had an injury. Wow.

Sheila Morago: So he literally had to hang up the pro baseball dream and went to work for the tribe. But stayed in it for a long time playing res ball.

Tino Magnatta: Wow that must have been a tough one.

Sheila Morago: Yeah, for him I'm sure it was. He was definitely a major athlete. And back then it was a pretty exciting time for him.

Tino Magnatta: And unheard of probably in Native Nations to have someone get so high in the sports world. You told me that he once told you-

Sheila Morago: Yeah especially coming from that little tiny town.

Tino Magnatta: The mining town, yeah. You told me he once told you "Don't let your education get in the way of your college."

Sheila Morago: Yeah. I think it was his ... Something I took way too much to heart. But he actually wanted to make sure that I experienced college life. Coming from the reservation it was straight from the reservation to university, he might have thought it was a little daunting for me. Which it was in the beginning. He wanted to make sure that I didn't become a wallflower and hide away and not experience all the stuff that was getting opened up to me. So it was really good advice, and I'm sure he thought that my personality, that I probably needed a little push every now and then.

Tino Magnatta: What was it like growing up on the res back then? This was before gaming, right?

Sheila Morago: Oh way before gaming. We hadn't even thought about that yet. Honestly it was very family oriented. But jobs were scarce, the access to healthcare was through the Indian clinic and you waited a long time. You went to school ... If you wanted to go to public school you went to school off the res, which meant good hour to two hour bus ride every day in the morning, if you went to school in Casa Grande. While it was not that far away, you had to stop every two blocks and pick people up. And we lived way in the boonies. It rained and we all had to go home early because the dirt roads wouldn't ... They were afraid the bus couldn't get through. It was an interesting time.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, very interesting. It's amazing how far we've gotten from there. What did you think you were going to do when you grew up? Did you have any indication that you would be in the hospitality business?

Sheila Morago: Oh god no. I was actually in pre-nursing for the first two years of college. My god mother and my aunt, my dad's sister, was a nurse and she actually was the CEO of the Gila River Hospital when she was alive. It was just sort of one of those things where they thought I was going to be a nurse because that's what you did back then. You were a nurse, you were a teacher. As a female you didn't do anything too crazy. So I was in nursing school for a couple of years.

Luckily for me, my aunt and another great aunt was also a nurse, and they took me aside one summer and they were like, buddy I'm sorry, you're not cut out to be a nurse.

Tino Magnatta: It's not for you.

Sheila Morago: You don't follow rules very well.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. I know you had a very interesting-

Sheila Morago: They talked me out of that one.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. I know you had a very interesting, kind of your first hospitality job. How did that happen? What happened? How did you fall into it in the beginning?

Sheila Morago: Well in the very beginning I was going to go to summer school. And I needed a job, a part time job. Back then you could work in bars at 18. So I applied for a cocktail waitress job in a bar that was close to campus. Then I got bit. I got bit by the bug. It was a lot of fun. It was a great bar. Not around anymore. But it was a very hopping college bar. I moved up in the ranks pretty darn quick. I was head cocktail waitress pretty fast, and then trained to be a bartender and I was working all the good shifts and making some pretty decent money in tips. Back then you lived on tips. You made nothing in salary. It was nice to come home with a few hundred bucks in your pocket.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. Back then that was quite a bit of cash. Still is now.

Sheila Morago: Oh yeah. I led a pretty nice life back then with just tip money. I got bit. I enjoyed myself. It was so much fun. And there becomes the part where you enjoy your college life and not your education part.

Tino Magnatta: Right, exactly. And what happened after that? You went on some other wild adventures and I know it's a very unique experience. What happened after that?

Sheila Morago: I did. I decided that college ... Of course making a lot of money, so I decided college was a little bit too financially restrictive for me, so I continued working. Got to work at some pretty fun bars and restaurants during that time in Tucson. And a friend of mine asked me if I wanted to work for one bar and I said sure. I didn't realize it was a chain. And within about a year, they hired me as an assistant manager. The big boss flew in from California. It was a very large company that owned bars and restaurants all through California, Colorado and Arizona. They made me a GM and I got to move to Los Angeles, and was there on and off for about five years. And got to manage some really fun places.

Tino Magnatta: Let me ask you something. We talked about this before, and we've always talked about with the women that have been on the show, about the adversity because of gender. And for some reason you have sidestepped that. Can you tell me a little bit about what is it about you that you've never had that kind of issue?

Sheila Morago: Well a lot of it I think is one, I don't really ever back away from a challenge. That's probably good and bad. But the second part is I was lucky, very lucky, in the fact that that company didn't see gender as a problem. If you could do the work, you got the job. There were very few females that worked in that company as GMs at the time, but the ones that did were every bit as capable as men were. We got some really good placements in some very fun areas. I was lucky enough to hold the GM position over at the Malibu Inn, which if you've ever been to Malibu it's a wonderful place. Back then it was a hopping bar scene. I was very lucky. Thank god that the owner of that company didn't see gender as a stumbling block.

Tino Magnatta: Right. But in the course of you working in that time period, did you ever have any instances where ... Because back then women working in companies that were male heavy, so to speak, that was an issue all around the country. But for some reason you've never really seen it that way, right?

Sheila Morago: No.

Tino Magnatta: Is it you character? What is it about-

Sheila Morago: It could've been just the fact that we were in California and everybody was free and easy, and nobody really looked at it that way. I was always encouraged to do my best and as long as I could do the job, nobody had any issues with that. Occasionally there was, customers more than anything else that had an issue with that and wanted to speak to the man in the house, in the bar. Which I would always send the biggest male that I had, my doorman, to go see them. I was maybe just in the right place at the right time, but I never had to worry about that when I was working in that industry.

Tino Magnatta: And you really haven't encountered that through the other courses of your job and all that. You attribute that to your character?

Sheila Morago: Maybe. Maybe that's part of it. But again, I've always had bosses that recognized the fact that you could do the job. It's never been an option that you're a female so you can only do this. Getting into gaming, we had a lot of great female leaders at the time. And so that was never a question I don't think, at the time. And I went up against a lot of men in some of my job interviews. So that's just been a great part of what I get to do.

Tino Magnatta: What makes you good at these jobs that are people orientated? It seems like your character is really good with people, and I think in life that's the secret. But what else is it?

Sheila Morago: Being good at people, I've got great on the job training with working in the bars and restaurants and having a very large family, that also helps. But being able to adapt and work amongst all different kinds of people. Maybe being a female actually helps in the fact that I am able to move around issues where I don't take it personally, as some people might. I'm able to talk with multiple tribal leaders, casino operators, industry folks, and able to work through their problems without having incidences or bad feelings about it. So maybe it is because I'm female, and maybe it's just because I'm blessed with the fact that I can sit down and listen and work out problems.

Tino Magnatta: You also said to me, no fear. You can't be afraid. Remember? You said that.

Sheila Morago: Yeah. Well, I think, and like I told you, fear to me is a temporary emotion. And that's just to me. Do I get scared? Absolutely. But I know that this too shall pass. And if I fall down and scrape my knee or am not as successful as I would like to

be in a certain situation, then you take with you what you learned in that and move on. You fall down more often than you want to admit, but you also have some really good successes. And you take those successes and you ride them as far as you can, and take the failures ... Sometimes I think we're harder on ourselves than we should be, calling things absolute failures when it's probably just one or two little things that didn't go perfect. But you learn from it, and you apply it to the next time.

So fear to me has never been crippling, I guess. I take it on as a little bit of a challenge every time. And that could be a good or a bad thing depending on how you look at it.

Tino Magnatta: It's something that you were saying that you just get up, pick yourself up, and keep moving forward, right?

Sheila Morago: Absolutely. The bad part is if you took that and just didn't get up. There's so many lessons we learn when we overcome those fears and learn from our mistakes. And we can take them and just make ourselves more successful and better at what it is we do. Everything is a lesson.

Tino Magnatta: Everything. Now after the GM job, you went back to Tucson right? And that's where you fell in, you had the opportunity for your gaming job. Explain a little bit about how that happened, and how you fell into marketing.

Sheila Morago: Well a friend of mine opened a bar and she asked me if I'd come and help them get it up and running. And I said I'm done with bars in the next year. But yeah, I can do that. And it just so happened that Gila River decided to go into gaming as I was leaving that job, and my family, my dad specifically and my uncle, said I think you should apply for a job here. Actually, it wasn't "I think you should apply for a job", it was more like "You're coming home. It's time."

And luckily for me they were just hiring their management staff and their employees for their first little casino. And they thought I'd be, since I was in the F&B industry, that the food and beverage department would be a good place for me to start. But fortunately, or unfortunately, they already had somebody picked out for that job. Another community member. She did a great job at it. And I went in for an interview, and the GM at the time said, "Well you had to do a little bit of marketing when you were in these prior jobs." And I said, yeah. And he goes, "Well would you like to be the marketing director?" And the rest is history.

Tino Magnatta: Wow.

Sheila Morago: I hadn't been a marketing director before, and I did the whole, yeah, sure I can do that! And jumped into the deep end of the pool with no floaties. But it was a great learning experience, and it was the best decision I've ever made in my

whole entire life. And I've got to thank my community for being so supportive of letting me do that at the time.

Tino Magnatta: You're really amazing. The analogy you just spoke where you said I jumped into the deep end with no floaties. That's been a constant in your life, and you really do have no fear. And you go in and you confront. We've had a few conversations about this. But, not all women are as confident as you are. For the women that are listening out there that might feel timid and afraid of taking up these kind of challenges that you did, how do you change that? Because you have a character that has no fear and you're willing to jump into the deep end with no floaties, but a lot of women don't have that. Can you give them some advice?

Sheila Morago: Surround yourself with supportive women friends. Like I said, it's not that I don't have any fear. I do. I'm lucky enough to be surrounded by some very, very good friends. If I get a little bit going back into my shell, they're like "Come on, none of that, let's go! You can do this, come on!" It's about having friends and mentors and people you look up to that can show you the way. I believe every woman has it in her to be whatever they want to be. There's a lot of examples out there. Find a mentor, have at least one supportive friend that tells you "Come on, you can do this! Don't be afraid. Go for it." Because for every single time that you go for it, it's taking one little small bite out of the apple. And pretty soon you've got everything that you've ever wanted.

And I truly believe that every woman is capable of doing that. It doesn't mean they have to be a CEO, it doesn't mean they have to be top of their field. Being a great mom is something that is, that would make me crawl into a shell, I'm fearful of that. It just depends on what your situation is and where you want to go. But I believe every woman can go and be the best that she can in whatever field it is that she wants to be in.

Tino Magnatta: You said to me, it's not how many times you fall down, it's how many times you get back up.

Sheila Morago: Absolutely. Without question. And that goes for anything that you want to do. And that's for females and males. And there's always going to be those people who count how many times you fall, but surround yourself with the people who count how many times you get up.

Tino Magnatta: And you also say that the women they have the talent, they just don't believe in themselves enough.

Sheila Morago: Well sometimes. We're unfortunately in a business, the gaming industry, that is very much male-dominated. Not so much, luckily, in the Indian gaming portion of it. A lot of our tribes come from matriarchal societies, so they're used to having women tribal leaders, women councilwomen, and women in higher titles in the Indian gaming industry. More than it is in the commercial.

I think that we are naturally born leaders. We're leaders of families, we are leaders of communities, and we're leaders of government. Those are the women that you look up to.

Tino Magnatta: Last question on this subject. What is your advice for young women coming up in the business?

Sheila Morago: Take whatever opportunity is available to you and hold on to it with both hands and make the best of it and shine. There's so many opportunities out there for everyone, especially for women. As long as you have the gumption and the fortitude, you can do whatever you want. When given the opportunity, take it. And if you fail, then you know what? Nobody can fault you for it. But you've learned a lesson and then the next time a different opportunity comes in you know what it is you're going to do. That is my biggest thing. When you get those opportunities, take them. Like I like to say, jump into the deep end of the pool. The water is fine.

Tino Magnatta: You got a great job after Gila River, you were asked to joined NIGA. And you worked with Rick Hill and Sharon Stevens, two juggernauts in the Native gaming industry. Tell us a little bit about what that was like for you and how it rounded off your career in a way.

Sheila Morago: Oh my gosh, it was the opportunity of a lifetime. I have to thank my old boss [Jay Coin 00:25:12] for giving me that call and asking me to come in and join the NIGA staff. I was lucky enough to be in D.C. working for NIGA during Rick Hill's final couple of years and Chairman Stevens' first year. Being able to work for two very, very capable leaders and literally hitting the ground running. Being able to work with all the tribes as they were opening casinos, starting initiatives for gaming, just being on the ground being able to watch how people work in the legislative arena and how the tribal leaders would come in and advocate for their sovereign rights. Gosh, I could go on and on. It was such an eye opening and wonderful experience that I can never repay in terms of being able to do that. It opened my eyes to a lot of things.

Tino Magnatta: They're pretty amazing people.

Sheila Morago: Oh yeah. And people you get to learn from and just be around. Just watching them work is something to behold.

Tino Magnatta: After that you took on the job at OIGA where you are now. What was that like? Why did you take that opportunity after NIGA?

Sheila Morago: Well after NIGA I went back to Arizona for a little bit. I worked on their first initiative that expanded their gaming compacts-

Tino Magnatta: Oh yeah, that's rights. The AIGA.

Sheila Morago: Got to work for AIGA. Yeah, for eight years. And when OIGA was, I was talking to them, when are you going to be able to become the first ED that an association has ever had? So when they offered me the job, I jumped at it. It was one opportunity that I could move some place that I've never been to. And again, starting new experience, work with all the amazing tribes here in Oklahoma, and when are you going to ever be able to work in the third largest revenue generator in the country? So really it was a lot of ... They said we need an executive director now. It was eight years ago and I was like, great! I'm moving to Oklahoma. Tornadoes and all.

Tino Magnatta: Tell us a little bit about OIGA-

Sheila Morago: As a matter of fact it was ... What's that? A little bit about OIGA? Well, it is-

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, tell us what you've got going on there. You're a bullet. So tell us what you've got going on there.

Sheila Morago: Well, we are 26 years of trade shows here in Oklahoma. If you think about it in Oklahoma, I was working at NIGA when their first trade shows were happening, and they were in a little tiny hotel, resort area that one of the tribes owned called Arrowhead. And their booth spaces were a foldout table that you got to put some brochures on. And it was a chance for them to do some educational training and that's what it was. And it grew and it grew and it was over at [inaudible 00:28:45] Bingo Hall for awhile. And now we can only put it into the big convention centers in Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

Representing the 31 some odd tribes here that have gaming and the 143 operations we have here in Oklahoma, this trade show has become the biggest little show in Indian gaming. It is large, it's a lot of fun. OIGA does give credit to the tribes who have done this forever. They've grown this from a little tiny seedling to a very large and important show in the gaming industry.

Tino Magnatta: I've done all the conferences, and what I love about your conference is it's so affordable but you have a big impact. There's so many people there. And you still have some opportunities in terms of space, right? If people want to call you and is there still some opportunities?

Sheila Morago: Yeah. We have about 20 some off 10 by 10s available. We have one 20 by 20. Literally that's all I have left right now and the show is in July, so I'm pretty excited about that.

We have some sponsorship opportunities and we are wide open when it comes to registration. For any member of a tribe and any employee of a tribal casino, no matter if it's Oklahoma or not, anywhere in the country. It's \$250 for registration and that gets you everything-

Tino Magnatta: That's amazing. Usually it's-

Sheila Morago: And we want to keep it at that price point-

Tino Magnatta: Over a thousand. Yeah, that's amazing. It's just incredible. You've done such a great job. One of the things that is always talked about, especially now because of the proliferation of gaming, especially in Oklahoma, have we gone too far? Is there too many casinos now? Is there enough for everybody? 143 casinos seems like a lot for one state.

Sheila Morago: It sounds like it, but you have to understand Oklahoma is a big state, number one, and we have size ranges that go from WinStar, which has the largest floor in the world at this point, to a [C Store 00:31:04] and a travel stop that has 15, 20 machines and everything in between. You count a casino if it's a travel stop, which we have a lot of those. We have some areas that people would probably argue are a little oversaturated in terms of the number of casinos per population. But we have a lot of areas in rural Oklahoma that gaming is the largest employer in that county. And without that, that town would be gone. The amount of jobs that it offers allows the small little rural towns to flourish.

So while it may sound like a lot of facilities, they are self-sustaining, they are doing well, and knock on wood Oklahoma has been one state that has never taken a dip in growth since they've started. And knock on wood that we're not going to see that anytime soon.

Tino Magnatta: You said that the growth is self-controlling. What do you mean by that?

Sheila Morago: Yeah. Well, Oklahoma is really lucky in the fact that there are no limits to the amount of facilities a tribe can open, the size of the facility they can open. So tribes are very cognizant of where they are putting their facilities and how big they are. They do it as a business decision, not as just a build it and they will come model. They look at the availability of population in market. And if it's more of a [C Store 00:32:48] that that area requires, then that's what they're going to open. They are very good at making sure that they are not oversaturating certain parts of the market, that they are putting facilities that are the right size and the right mix into the areas that they are looking at. So nothing is done haphazardly. Everything is done as a pure business decision.

Tino Magnatta: It's structured.

Sheila Morago: It is very structured. You don't want to put in a facility just because you can. You've got to make sure it makes sense.

Tino Magnatta: Sure, that's important. Otherwise it's going to be chaos.

Sheila, what is your message to Native Nations in the future moving forward?

Sheila Morago: Continue to grow. Continue to look at other economic opportunities. I'm in gaming but I do realize that this is not the [inaudible 00:33:42] of what we all

need. We have to look at diversifying. We have to become stronger. We have to become very strong, sovereign nations. And to do that we need to spread our eggs in a lot of different baskets. And I'm hoping that gaming is that spark that keeps everything moving in the right direction.

We don't look like we did 30 years ago, and in 30 years ago we're not going to look like this. It's constantly changing, and the more diversification that we can have the more opportunity that will give us for our youth to come home and work and contribute to our governments and our society. That is the goal.

Tino Magnatta: How do you balance work and life?

Sheila Morago: Not well. I am seriously not very good at that. That is one discipline I have not learned at all. But I am super, super lucky in the fact that I love my job. It is very rare in anybody's life that your heart and your head can work in the same direction and in the same place. And so for me, work is fun and I like it a lot. That makes it not feel as depressing that I have to go to work everyday because I love my job. To me, work is fun, work isn't work. It's something that I enjoy doing. So that could be the problem of why I don't balance very well.

Tino Magnatta: Well you told me that you have friends that make sure that you stop.

Sheila Morago: Oh yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Once in awhile. Right?

Sheila Morago: I do. In the most annoying ways, someone texts me or my phone goes off and I see an email and we're in the middle of watching a movie here at my place, it's literally the hands come out like, "Hand it over. Nope. We're watching a movie, would you please just hand over the phone?" So yeah, they will take it away from me periodically.

Tino Magnatta: I can relate.

Sheila Morago: And force me to take a break from it, which I totally appreciate. At the time I might get a little snippy about it, but I totally appreciate it.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, you need to turn off sometimes. But I'm sure they can't hold you back from jumping into the deep end without the floaties. That is something I think you're just born with that. I know from talking to you a few times. You're the no floaty girl.

Sheila Morago: And sometimes you have the friends that encourage you to do that. [crosstalk 00:36:43]

Tino Magnatta: Oh man, that's so funny. Should we take some calls? We've got a whole bunch of callers here that are just chomping at the bit here-

Sheila Morago: Get out of town.

Tino Magnatta: Get out of town. Yeah, exactly. Let me patch in someone here. Hang on a sec.

Sheila Morago: Okay.

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

Mike: Hey, good evening Tino. How are you?

Tino Magnatta: Good evening, how are you?

Mike: Good. It's Mike from New York.

Tino Magnatta: Hey, Mike. How are you? Good to hear you. Mike was recently on our show also. And great guy.

Mike: Sheila, pleasure to talk to you. I have a question about Indian gaming. I heard you allude to the fact that you see a little bit of a difference at the top of the management spectrum where women are perhaps a little bit more welcome in leadership roles, which is a really interesting concept. I'm wondering from a business standpoint, operational standpoint, if there are other differences between a commercial casino and tribal.

Sheila Morago: Well, yeah. Hi, Mike. How are you?

Mike: Good, good.

Sheila Morago: Well from an operational standpoint, casinos from commercial to tribal gaming work exactly the same way. Any operations person will tell you that the rules are the rules and everybody has to abide by them. I think where we split off is what it means to be a tribal casino. It's the word "tribal". Everybody in that facility is looking at and appreciating what tribal facilities do, and that means making sure that our governments and our communities have the money to do what we need to do. Taking care of our elders, educating our youth, making sure that we have running water and electricity and housing and healthcare.

And so while I don't mean to be mean, commercial facilities are there to make money for their shareholders. We are making money for the betterment of our community and I think every single employee knows that responsibility and takes it to heart.

Mike: So there's almost a philanthropic arm to your operation.

Sheila Morago: If you want to put it that way, but our operations are 100% taxed by government. And all that money goes into the improvement of our

governments and our community. It is more of a mantra and a joy for us to do what we do for the betterment of our people.

Mike: Do you see the pressures of, Tino alluded to competition, do you see the pressures of outside business forces impacting that overall mission?

Sheila Morago: No. I actually see them in the opposite direction. Tribal gaming is now 51% of the total gaming market in the United States. We have 28 states where exclusivity is the key to how we work. And so you now see a lot of our tribal facilities going out and managing commercial ventures. I don't see that as a downside at all. I see it as opportunity for us.

Mike: Interesting. Well thank you. I'm enjoying the listen. I was tuning in on the way home. And my evening is finally stopped, unless I got a phone call like you will. But I'm enjoying the listen.

Sheila Morago: Thanks, Mike.

Mike: Have a good rest of-

Tino Magnatta: Thanks, Mike. Appreciate it. You have a good night.

Mike: Bye bye.

Sheila Morago: Have a good night.

Tino Magnatta: Okay, bye bye.

Yeah, he's great. He's up in New York so he's-

Sheila Morago: The accent is awesome.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, exactly. Hang on one sec. All right, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Sheila?

Nick: Evening Sheila, evening Tino. This is Nick [Vossing 00:41:07]. How are you guys?

Tino Magnatta: Hey, Nick. How are you?

Nick: Great, great. I actually great up probably 70 miles from the Oklahoma border. And I'll tell you, when I was in my 20s they started putting in small Indian casinos along the border of Oklahoma and the border of Texas in Oklahoma City where you're at. I've watched them grow into nice facilities and now really nice facilities.

I was wondering, do you know what the plan is, and how do you see Oklahoma gaming going in the near future and the long term?

Sheila Morago: Well, we're working now on expanding some of the facilities along the Texas border. I know Durant just announced an expansion and they broke ground last month on it. So that should be getting bigger and better. And that is a beautiful facility if you've never been there. I see a lot of the casinos maturing more in the amenities department. So you'll probably see a lot of them, especially along the borders, doing more hotels, more entertainment venues, more restaurants and possibly more pure entertainment facilities with movie theaters and bowling alleys and laser tag facilities and game rooms. Those areas are lacking in some of those entertainment options. And a lot of the tribes have stepped in to grow that portion of the market. So while we may not be opening up floors and getting bigger floors, the amenities portion of it is definitely on the upswing here.

Nick: Great. Have you become an OU fan or are you still loyal to Arizona?

Sheila Morago: I am still an Arizona Wildcat. [crosstalk 00:43:09] is not good, and I am not ... Basketball was disappointing this year. Women's softball was doing awesome. But I did not want to get into this OU versus OSU rivalry. I have enough rivalry in my family between ASU and U of A.

Nick: I'm not sure you can avoid it. I've been to the Durant property and I definitely see the expansion you've got, the whole space. I didn't know it was the third largest gaming for tribal in the United States. That's impressive.

Sheila Morago: It's actually the second largest in the United States for tribal. It's the third overall behind Nevada, California and then Oklahoma.

Nick: Oh wow. That's phenomenal. Absolutely phenomenal. For the North Dallas metropolitan area, Durant is a great attraction for sure.

Sheila Morago: Yeah, that area, the Northern part of Dallas, Fort Worth, is just growing like crazy. I drove to Plano awhile back and I was just shocked at what Plano looks like now compared to when I was in high school and went through there.

Tino Magnatta: Pretty incredible.

Nick: It's unbelievable. Do you see that area, right there at the border of Texas, becoming a mini Vegas? Or do you see it step laddering into just growth?

Sheila Morago: You've got two really large casinos there with Durant opening up their expansion. You're going to have probably the one and two biggest facilities here in Oklahoma right there on that border. So I don't see really any more coming in on that part, but you'll see probably some expansion on the Arkansas border and Missouri.

Nick: Great. Thanks guys. Have a good evening.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks so much.

Sheila Morago: You too.

Tino Magnatta: Take care, Nick. Have a good night. Great questions. All right, here we go.

Hello, do you have a question for Sheila?

Jess: Hey, Sheila, Tino. Really appreciate you having me on the show today. This is Jess calling from Las Vegas.

Tino Magnatta: Cool. How are you?

Jess: I'm great. Thank you. Sheila, you talked about your time at Gila River and starting out there, just jumping in there are a director of marketing having never done it before. I'm curious what your process was. I assume you had a lot of building up from scratch and I'm curious what did you necessarily pull from peers in the industry, or from other properties? Where did you go to get that information to learn about how to build something from scratch?

Sheila Morago: Everywhere I possibly could. I did have a lot of people around me at the time, some consultants that worked with us in the Phoenix market. I was able to actually grow that marketing department into its own buying portion so we never had a buyer for our media. And luckily enough was able to actually get the tagline, "Go to the Gila River Casino" back in the old days. It was one of the first things we did.

So I watched everything, I learned very quickly. And like I said we borrowed every great idea that I saw. What worked, worked. What didn't work, didn't work. Three years later we had opened up three new facilities. It worked. It worked and we learned a lot from Vegas too, trust me.

Jess: Awesome. One more question. Everybody in the country is talking about sports betting this and sports betting that. First, when do you see sports betting being, the windows actually opening up in Oklahoma? And then I think everybody is asking, what are your major concerns, what do you see the biggest challenge being? But I'm curious, what are you looking forward to if sports betting, and when sports betting, becomes legal in Oklahoma?

Sheila Morago: I don't see it happening for at least another two years. The legislative session is closing in the next couple of weeks here in Oklahoma. There are no gaming bills on the table at this point. I know that the tribes in the state have been working extremely well together to have such a successful market. So they have to get through compacts. We're very lucky in the fact that we have an evergreen clause here, which means if we can't agree then the current compact moves on for another 15 years. So it is going to be totally up to the tribal leaders and the

state administration as to how they want proceed on that. But I don't see it at least for another couple of years moving.

Jess: Okay. And two years from now, what would you most be looking forward to when the first window opens in sports betting?

Sheila Morago: Betting on my Arizona Wildcats!

Jess: There you go. They've got some time to get back up there. In terms of basketball they've got some time to get back up there.

Sheila Morago: I'll be waiting for basketball season to rebuild in those two years so they have a good shot at it.

Jess: Perfect amount of time. All right, thank you. Have a great night.

Sheila Morago: Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you so much.

Sheila Morago: You too.

Tino Magnatta: Have a great night. Bye. Yeah, sports is a big thing. You guys have got the rivalries going on.

Sheila Morago: Oh yeah.

Tino Magnatta: It gets gnarly.

Sheila Morago: Yeah. In my family the ASU, U of A football game, them's fighting words in our family. Half of us went to U of A, half of us went to ASU.

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

Rogelio: Yes, I do. Hello, Sheila and Tino. It's Rogelio up in North Dakota.

Tino Magnatta: How are you Rogelio?

Sheila Morago: How are you?

Rogelio: Good.

Tino Magnatta: You're originally from Arizona, so what sports team do you follow?

Rogelio: I was actually born, she's going to know exactly where this is at, it's funny, I was born and raised in Sierra Vista close to Bisbee. Which is about ... What is that, Sheila? Sixty miles south of Tucson?

Sheila Morago: Sixty miles south of Tucson, yes. I know exactly where that is.

Tino Magnatta: Wow.

Rogelio: My family is all from Tucson. I went to school in Tucson as well, so Bear Down.

Sheila Morago: Bear Down, buddy.

Rogelio: That's my team.

Tino Magnatta: Bear Down.

Rogelio: That's funny. Sheila, you had an amazing story. I love the history and everything that you spoke about and what you went through. And congratulate you and wish you the best of luck on everything you do moving forward.

Sheila Morago: Thank you.

Rogelio: I'm curious, is there any personal goals that you would like to still accomplish or you foresee in the future that you want to tackle or complete or anything like that? Any big projects that you left out?

Sheila Morago: I don't know. Tino and I were talking about it. I'm getting up there, buddy.

Rogelio: Oh no.

Sheila Morago: Maybe going home and retiring well would be my next option. But honestly as long as I love what I'm doing, and as long as the [inaudible 00:51:20] in me to continue doing my job, I want to continue doing it for as long as I possibly can. There are really no new associations that are opening up that need a new ED and I honestly think that I should leave that for the younger folk.

But honestly, maybe getting much better at the balancing of work and personal time. That's my new goal.

Rogelio: Definitely. Start to travel or something.

Tino Magnatta: The life balance.

Sheila Morago: Well you know I need to start traveling for pleasure and not for work.

Tino Magnatta: Life balance.

Sheila Morago: That's it. That'll be my new goal. Thanks for pointing it out to me.

Tino Magnatta: That'll be your new goal. Rogelio, do you have another question?

Rogelio: Nope. That's it.

Tino Magnatta: Okay great. Thanks for calling in. Really appreciate it. You have a great evening.

Sheila Morago: Thank you.

Rogelio: You too.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks so much.

Rogelio: Okay bye bye.

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

Speaker 7: Hi, good evening Tino. This is [inaudible 00:52:33] over in Miami. How are you guys doing tonight?

Tino Magnatta: Good. How about you?

Speaker 7: Doing well. Sheila, first of all thank you so much for spending some time with us today and sharing your stories and insight. It's always a great pleasure to be able to learn from people much smarter than myself.

Sheila Morago: Well thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks a lot, [Derek 00:52:52].

Speaker 7: No worries. Thank you. I have a question for you. Do you feel as though that there are any challenges which are unique to Oklahoma versus other areas of the country in regards to gaming?

Sheila Morago: Probably the fact that that there's 39 tribes here in the state of Oklahoma. The challenges are just that of having a lot of different tribes and a lot of different cultures. I don't mean the challenges as a bad thing. We've got a lot of culture and a lot of very strong tribes here. But that leaves the door wide open for ... Right now we have 31 tribes that have a gaming compact that leaves a few more that are out there still that could still get into the market. I don't see that as a challenge as much as an opportunity. But we just had an election, this administration and this governor seems to be working very well with the tribes and I give a lot of credit to the tribes and the administration for getting a good working relationship going right off the bat. It'll be interesting to see how we progress in the market at this point.

Speaker 7: Sounds good. Let me ask you, what are some of the biggest changes you would say you've seen during your career in the industry overall?

Sheila Morago: The growth. If you think about in my time watching us, and I mean us as tribal gaming, go from just getting into the market, having management contracts with stations, with Harrah's, with gaming companies that were handling our management at the time. And growing so quickly and learning so fast. To becoming leaders in this industry, not just in the tribal gaming industry, but the commercial as well. And now having very few facilities that have management contracts.

Think about we've grown so quickly in the 30 plus years that we've gone through this growth. We surpassed Vegas that started gaming way before we did. The most important and the most amazing thing is the speed and the size of which we've grown. Just so fast. Kind of unheard of.

Speaker 7: Fascinating. Last question. Are there days that you kind of miss working at one specific gaming location as opposed to being the director, especially with seeing how things are growing?

Sheila Morago: Yeah. I actually do miss working in operations. I haven't done it in a really long time, but yeah I do. That camaraderie of having friends and work colleagues in one facility. I definitely miss that. The sort of day by day, 8 to 5 or 8 to 12 depending on what you were doing that day, of working, yeah I miss that a lot. But you know what, this is so eye opening and I get to do so many different things. No day is ever alike, and that is a good thing. So while I might miss my very tidy office and my assistant and things like that, this is good too.

Speaker 7: Okay. Well thank you so much for sharing your fascinating story and your good insights.

Sheila Morago: Thank you so much. You have a good night.

Speaker 7: Thanks.

Tino Magnatta: Have a good night. Thanks for calling in. Great questions.

Sheila Morago: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: But I'm suspicious about you taking it easy. I don't think that's going to happen. Because I know ... Someone asked me today, "So when are you going to retire?" I said flat out, I am never retiring. I can go to the beach for a week and then I get restless. Some people can just lay on the beach forever. Me it's like, okay, this is kind of getting boring here. You know? You're the same way, right?

Sheila Morago: That would drive me absolutely bonkers-

Tino Magnatta: Bonkers.

Sheila Morago: In fact, a friend of mind said "I give you about seven or eight days before you start volunteering to do just about anything to get your butt out of the house."

Tino Magnatta: It's amazing, isn't it? I don't know what it is, but it's just the character with us. People go, "Well don't you golf?" I go, well no. I've got to be doing something. Is golfing doing something? They're like, "Yeah! You're golfing!"

Sheila Morago: Golfing is frustrating. [crosstalk 00:57:57]

Tino Magnatta: I don't see it that way. Yeah, golfing is frustrating. Yeah. It doesn't work for me. Oh man.

Sheila Morago: Other than the fact that I'm really lousy at it, it doesn't work for me either.

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

Cal: Yeah, Sheila. This is Cal Houston. How are you?

Sheila Morago: Cal! Buddy! What's shaking?

Cal: Well, I thought that this would be a lot of fun to call in and say hello. I've got a question for you because our company works all across the country, and Oklahoma is such a busy, thriving gaming market. The executives seem to stay in place longer. What do you think the success of Oklahoma gaming has to do with in a comparison to Washington or California for instance? What do you think is the difference?

Sheila Morago: We are blessed with borders that have states with no gaming. Or very little gaming.

Cal: Well that helps. That's true.

Tino Magnatta: Especially Texas.

Sheila Morago: But you put your finger right on the head. We have a lot of stability here. The folks that are in this market have been here for a long time. They know their market like the back of their hand. And the fact that there are so many facilities here. They've gotten really good at promotions and entertainment options and marketing. That little bit of competition has done well for them. They really do ratchet it up and take it up a notch and I think that that has a lot to do with it.

Cal: It's really impressive. I first ventured into Oklahoma back with the Thunderbird when Mickey, I can't remember his last name now, but that was back before Class III got in place. It was kind of a good 'ol boys network, and boy it was hard to crack. But once you got inside, and got accepted by everybody, it's a tight, tight network and it's very, very user friendly really.

Sheila Morago: Yeah. And it still is. Think about it, we've only been into Class III gaming for what, since 2004? 2003?

Cal: Something like that.

Sheila Morago: Yeah. We're still brand new babies when it comes to Class III markets, so this was all built on Class II. And you're right, they are very tight here. Once you're in, you're in. So Cal I hate to say it, but you're going to be around for a very long time here.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah.

Cal: Well you look at the, and I don't mean to be throwing out a bunch of stuff here, but I mean you look at markets like New Mexico, Northern California and even in Washington where the turnover is so great and marketing directors are in and out. They never really establish a program. And Oklahoma, most of these people are sticking around and you're getting cohesive programs that are building strength and consistency. And it leads to a greater success.

Sheila Morago: Yeah. And then Cal, this is the market for that. Maybe a lot of it has to do with these guys hire from within. These guys, the operations here, their management is core either their tribal members or tribal members from surrounding tribes. There are very few people out here that are in management that aren't from Oklahoma. And I think that has a lot to do with it.

Cal: What I'll say, these people, these tribal entities that go outside and look for some educated guy that's got a degree in whatever that's never even been in the community and doesn't understand the community, and they pay him big money and then they can't figure out why it doesn't work.

Sheila Morago: Yeah. And that was one of the things I've always said, especially when I was in Arizona, is that a GM and any executive management person coming into a tribal facility not only needs to know the business side of the casino business, but they have to buy in hook, line and sinker to the goals of the tribe. They have to truly believe in it. And if you don't you can only go so far before your ideas and the tribe's ideas start to go sideways.

Cal: That's for sure.

Sheila Morago: That's why it is really important, especially when you're going out for executive management, that they really do believe in the goals of the tribe. Not just the goals of the casino business, but the goals of the tribe. Because both of those go hand in hand.

Tino Magnatta: Yep.

Cal: It's always good when they're on the same page. The goals of the tribe and the goals of the ...

Sheila Morago: Sometimes they are [crosstalk 01:03:32]-

Cal: I'm not going to take up any more of your ... Go ahead.

Sheila Morago: I was going to say, it's good if they're doing off the same page, but sometimes you've got to go with they're at least just singing out of the same song book.

Cal: At least. Well I just wanted to poke my head in. Are you coming out to Washington Gaming?

Sheila Morago: Yep. I'll be there. I'll see you there.

Cal: You definitely will. Thank you much. And Sheila, it's always great to talk to you. You're one of the true gems in this business.

Sheila Morago: Aww thanks Cal. Love you.

Cal: Love you guys.

Tino Magnatta: Have a good night. Thank you for calling in. Okay I think we have time for one more. Great questions.

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

Speaker 9: Hi, Tino. Hi, Sheila. Man I love everything you guys have been saying. Some great stuff here. Sheila, I have a question for you. You have so much energy, it's infectious. Right over the phone I can feel it. How do you keep that going?

Sheila Morago: Good genes, my friend. Good genes. [crosstalk 01:04:36]

Speaker 9: I mean to keep that energy level all the time. Really, there's go to be something that you're doing on a regular basis. What would it be?

Sheila Morago: Like I said, I love my job. I love my work. I am blessed with being able to do what I love. I'm not going to say that life and work and balance is good, it never is. I'm not going to tell you that I eat well and take a lot of vitamins, because I don't. But I love my job and I'm surrounded by great friends and family that support me in what I do. So why wouldn't you have-

Speaker 9: Great answer-

Sheila Morago: Great energy.

Speaker 9: Yeah that's a great answer. Because a lot of people turn to exercise or something else. And you just naturally enjoy what you're doing so much that you carry it with you all the time. That's great.

Sheila Morago: Thanks.

Tino Magnatta: And it's also very genuine. It really comes from the heart. She's a pretty amazing person.

Sheila Morago: Thanks. You're making me blush, Tino, you're making me blush.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks, Nick. Appreciate it.

Speaker 9: Thank you, Tino. Thank you, Sheila.

Sheila Morago: Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Have a good night.

Speaker 9: You too.

Tino Magnatta: Okay. Amazing show. We went over, but that's okay because the content is amazing. I really appreciate you coming on tonight. We're going to have you back on. Remember OIGA, the Oklahoma Gaming Conference. When is it? July? I think July 23rd to the 25th, something like that?

Sheila Morago: 22nd, 23rd and 24th.

Tino Magnatta: And you still have some spaces available if you want to, a booth or something like that. And of course it's, did you say it was \$275 for admission, right?

Sheila Morago: \$250 for any tribal operation in the United States, \$350 if you're an industry person that just wants to come and check out the floor, that gets you everything for three days. And you can reach me at sheila.morago@oiga.org. All the information is on our website, www.OIGA.org. And shoot me an email. I'd be glad to answer any questions you might have.

Tino Magnatta: Sheila, thanks so much for being on the show and we'll see you at the conference.

Sheila Morago: Okay. See you soon, Tino. Thank you so much.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you. Have a good night.

Sheila Morago: You too. Bye bye.

Tino Magnatta: Bye bye.

What an amazing person and just an amazing show. She's got that natural energy, it's just a gift.

Our next show is May 30th. It's Thursday May 30th. And I have Leticia Peterson, who's the GM of Yakama Nation Legends Casino Hotel. And it's going to be a spectacular show. I'm sure she has a lot of stuff. Actually I know, I've spoken to her before. It's going to be fantastic. Remember, everybody has got a story to tell, you just have to have time to listen. Have a good night and we'll see you on the 30th. Take care.

END