

by Sharon Harris and Loren Adams

Great Women of Gaming

Part one of a two-part special feature

The times are changing—and in gaming, it's definitely for the better. The US Department of Labor says that the number of women in the American workforce has grown from 44 percent of the total in 1983 to over 47 percent in 2002; the number of women holding management positions has more than doubled in that time.

Gaming appears to be ahead of that curve. In its Gaming Diversity Snapshot report conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers and published in November 2003, the American Gaming Association said that 138 participating casinos employed more women (51.3 percent) than men in 2002, up nearly a full percentage point since a similar study it had published just two years earlier. The same report said that the gaming industry as a whole (according to Standard Industrial Classification Codes 701 and 799) employed 50.1 percent women; the percentage of women in management positions was slightly higher (8.3 percent) than across all national industries (7.8 percent).

We need only look around us to see the effect—women are making a big impact in gaming today. What they are saying is very positive. When they do touch on their skills as related to gender, they talk about teamwork and intuition, and simply capitalizing on opportunity. And though some will say that the earlier years were more difficult, what's absent is any sense of gender-based conflict or rivalry. There are some great women in gaming. In this, the first of a two-part feature, we highlight some of our brightest stars.



A True Matriarch of Gaming

Claudine Williams,

Chairman of the Board, Harrah's Las Vegas

Ask Claudine Williams what gaming was like in the 60s and 70s, and she laughs. "Try the 30's," she says. Ask her what it was like being a woman in gaming, and she'll tell you, "When I started in gaming, I think there weren't any women in it." This makes Williams a great source of wisdom—and in invaluable asset—to the entire gaming industry.

Williams was a Desoto Parish, Louisiana girl with a single mother and a job replacing candy bars and magazines at the local hotel. When her mother became ill, Williams needed to find a job that could support herself, her mother, her sister and her grandmother. "I had never heard of gaming," she says now. "I didn't know what it was. I was looking for a job, and a new supper club was opening. I had no idea what I would do, but everybody was talking about it. It had big-name bands and food and a private (gaming) club in the back. I got a job there...of course I lied about my age."

Williams went to work checking credentials for admittance to the club. She recalls that she went out of her way to make sure tables were clean, and things were stored properly. "My curiosity got greater and greater," she says. "I would get everybody that I could to show me this, show me that, and I got good enough that I could relieve the dealers...(Gaming was) just something I guess I fell in love with over time."

She moved to Houston, Texas, working as a dealer in a private club there. "Within two months I began taking over responsibilities," she says. "I handled the scheduling of people coming in. It didn't take too long."

Williams met and married Shelby Williams—"one of the old time gamblers," she says—and moved to Las Vegas, where they bought the Silver Slipper. They sold that property to Howard Hughes, which Williams says was the first gaming property that Hughes bought and the only one he bought in his name. As you can imagine, Williams is full of stories about this time.

"I met Howard Hughes in Houston," she says. "He was working at the telephone company researching the cable going across the ocean. The club I was working in was right across the street. We had Grand Prize beer, which was owned by Hughes Tool Company. During the war, beer was scarce, and he'd come in and have two sips out of the beer. I remember asking, 'why does he come in just for that?'"

"Mr. Hughes had been living on the top floor of the Desert Inn across from the Silver

Slipper," says Williams. "We had that huge slipper going around and around. He sent Robert Maheu (his alter ego) a telegram that Mr. Maheu showed me after the sale. It said, 'Buy that damn thing. The lights are driving me crazy.'"

The Williams bought 22 acres, with plans to build a 1000-room hotel. However, Shelby Williams became seriously ill. "I decided I'd better sell and go back home where all of our parents were," says Williams. "I went to Houston for two weeks—and I said, this is not home anymore, let's go back to Las Vegas."

After the sale of the Slipper, they bought more property on the Strip and built the Holiday Casino. When Shelby passed away in 1977, Williams undertook a major property expansion. As president and general manager, she sold the Holiday Casino to Harrah's in 1983.

Williams has never moved out of her original office. Today, as Chairman of the Board of Harrah's Las Vegas, she shares her wealth of knowledge with incoming executives.

Her view from the top of the gaming world is fascinating, especially as a woman. "Don't let anybody fool you," she says. "There are many different opportunities and so many wonderful, smart women in gaming. They are corporate people, executives throughout. I get excited about that."

She says her success, and her attitudes about women in gaming, came from the necessity she felt in her early years. "When you know you've got to work, you do the job," she says. "Sometimes working in gaming you get criticized. My relatives thought (the original Louisiana) club was terrible. But it was the only job that could support four people. I think this held women back for years. If they weren't a school teacher or a nurse, they might be criticized if they left their homes and families to pursue a career."

Williams has strong advice for women in gaming. "You get ahead when you show you are willing to work and willing to carry your load," she says. "If you want equality, make up your mind—I've got to *give* equality.' This is a hard lesson for women to learn. They might come in and want all weekends off. Well, no, you can't. Men want weekends off too. I think of a woman who takes a job as a



Claudine Williams

porter. She might ask, 'do they expect me to lift those big bags?' Well, did you sign up to be a maid or a porter? If you want the pay of a porter you have to be willing to do the work of a porter."

Though Williams herself has a grown son and a two grandsons, she has definite ideas about a woman's new role in balancing family and career. "It takes two to make children," she says. "It's a hard thing to accept—you want to have children and a family, and you want the better job. You're getting ready to promote somebody, and one of them is a man and the other is a woman with children. If her child gets sick, most mothers want to take care of that sick child, so the man is probably going to get the job. It isn't the way it should be, but you really have to accept it."

She draws these thoughts from all the way back to the 1930s, in the small private club in Louisiana. "I wasn't asked to brush off tables or put things away," she says. "I just wanted to prove to them that I really wanted to work. The proudest thing for me is, I think I tried to set an example in gaming. Women have the freedom to do whatever we want. Set your goals, work hard and you will achieve them."

This month, Claudine Williams turns 84 years old. Yet she has no plans to step away from gaming, or even leave her office. "We have a lot of the young people coming in, and I like to do what I can to share what I know," she says. "They are all so good to me. That makes it hard to go. And I'm slow at packing, so I'll leave someday."



Kathleen McLaughlin-Harris,
Vice President Slot Development—Corporate,
Harrah's Entertainment, Inc.

Kathleen McLaughlin-Harris is one fearless female. She has followed the same philosophy her entire life: take the risk, face the challenge and pursue all good opportunities. That mindset is how she landed her position with Harrah's Entertainment. Never one to shy away from taking responsibility, she says, "I have always sought jobs with risks. I like being uncomfortable in the challenge. If not, I'm bored. I like the total accountability for any failure."

As the Vice President of Game Development, Slot Operations since 1999, McLaughlin-Harris oversees key slot product selection, purchase, merchandising and new products for the Harrah's brand. She says, "My job involves forward thinking, and has been very entrepreneurial. Early in my career, it started as a job, but now I'm consumed and incredibly passionate about slots and electronic gaming machines. I understand sales, manufacturing and service since I have worked in every area during my career. We are very analytical and measurement-driven, and often know more about the end-user customer than the manufacturers."

McLaughlin-Harris says she works with many manufacturers—some better and more cooperative in their thinking than others—and must deliver a quality product without getting a defensive reaction to her suggestions. "There are only a handful of people in the world who truly should be game designers. They are artistic and can create a wonderful product for us because Harrah's has spent the time to develop and articulate a specification

for the type of player experience we want to provide," says McLaughlin-Harris.

She knows something about creativity and innovation, having designed many of her own jobs during the past 20 years. Born in Pennsylvania, but raised in suburban Chicago, McLaughlin-Harris migrated west more than once to take full advantage of career opportunities that came her way, and also to seize the chance to create some positions of her own.

Following a two-year term as a biology teacher in the early 1980s, McLaughlin-Harris traveled west to sing professionally at Disneyland and in venues throughout southern California. She continued to be contracted to sing in larger rooms in many casinos in Las Vegas.

After several years, McLaughlin-Harris felt that her people skills and understanding of customers' interests qualified her for something new. She approached the marketing department at the Las Vegas Hilton, and joined a pilot program to develop a player tracking system. Though it was an entry-level position, McLaughlin-Harris soon learned the mechanical workings and reward functions of the machines and marketing them to players.

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The next seven years was a whirlwind of jobs in the slot departments of both land-based and riverboat casinos in Las Vegas and Illinois. McLaughlin-Harris created Mirage Resorts' Slot Training Department in 1990. "It was supposed to be a probationary six-month job to help Mirage employees address complex slot operations problems while developing employee action training plans to achieve sustainable results. I stayed through 1992," she says.

McLaughlin-Harris spent the first half of the 1990s back in Illinois, working for the Hollywood Casino and Silver Eagle Casino Cruise companies, again perfecting her skills in slot operations and marketing.

When McLaughlin-Harris left operations in

1996 to learn the true mechanics of the slot-manufacturing end of the industry, she remained in the Chicago area. She joined WMS Gaming, Inc. as corporate director of marketing. Her job involved marketing, sales and distribution, packaging and influencing game development and design strategies.

McLaughlin-Harris says that manufacturing gave her an interesting perspective, solidifying her conclusions about successful slot operations. She says, "While innovation in technology is important, one thing remains vital—bells and whistles matter, but the math is the key. Players want a fair gamble for their seat time. They vote with their dollars, choosing either shorter or longer experiences. I have learned that customers want to win in many ways."

When McLaughlin-Harris joined the Harrah's team in Las Vegas in 1999, she took on the role of corporate liaison between the properties, marketing and the slot manufacturers. She states that the packaging of slot machines is changing. "I work with manufacturers to identify a project. I either bring them a concept or work with them at various stages of the game's development. It depends on when we join the relationship. We look to meet the goals and objectives of the players when we partner or launch a product in a creative, collaborative way," says McLaughlin-Harris.

Over the years, McLaughlin-Harris has been an integral part of the design and distribution of numerous famous, successful products such as The Price is Right®, Hollywood Squares® and The Game of Life® for Harrah's and MONOPOLY® and Reel Em' In® for WMS Gaming.

In 2004, there have been 10 launches with various manufacturers, either on a company-wide saturation or in targeted markets. "If we do a national launch, a manufacturer must be willing to hold the game until it is approved in all jurisdictions. We have a lot of intelligence on the manufacturers, and can hand pick them, based on suitability for each project," McLaughlin-Harris says.

McLaughlin-Harris loves her work and feels that Harrah's is a great place for women to work. "As a company, Harrah's has become much more open to women in senior management. As people rise in the organization, it is more competitive, whether it is a man or a woman vying for the same position. I believe my career path has been successful because I have been in the right place at the right time for certain career decisions. I have been able to pick and choose certain roles," she says.

Dona Cassese,

**Executive Director Of Marketing,
WMS Gaming, Inc.**

For the first 20 years of her gaming career, Dona Cassese had her suitcase packed. She traveled the country selling casino services, consulting on-site for casino properties and marketing gaming equipment. Now, as the executive director of marketing for WMS Gaming in Las Vegas, Cassese stays in one place for longer stretches of time.

"I traveled for months at a time during my 20s and 30s, and had great fun while working on exciting projects. I was involved in many casino openings and start-ups. They were my favorite assignments. Now, I am a wife with a young child and feel a greater need to create a more balanced life between my personal life and my career. I don't travel as much as I used to," says Cassese. She likes to spend most of her time with husband Bob Caccia and their son, six-year-old Chase.

Cassese had the advantage of growing up in Las Vegas near the lights and excitement of casinos. She graduated from the University of Nevada in Las Vegas in 1983, where her late father Tom was the dean. Cassese worked for two years for the Tandy Corporation before beginning her first job as director of casino promotions for the Gold Coast Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.

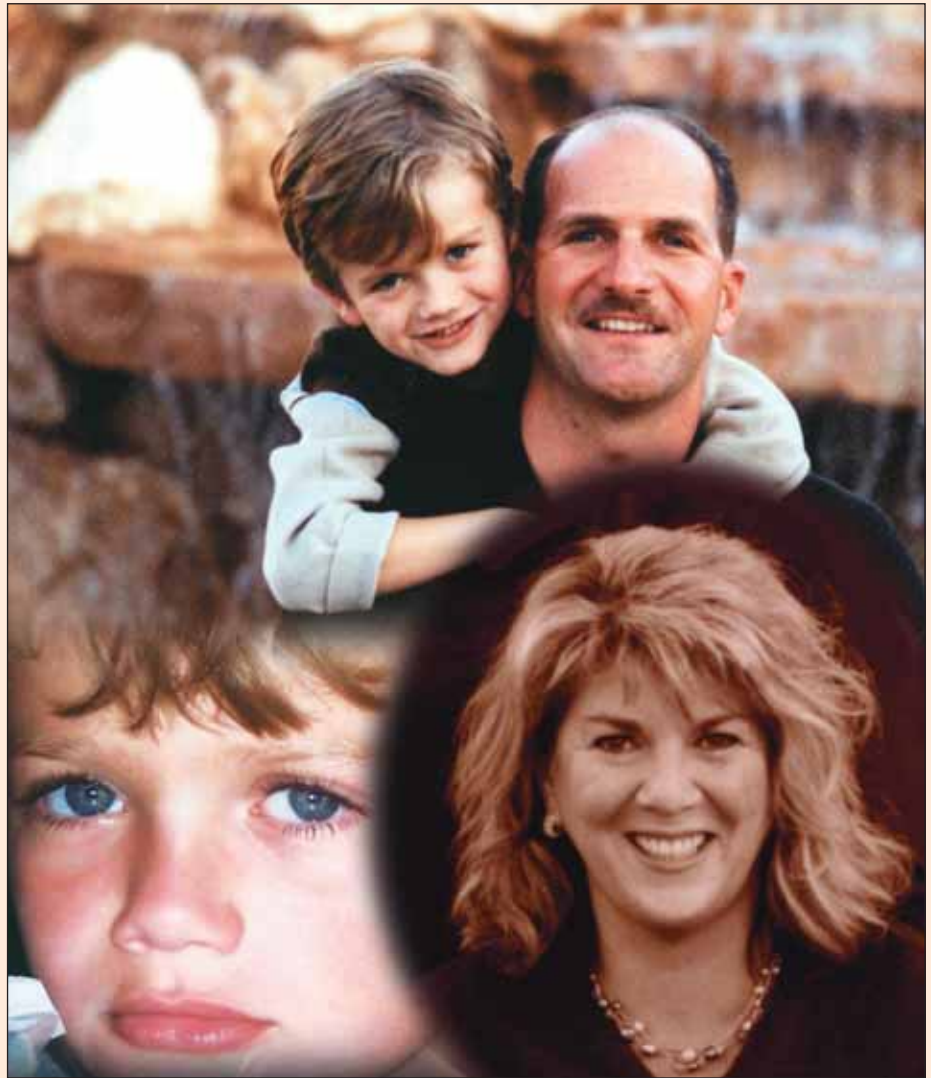
Before joining WMS Gaming in 1998, Cassese has held high-ranking positions in promotions, marketing and sales for such giants as the Mirage, Luxor and Gaming Systems International. In between, Cassese managed to also operate her own consulting company with her father, whom she credits with having the greatest influence on her life.

"My father always believed in me. He always pushed me to be my best and strive for goals that I did not think were attainable. He also taught me about integrity, advising me that a solid reputation is all I have, and that I should not let the excitement of the business test my good judgment," says Cassese.

Cassese traces part of her success back to working with great people like Michael Gaughan, founder of Coast Resorts, who hired her for her first gaming position at the Gold Coast. She also cites friends Diana Bennett, President of Paragon Gaming, and Carol Carter, the owner of Egads Casino Display Company, as pivotal in her growth.

She says, "Carol Carter has been a longtime friend of my family and is simply the most amazing and inspiring woman I have met in this industry. I worked very closely with Diana Bennett during the opening of the Luxor. She was a caring mother, a top executive and a great example of someone who balanced the demands of a high profile position with a home life."

While managing hundreds of employees over the years, Cassese feels fortunate that most have



Dona Cassese

done well. "I have only fired two people that have worked for me. I try to hire good employees because I believe my job is to make sure the staff enjoys their work and gets the appropriate recognition. I feel that I've developed close relationships with them and am confident that they would rally around me if I needed them," says Cassese.

The casino industry requires dedication and a time commitment. Cassese would urge women entering the industry to address time constraints on their personal lives. She says, "I think it is easier for women to enter the business now than in the 1980s. Truthfully, intelligent younger women have great opportunity at casino properties. Women in this business have to work harder for more time to gain and retain the recognition they deserve. Women must be strong, driven and have a true passion for their jobs and their companies. This industry can be rough and is not for the weak at heart."

As a 24-hour business, the demands on executives are greater. Cassese says while working at casinos, she could be there all the time. "I threw a large event every New Year's Eve for 14 years.

When I left the property side of the business, I didn't know what to do on many weekends and holidays. Now that I have a family, I see that married women must have a strong support group and a partner that is helpful at home," says Cassese.

Even with the demands on personal time, Cassese encourages women to throw themselves into the challenges of senior management positions whenever possible.

She says, "There are more women in high-ranking jobs than may be expected, although they may not get public exposure. I think that our society has tried to be open to the fact that women can and do juggle the roles of executive and mother. The disadvantage is that even today, our male associates still primarily fill most of the highest positions, although it is improving."

Cassese has surpassed many of the career mountains she had aimed to climb. She never imagined herself in the gaming business, but credits her success to working longer and harder, being open to new opportunities and surrounding herself with very talented people.

Not Just One of the Boys

Maureen Mullarkey, Chief Financial Officer, International Game Technology

Being a woman surrounded by men should be nothing new for Maureen Mullarkey. She grew up in suburban Chicago with older brothers. "Whatever my brothers did, I wanted to do," she says. "I also had to learn to fend for myself as the youngest." Self reliance and resiliency were also required skills after she lost her mother as a teenager. "That was defining because we were all in sort of a survival mode," she says. But in Mullarkey's case, there was no boundary between surviving and succeeding.

"We've had success in promoting women and people of different ethnic backgrounds.

And hopefully, other companies are doing the same thing."

Going to college in Texas, she majored in geology—another male-dominated field. "If you think gaming has a lot of men, you should see the oil industry," she laughs. "While an unconventional route to finance and gaming, it was good for a couple of reasons. The scientific method helped develop my analytical thinking and related skills. And, most of the students there were men."

Mullarkey began her career in the oil business in the early 1980s. "I was really not satisfied with the professional opportunities," she says. "At that time the price of oil was quite low, which meant good jobs were hard to find."

Now in Reno, Mullarkey decided to finish her MBA at the University of Nevada. "Then, in January 1989, I answered an ad for Revenue Analyst for IGT," she says. "I was actually hoping for an opportunity at IGT. It was not a big company at the time, but it had a big presence in the town."

Mullarkey says that outgoing IGT chairman Thomas Baker was a key mentor for her. "The culture here has always been to promote from within, and to give people 'stretch' projects," she says. "We saw new markets open up in Indian gaming and in several riverboat jurisdictions...we put almost two billion dollars in acquisitions on the balance sheet. It's been a great and fantastic ride."

She's open about the stresses of the job. "It's pretty demanding," says Mullarkey. "But I could not do a job like this without having a great staff, both here in Nevada and worldwide."

In 1996, Mullarkey became the first woman promoted to a vice president position in the company. Mullarkey says the promotion was not completely without its burden.

"I was cognizant that people were watching me," she says. "Which was fine. One of the characteristics that I work hard on is to be consistent in what I say and what I do. I felt the pressure with the realization that I was carrying the flag for others coming up through the ranks as well. When you're out in front and feeling a little different, it is important to be confident of your abilities; but it is also key to make the people around you feel comfortable. Have a sense of humor. Make people relax."

Now, Mullarkey points out, there are several women in vice-presidential roles at IGT. "I am pleased to see more and more women in the VP ranks," she says. "They're across the company in accounting, sales, product management and compliance to name a few. We've had success in promoting women and people of different ethnic backgrounds. And hopefully, other companies are doing the same thing."

Her increasing responsibility at IGT also made Mullarkey a better leader. "I said, 'I cannot do all this work by myself,'" she says. "I've become a good delegator. I put energy into communicating effectively

and to understanding those around me."

Following her promotion to CFO in 1998, Mullarkey briefly left the company in 2000—and she's happy to be back. "What I realized then was that I worked for people of very high integrity. And my team...we had a practice of working together, which makes everyone more effective."

One wonders how Mullarkey maintains balance. Despite the demands of her job and her national status as a successful businesswoman—she recently appeared on a list of elite women in *Fortune* magazine—she has the openness, energy and positive air of a recent college graduate. "It takes time," she says. "You have to be committed to do the work. I've made sacrifices. Anything that's really important in life, you make sacrifices. But I think the most successful people are the ones who have help."

Maureen Mullarkey



Marianne Boyd Johnson,
Vice Chairman and Senior Vice President,
Boyd Gaming Corporation

“I think there are a lot of advantages to being a woman in today’s business,” says Marianne Boyd Johnson. “There’s no question the number of women in key executive positions is growing and I think as time goes on, we’ll see more and more in leadership positions.” She should know. She has been involved in gaming her entire life.

Johnson’s family first came to Las Vegas when her father (William Boyd, chairman and CEO of Boyd Gaming) moved there with his parents in 1941. “At that time, there were only about 10,000 people in the valley,” she says. “Growing up around the business, as my dad did and as I did with my two brothers, it’s easy to see how we ended up working in the family business. To that end, the greatest influence in my life probably goes without saying, but that would be my dad.”

As a teenager, Johnson worked in virtually every aspect of gaming properties, from the back of the house to the front desk. “I have a good understanding of how it all works,” she says. “I have been fortunate to have role models like my dad and my grandfather. They taught me the importance of integrity and hard work. While I never really worked directly with my grandfather, as I have with my dad, he was still an important influence.”

Johnson believes that women are coming into their own in today’s gaming world. “I think women offer a different perspective and for the most part, companies just recently began to realize that, and we’re seeing more women in key positions,” she says. “At our company, we have many women key executives at both the corporate and property levels. When you think about it, the gaming industry really didn’t get going until the 1990s when proliferation created opportunities for new companies, public traded companies and new markets.”



Marianne Boyd Johnson

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In fact, Johnson’s memory spans over a valuable portion of gaming history. According to Johnson, gaming has changed greatly over the years, but one thing still stays constant: “the casino business was always about fun,” she says. “And today, the casino entertainment product is so much more than just the gaming—it includes great restaurants, celebrity chefs, great rooms, world class shopping,

amazing golf courses and a variety of shows and name entertainment. I don’t think any of us, including my grandfather, had any idea gaming would become so widespread, having some form of gambling in nearly every state, and mean so many different things, in terms of entertainment.”

Is the growth of the industry helping the proliferation of women in gaming? “It’s evolving, there’s no question,” says Johnson. “I remember when my grandfather was the first to hire women dealers. That gave way to more women working in the business, and eventually, making their way up the ladder to today, where we have many women in key positions throughout the industry. As time goes on, I think we’ll see more (women in key gaming roles).”

Her perspective includes not just employers, but the entire market demographic as well. “In the early days, even the casino customer demo consisted almost entirely of men,” says Johnson. “Not until casino operators began to see the slot business take off did the business really start to reach women. Considering that most casino customers are women today, it seems only natural that women play a more integral part of operating the business.”

Typical of women in gaming today, Johnson is obviously very quick to credit those around her. “I think gaming is moving in the right direction, and I’m proud of where our company is today in that regard,” she says. “As an example, Judy Campbell leads our most successful riverboat operation, the Blue Chip Casino and Hotel in Michigan City, Indiana. She has been an employee for more than 20 years and has worked her way up over that time. I believe her story of success helps to create opportunities for other women throughout the industry, as well as our company. I think in a male-dominated industry, the more examples we have like Judy the more opportunities there will be for women in the future.”



Christie Eickelman,
Director of Worldwide Marketing,
Gaming Laboratories International (GLI)

She might have come from a small town, but just by being herself, Christie Eickelman embodies a solid definition of big-time success.

Born in tiny Belle Fourche, South Dakota, Eickelman started as a marketing representative at Sodak Gaming in 1991 “when Indian gaming was at the very beginning,” she says. Eventually—though actually over a very short time—she became director of marketing at Sodak. “I was one of the first 20 employees there,” says Eickelman. “My department basically designed the logo and the appearance of Sodak Gaming. It gives you great pride, but then you have to move forward.” In 1994, Eickelman’s drive for new experiences led her to a start-up gaming company in Grand Junction, Colorado as vice president of marketing and public relations. Following the position in Colorado and a short break from gaming, she arrived at Gaming Laboratories International in 1999 as marketing manager.

Typical of Eickelman, she climbed the GLI ranks quickly, becoming director of marketing and development, and then, in 2003, director of worldwide marketing. Also typical of Eickelman is that she is reticent, even dismissive, about crediting herself for any of this.

“I don’t view myself as an ego-based person,” she says. “I think there are a lot of women in gaming that no one knows about. I’m not involved in the industry from an oper-

ator or supplier standpoint. I came from that world, and I work with a lot of successful women in the supplier’s arena. And nobody knows about them. I choose to put the people at the forefront that I feel as a whole make the company a success. I think that was my biggest thing at Sodak Gaming. There were a lot of people that made it a success. It’s all a team effort.

“We have 250 people in North America that make GLI a success,” she continues about her current company. “And there are the behind the scenes people that make this company look as successful and be as successful as it is.”

Still, Eickelman seems very comfortable where she is. “Before, I wanted to conquer the world. Now I look back and say, ‘wow, that was exhausting... Now I just want to do a great job at what I’m doing.’”

“I don’t feel I’m a great woman in gaming. I just feel like I am doing my job, hopefully to the best of ability and hopefully learning from others as I go along.”

She talks about balance, and boundaries. “I’m single,” she says. “And sometimes (balancing work and off-time) is overwhelming for me, and I don’t know how men or women who might be married with kids can do it. I admire those people. If you feel it’s unbalanced, then you have to stop and look at where you’re at personally and professionally. People have to have boundaries and they have to set their limits as to what they will do and what they won’t do. You get to a certain level personally and professionally that you can hopefully make your own decisions. And the older you get the easier it is, hopefully.”

If she places importance on one thing for women, it’s setting goals. “If one bad experience happens, you can’t let that stop you,” she says. “People do sabotage themselves,

because it’s scary out there. But you have to continue toward what your dreams and your goals are.”

How does Eickelman define success? Given her small-town roots, she says that success is relative only to who you are. “The people in small towns are just as successful,” she says. “I always say that there are some people that like living in small towns—they love that feeling of belonging. And that’s a great feeling. I had different goals and different aspirations for myself. If that’s where they choose to be, then great success for them.”

The support she got from her small town, and her other mentors, are central to who Eickelman is. “Coming from a small town, I think the people that help you most there is your family,” she says. “And then from that point on, it’s just strong mentors in the business. I love the fact that the people around you, male or female, have something to teach you.

“I like to learn from other people. This is a thing that’s overwhelming for me on this... I don’t feel I’m a great woman in gaming. I just feel like I am doing my job, hopefully to the best of ability and hopefully learning from others as I go along.”

She acknowledges that some influences are better than others—and that some challenges remain for women in gaming and in other industries. “You can’t be afraid to ask questions,” she says. “But the person who has the knowledge can sometimes tend to talk down to you. And that will keep you from learning and growing to make yourself better.

“Unfortunately there is a glass ceiling, not just in gaming,” Eickelman observes. “I’ve never felt that male-female type thing. There are women out there that feel that, and they’ve been held back. This is a male-dominated business, but there are a of very successful women that have evolved in it and there’s going to continue to be more.”

Eickelman feels that women as a whole are a tremendous asset to gaming. “We all have a message,” Eickelman says, “and if we can get that out there to women who are up and coming, then the more successful the industry will be.”

What is Eickelman’s message? “Everything happens for a reason,” she says. “And you can choose to learn from it, or not.”



Staci Columbo

After 18 years in gaming, Staci Columbo still sparkles with passion. Her path through gaming—and life—is the result of that passion, combined with a good dose of hard work, and, perhaps, just a sprinkle of luck. She is one of the fortunate few who has formed her life according to who she is.

Born and raised outside Philadelphia, Columbo started her gaming career as a slot club representative at Atlantic City's Tropicana in 1987. "I fell into the position, as I think many have," says Columbo. "But within three days, I knew that this was the career for the rest of my life. It hit me like a thunderbolt. And I just fell in love with it. I loved everything about the business."

Typical of Columbo, she quickly tried all different shifts that the position offered. She cites Pam Popielarski, then the vice president of marketing at the AC Tropicana, as a major influence for her. "(Pam) allowed me to grow up in the business," says Columbo. "I was so energetic and I was so interested in all the pieces of marketing that I literally moved into every position in marketing in the seven years that I was in Atlantic City."

Columbo worried a little when she requested a transfer to the Tropicana in Las Vegas. Some around her questioned the decision, and she may have as well. "But in hindsight now I know that I was just so excited about knowing everything about the business," she says. "I just couldn't get enough of it."

In fact, she became both the youngest and the first female casino host at the Tropicana Las Vegas. "At this point in the industry in Las Vegas the slot host and the casino host were two very different departments," says Columbo. "I think that anybody can reflect back that even at that

A Very Purpose-Driven Life

Staci Columbo,

Corporate Vice President, Marketing & Advertising, Station Casinos Inc.

point slots were 'something that the wives did.' So I was a young female from Atlantic City coming into an all-male department. I think that some of the men would question how I got there. But it took a very short time seeing my commitment and hard work that I was 'one of the boys' very quickly."

By itself, being a woman in gaming doesn't occur much to Columbo. She is comfortable with herself, to start, and to her gender was never a factor. "I don't know whether it's because I entered into the business in Atlantic City, or the timing in the late 80s, but I wasn't as exposed to the alleged 'old boys club' as much as maybe others," she says. "In Atlantic City there were always so many women executives that you didn't think differently. I don't think you limited yourself as a female...there were so many women already in those roles that it was just never a thought. I don't feel that I've ever been denied a job, or gotten a job, because of my gender. It just really hasn't played a factor in my career."

That career took her to the Luxor, where she helped open the facility as special events and marketing manager. There, she met Diana Bennett, who "is without a doubt the second most influential person in my career," she says. "Diana brought into my experience the balance of personalizing yourself and spending a little bit more time getting to know the people you work with every day, and how that pays off. You always felt special with your time with her, you felt that she was listening to you. She recognized each individual effort. I still use so much of what she taught me by example today."

Following stints in senior-level marketing positions at Station and the Las Vegas Hilton, Columbo landed back at Station Casinos. The move was, as is everything in Columbo's life, driven by who she is. "I'm more comfortable in the local market," she says. "I enjoy getting to know guests and I enjoy being able to measure the success of my programs in a relatively short time. So the local market is a natural fit for my style and passion for the business. Station is not only a great place to work (the company was recently named one of the Top 100 Best Places to Work by *Fortune* magazine), but has a model that fits who I am."

She talks about her work with Stephen Cavallaro, Station's chief operating officer, very reverently. "What I think left most of a mark with Steve is that it could be fifteen hour days—

and there were a lot of them—and he always found the time to bring in a little bit of 'personal' to the day...just breaking it up a little bit, and making you want to work harder. That made me a better leader."

In fact, that time in her life, which also included the birth of her son, Noah, changed Columbo profoundly. "I think that if you had to ask people to describe me, they would say that I'm a workaholic, or I'm very intense, and you always know where you stand and I'm just there for results," she says. "And I think since I became a mother and I've been exposed to leaders like Steve, I'm a little bit more balanced and that shows in my style of leadership."

Columbo exercises her leadership on the board of directors for Shade Tree Shelter, a refuge for homeless and abused women and children. She also has her own project underway, called Noah's Animal House—named for her son, and for two of her greatest non-gaming passions, animals and her connection to God. That project will serve women, children and their pets in abusive domestic situations.

This reflects Columbo's passion, and her greatest wish for people. "I really think that your community commitments really have to come with what makes you tick," she says. "Each one of us is unique for a reason. I'm lucky enough that I was able to recognize what my gifts were. Some people, I think, don't ever slow down enough to find out what it is that stimulates them the most, or they never experience enough different things in order to go, 'oh, that's the one that I was most excited about.' Finding a career that you love is where it starts. So if people are in current positions or with current companies that in your gut you know are just not meant for you, I think people need to have the ability to take that risk and make a change. Because when you get it, you know it."

One word that adequately describes Columbo is "strong." According to her, strength comes from the ability to recognize experiences—both successful and tragic—as lessons. "I'm an example of somebody who can have both," she says. "I'm a single mom—his father's in heaven—and I still work a lot of hours and I still have my best friend (four-year-old Noah) and I'm his. If anybody thinks they can't do it, they can just run with me for a day. Because you can. You really can, and do it right. I think it is sacrifices, I think it is hard work, I think it is priorities. And I think you can do it all."

by Sharon Harris and Loren Adams

Great Women of Gaming

Part one of a two-part special feature

The times are changing—and in gaming, it's definitely for the better. The US Department of Labor says that the number of women in the American workforce has grown from 44 percent of the total in 1983 to over 47 percent in 2002; the number of women holding management positions has more than doubled in that time.

Gaming appears to be ahead of that curve. In its Gaming Diversity Snapshot report conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers and published in November 2003, the American Gaming Association said that 138 participating casinos employed more women (51.3 percent) than men in 2002, up nearly a full percentage point since a similar study it had published just two years earlier. The same report said that the gaming industry as a whole (according to Standard Industrial Classification Codes 701 and 799) employed 50.1 percent women; the percentage of women in management positions was slightly higher (8.3 percent) than across all national industries (7.8 percent).

We need only look around us to see the effect—women are making a big impact in gaming today. What they are saying is very positive. When they do touch on their skills as related to gender, they talk about teamwork and intuition, and simply capitalizing on opportunity. And though some will say that the earlier years were more difficult, what's absent is any sense of gender-based conflict or rivalry. There are some great women in gaming. In this, the first of a two-part feature, we highlight some of our brightest stars.



A True Matriarch of Gaming

Claudine Williams,

Chairman of the Board, Harrah's Las Vegas

Ask Claudine Williams what gaming was like in the 60s and 70s, and she laughs. "Try the 30's," she says. Ask her what it was like being a woman in gaming, and she'll tell you, "When I started in gaming, I think there weren't any women in it." This makes Williams a great source of wisdom—and in invaluable asset—to the entire gaming industry.

Williams was a Desoto Parish, Louisiana girl with a single mother and a job replacing candy bars and magazines at the local hotel. When her mother became ill, Williams needed to find a job that could support herself, her mother, her sister and her grandmother. "I had never heard of gaming," she says now. "I didn't know what it was. I was looking for a job, and a new supper club was opening. I had no idea what I would do, but everybody was talking about it. It had big-name bands and food and a private (gaming) club in the back. I got a job there...of course I lied about my age."

Williams went to work checking credentials for admittance to the club. She recalls that she went out of her way to make sure tables were clean, and things were stored properly. "My curiosity got greater and greater," she says. "I would get everybody that I could to show me this, show me that, and I got good enough that I could relieve the dealers...(Gaming was) just something I guess I fell in love with over time."

She moved to Houston, Texas, working as a dealer in a private club there. "Within two months I began taking over responsibilities," she says. "I handled the scheduling of people coming in. It didn't take too long."

Williams met and married Shelby Williams—"one of the old time gamblers," she says—and moved to Las Vegas, where they bought the Silver Slipper. They sold that property to Howard Hughes, which Williams says was the first gaming property that Hughes bought and the only one he bought in his name. As you can imagine, Williams is full of stories about this time.

"I met Howard Hughes in Houston," she says. "He was working at the telephone company researching the cable going across the ocean. The club I was working in was right across the street. We had Grand Prize beer, which was owned by Hughes Tool Company. During the war, beer was scarce, and he'd come in and have two sips out of the beer. I remember asking, 'why does he come in just for that?'"

"Mr. Hughes had been living on the top floor of the Desert Inn across from the Silver

Slipper," says Williams. "We had that huge slipper going around and around. He sent Robert Maheu (his alter ego) a telegram that Mr. Maheu showed me after the sale. It said, 'Buy that damn thing. The lights are driving me crazy.'"

The Williams bought 22 acres, with plans to build a 1000-room hotel. However, Shelby Williams became seriously ill. "I decided I'd better sell and go back home where all of our parents were," says Williams. "I went to Houston for two weeks—and I said, this is not home anymore, let's go back to Las Vegas."

After the sale of the Slipper, they bought more property on the Strip and built the Holiday Casino. When Shelby passed away in 1977, Williams undertook a major property expansion. As president and general manager, she sold the Holiday Casino to Harrah's in 1983.

Williams has never moved out of her original office. Today, as Chairman of the Board of Harrah's Las Vegas, she shares her wealth of knowledge with incoming executives.

Her view from the top of the gaming world is fascinating, especially as a woman. "Don't let anybody fool you," she says. "There are many different opportunities and so many wonderful, smart women in gaming. They are corporate people, executives throughout. I get excited about that."

She says her success, and her attitudes about women in gaming, came from the necessity she felt in her early years. "When you know you've got to work, you do the job," she says. "Sometimes working in gaming you get criticized. My relatives thought (the original Louisiana) club was terrible. But it was the only job that could support four people. I think this held women back for years. If they weren't a school teacher or a nurse, they might be criticized if they left their homes and families to pursue a career."

Williams has strong advice for women in gaming. "You get ahead when you show you are willing to work and willing to carry your load," she says. "If you want equality, make up your mind—I've got to *give* equality.' This is a hard lesson for women to learn. They might come in and want all weekends off. Well, no, you can't. Men want weekends off too. I think of a woman who takes a job as a



Claudine Williams

porter. She might ask, 'do they expect me to lift those big bags?' Well, did you sign up to be a maid or a porter? If you want the pay of a porter you have to be willing to do the work of a porter."

Though Williams herself has a grown son and a two grandsons, she has definite ideas about a woman's new role in balancing family and career. "It takes two to make children," she says. "It's a hard thing to accept—you want to have children and a family, and you want the better job. You're getting ready to promote somebody, and one of them is a man and the other is a woman with children. If her child gets sick, most mothers want to take care of that sick child, so the man is probably going to get the job. It isn't the way it should be, but you really have to accept it."

She draws these thoughts from all the way back to the 1930s, in the small private club in Louisiana. "I wasn't asked to brush off tables or put things away," she says. "I just wanted to prove to them that I really wanted to work. The proudest thing for me is, I think I tried to set an example in gaming. Women have the freedom to do whatever we want. Set your goals, work hard and you will achieve them."

This month, Claudine Williams turns 84 years old. Yet she has no plans to step away from gaming, or even leave her office. "We have a lot of the young people coming in, and I like to do what I can to share what I know," she says. "They are all so good to me. That makes it hard to go. And I'm slow at packing, so I'll leave someday."



Kathleen McLaughlin-Harris,
Vice President Slot Development—Corporate,
Harrah's Entertainment, Inc.

Kathleen McLaughlin-Harris is one fearless female. She has followed the same philosophy her entire life: take the risk, face the challenge and pursue all good opportunities. That mindset is how she landed her position with Harrah's Entertainment. Never one to shy away from taking responsibility, she says, "I have always sought jobs with risks. I like being uncomfortable in the challenge. If not, I'm bored. I like the total accountability for any failure."

As the Vice President of Game Development, Slot Operations since 1999, McLaughlin-Harris oversees key slot product selection, purchase, merchandising and new products for the Harrah's brand. She says, "My job involves forward thinking, and has been very entrepreneurial. Early in my career, it started as a job, but now I'm consumed and incredibly passionate about slots and electronic gaming machines. I understand sales, manufacturing and service since I have worked in every area during my career. We are very analytical and measurement-driven, and often know more about the end-user customer than the manufacturers."

McLaughlin-Harris says she works with many manufacturers—some better and more cooperative in their thinking than others—and must deliver a quality product without getting a defensive reaction to her suggestions. "There are only a handful of people in the world who truly should be game designers. They are artistic and can create a wonderful product for us because Harrah's has spent the time to develop and articulate a specification

for the type of player experience we want to provide," says McLaughlin-Harris.

She knows something about creativity and innovation, having designed many of her own jobs during the past 20 years. Born in Pennsylvania, but raised in suburban Chicago, McLaughlin-Harris migrated west more than once to take full advantage of career opportunities that came her way, and also to seize the chance to create some positions of her own.

Following a two-year term as a biology teacher in the early 1980s, McLaughlin-Harris traveled west to sing professionally at Disneyland and in venues throughout southern California. She continued to be contracted to sing in larger rooms in many casinos in Las Vegas.

After several years, McLaughlin-Harris felt that her people skills and understanding of customers' interests qualified her for something new. She approached the marketing department at the Las Vegas Hilton, and joined a pilot program to develop a player tracking system. Though it was an entry-level position, McLaughlin-Harris soon learned the mechanical workings and reward functions of the machines and marketing them to players.

***"Women have the
freedom to do
whatever we want.
Set your goals,
work hard and you
will achieve them."***

The next seven years was a whirlwind of jobs in the slot departments of both land-based and riverboat casinos in Las Vegas and Illinois. McLaughlin-Harris created Mirage Resorts' Slot Training Department in 1990. "It was supposed to be a probationary six-month job to help Mirage employees address complex slot operations problems while developing employee action training plans to achieve sustainable results. I stayed through 1992," she says.

McLaughlin-Harris spent the first half of the 1990s back in Illinois, working for the Hollywood Casino and Silver Eagle Casino Cruise companies, again perfecting her skills in slot operations and marketing.

When McLaughlin-Harris left operations in

1996 to learn the true mechanics of the slot-manufacturing end of the industry, she remained in the Chicago area. She joined WMS Gaming, Inc. as corporate director of marketing. Her job involved marketing, sales and distribution, packaging and influencing game development and design strategies.

McLaughlin-Harris says that manufacturing gave her an interesting perspective, solidifying her conclusions about successful slot operations. She says, "While innovation in technology is important, one thing remains vital—bells and whistles matter, but the math is the key. Players want a fair gamble for their seat time. They vote with their dollars, choosing either shorter or longer experiences. I have learned that customers want to win in many ways."

When McLaughlin-Harris joined the Harrah's team in Las Vegas in 1999, she took on the role of corporate liaison between the properties, marketing and the slot manufacturers. She states that the packaging of slot machines is changing. "I work with manufacturers to identify a project. I either bring them a concept or work with them at various stages of the game's development. It depends on when we join the relationship. We look to meet the goals and objectives of the players when we partner or launch a product in a creative, collaborative way," says McLaughlin-Harris.

Over the years, McLaughlin-Harris has been an integral part of the design and distribution of numerous famous, successful products such as The Price is Right®, Hollywood Squares® and The Game of Life® for Harrah's and MONOPOLY® and Reel Em' In® for WMS Gaming.

In 2004, there have been 10 launches with various manufacturers, either on a company-wide saturation or in targeted markets. "If we do a national launch, a manufacturer must be willing to hold the game until it is approved in all jurisdictions. We have a lot of intelligence on the manufacturers, and can hand pick them, based on suitability for each project," McLaughlin-Harris says.

McLaughlin-Harris loves her work and feels that Harrah's is a great place for women to work. "As a company, Harrah's has become much more open to women in senior management. As people rise in the organization, it is more competitive, whether it is a man or a woman vying for the same position. I believe my career path has been successful because I have been in the right place at the right time for certain career decisions. I have been able to pick and choose certain roles," she says.

Dona Cassese,

**Executive Director Of Marketing,
WMS Gaming, Inc.**

For the first 20 years of her gaming career, Dona Cassese had her suitcase packed. She traveled the country selling casino services, consulting on-site for casino properties and marketing gaming equipment. Now, as the executive director of marketing for WMS Gaming in Las Vegas, Cassese stays in one place for longer stretches of time.

"I traveled for months at a time during my 20s and 30s, and had great fun while working on exciting projects. I was involved in many casino openings and start-ups. They were my favorite assignments. Now, I am a wife with a young child and feel a greater need to create a more balanced life between my personal life and my career. I don't travel as much as I used to," says Cassese. She likes to spend most of her time with husband Bob Caccia and their son, six-year-old Chase.

Cassese had the advantage of growing up in Las Vegas near the lights and excitement of casinos. She graduated from the University of Nevada in Las Vegas in 1983, where her late father Tom was the dean. Cassese worked for two years for the Tandy Corporation before beginning her first job as director of casino promotions for the Gold Coast Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.

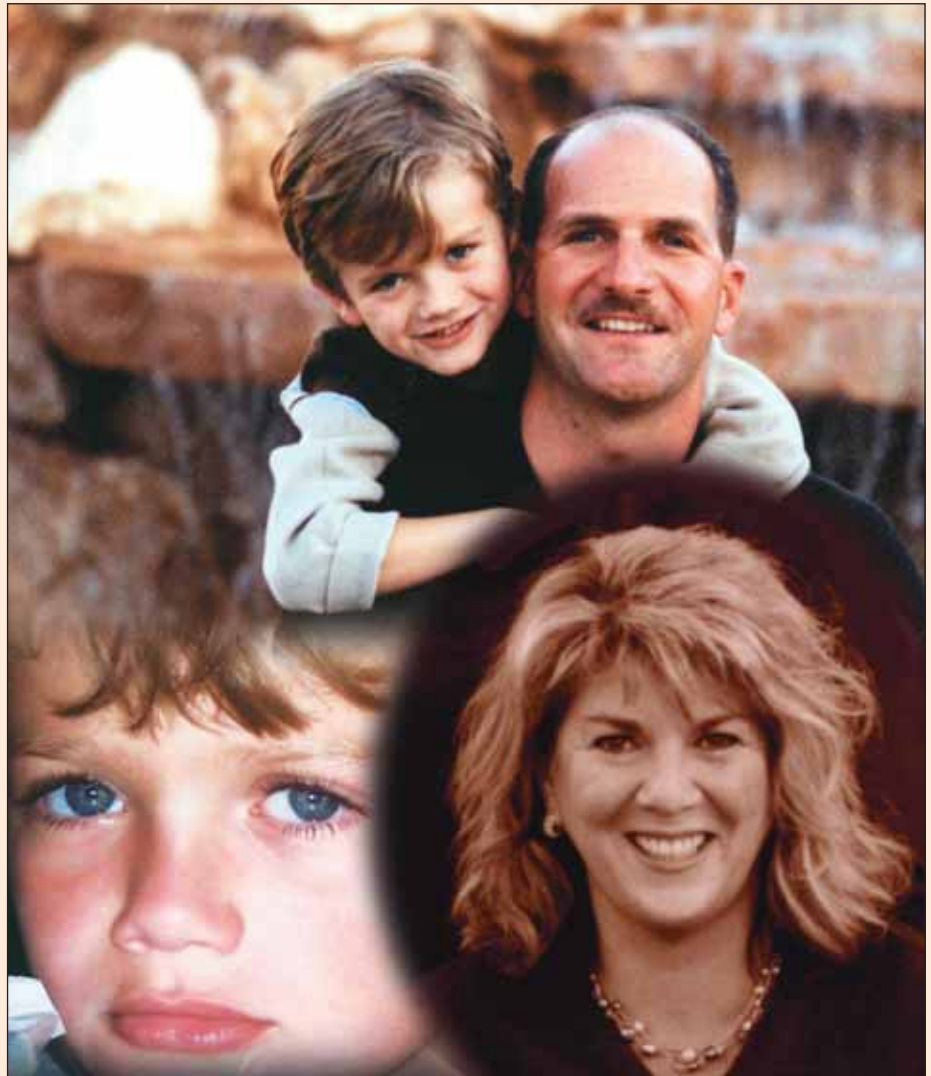
Before joining WMS Gaming in 1998, Cassese has held high-ranking positions in promotions, marketing and sales for such giants as the Mirage, Luxor and Gaming Systems International. In between, Cassese managed to also operate her own consulting company with her father, whom she credits with having the greatest influence on her life.

"My father always believed in me. He always pushed me to be my best and strive for goals that I did not think were attainable. He also taught me about integrity, advising me that a solid reputation is all I have, and that I should not let the excitement of the business test my good judgment," says Cassese.

Cassese traces part of her success back to working with great people like Michael Gaughan, founder of Coast Resorts, who hired her for her first gaming position at the Gold Coast. She also cites friends Diana Bennett, President of Paragon Gaming, and Carol Carter, the owner of Egads Casino Display Company, as pivotal in her growth.

She says, "Carol Carter has been a longtime friend of my family and is simply the most amazing and inspiring woman I have met in this industry. I worked very closely with Diana Bennett during the opening of the Luxor. She was a caring mother, a top executive and a great example of someone who balanced the demands of a high profile position with a home life."

While managing hundreds of employees over the years, Cassese feels fortunate that most have



Dona Cassese

done well. "I have only fired two people that have worked for me. I try to hire good employees because I believe my job is to make sure the staff enjoys their work and gets the appropriate recognition. I feel that I've developed close relationships with them and am confident that they would rally around me if I needed them," says Cassese.

The casino industry requires dedication and a time commitment. Cassese would urge women entering the industry to address time constraints on their personal lives. She says, "I think it is easier for women to enter the business now than in the 1980s. Truthfully, intelligent younger women have great opportunity at casino properties. Women in this business have to work harder for more time to gain and retain the recognition they deserve. Women must be strong, driven and have a true passion for their jobs and their companies. This industry can be rough and is not for the weak at heart."

As a 24-hour business, the demands on executives are greater. Cassese says while working at casinos, she could be there all the time. "I threw a large event every New Year's Eve for 14 years.

When I left the property side of the business, I didn't know what to do on many weekends and holidays. Now that I have a family, I see that married women must have a strong support group and a partner that is helpful at home," says Cassese.

Even with the demands on personal time, Cassese encourages women to throw themselves into the challenges of senior management positions whenever possible.

She says, "There are more women in high-ranking jobs than may be expected, although they may not get public exposure. I think that our society has tried to be open to the fact that women can and do juggle the roles of executive and mother. The disadvantage is that even today, our male associates still primarily fill most of the highest positions, although it is improving."

Cassese has surpassed many of the career mountains she had aimed to climb. She never imagined herself in the gaming business, but credits her success to working longer and harder, being open to new opportunities and surrounding herself with very talented people.

Not Just One of the Boys

Maureen Mullarkey, *Chief Financial Officer, International Game Technology*

Being a woman surrounded by men should be nothing new for Maureen Mullarkey. She grew up in suburban Chicago with older brothers. "Whatever my brothers did, I wanted to do," she says. "I also had to learn to fend for myself as the youngest." Self reliance and resiliency were also required skills after she lost her mother as a teenager. "That was defining because we were all in sort of a survival mode," she says. But in Mullarkey's case, there was no boundary between surviving and succeeding.

"We've had success in promoting women and people of different ethnic backgrounds.

And hopefully, other companies are doing the same thing."

Going to college in Texas, she majored in geology—another male-dominated field. "If you think gaming has a lot of men, you should see the oil industry," she laughs. "While an unconventional route to finance and gaming, it was good for a couple of reasons. The scientific method helped develop my analytical thinking and related skills. And, most of the students there were men."

Mullarkey began her career in the oil business in the early 1980s. "I was really not satisfied with the professional opportunities," she says. "At that time the price of oil was quite low, which meant good jobs were hard to find."

Now in Reno, Mullarkey decided to finish her MBA at the University of Nevada. "Then, in January 1989, I answered an ad for Revenue Analyst for IGT," she says. "I was actually hoping for an opportunity at IGT. It was not a big company at the time, but it had a big presence in the town."

Mullarkey says that outgoing IGT chairman Thomas Baker was a key mentor for her. "The culture here has always been to promote from within, and to give people 'stretch' projects," she says. "We saw new markets open up in Indian gaming and in several riverboat jurisdictions...we put almost two billion dollars in acquisitions on the balance sheet. It's been a great and fantastic ride."

She's open about the stresses of the job. "It's pretty demanding," says Mullarkey. "But I could not do a job like this without having a great staff, both here in Nevada and worldwide."

In 1996, Mullarkey became the first woman promoted to a vice president position in the company. Mullarkey says the promotion was not completely without its burden.

"I was cognizant that people were watching me," she says. "Which was fine. One of the characteristics that I work hard on is to be consistent in what I say and what I do. I felt the pressure with the realization that I was carrying the flag for others coming up through the ranks as well. When you're out in front and feeling a little different, it is important to be confident of your abilities; but it is also key to make the people around you feel comfortable. Have a sense of humor. Make people relax."

Now, Mullarkey points out, there are several women in vice-presidential roles at IGT. "I am pleased to see more and more women in the VP ranks," she says. "They're across the company in accounting, sales, product management and compliance to name a few. We've had success in promoting women and people of different ethnic backgrounds. And hopefully, other companies are doing the same thing."

Her increasing responsibility at IGT also made Mullarkey a better leader. "I said, 'I cannot do all this work by myself,'" she says. "I've become a good delegator. I put energy into communicating effectively

and to understanding those around me."

Following her promotion to CFO in 1998, Mullarkey briefly left the company in 2000—and she's happy to be back. "What I realized then was that I worked for people of very high integrity. And my team...we had a practice of working together, which makes everyone more effective."

One wonders how Mullarkey maintains balance. Despite the demands of her job and her national status as a successful businesswoman—she recently appeared on a list of elite women in *Fortune* magazine—she has the openness, energy and positive air of a recent college graduate. "It takes time," she says. "You have to be committed to do the work. I've made sacrifices. Anything that's really important in life, you make sacrifices. But I think the most successful people are the ones who have help."

Maureen Mullarkey



Marianne Boyd Johnson,
Vice Chairman and Senior Vice President,
Boyd Gaming Corporation

“I think there are a lot of advantages to being a woman in today’s business,” says Marianne Boyd Johnson. “There’s no question the number of women in key executive positions is growing and I think as time goes on, we’ll see more and more in leadership positions.” She should know. She has been involved in gaming her entire life.

Johnson’s family first came to Las Vegas when her father (William Boyd, chairman and CEO of Boyd Gaming) moved there with his parents in 1941. “At that time, there were only about 10,000 people in the valley,” she says. “Growing up around the business, as my dad did and as I did with my two brothers, it’s easy to see how we ended up working in the family business. To that end, the greatest influence in my life probably goes without saying, but that would be my dad.”

As a teenager, Johnson worked in virtually every aspect of gaming properties, from the back of the house to the front desk. “I have a good understanding of how it all works,” she says. “I have been fortunate to have role models like my dad and my grandfather. They taught me the importance of integrity and hard work. While I never really worked directly with my grandfather, as I have with my dad, he was still an important influence.”

Johnson believes that women are coming into their own in today’s gaming world. “I think women offer a different perspective and for the most part, companies just recently began to realize that, and we’re seeing more women in key positions,” she says. “At our company, we have many women key executives at both the corporate and property levels. When you think about it, the gaming industry really didn’t get going until the 1990s when proliferation created opportunities for new companies, public traded companies and new markets.”



Marianne Boyd Johnson

“I think women offer a different perspective and for the most part, companies just recently began to realize that, and we’re seeing more women in key positions.”

In fact, Johnson’s memory spans over a valuable portion of gaming history. According to Johnson, gaming has changed greatly over the years, but one thing still stays constant: “the casino business was always about fun,” she says. “And today, the casino entertainment product is so much more than just the gaming—it includes great restaurants, celebrity chefs, great rooms, world class shopping,

amazing golf courses and a variety of shows and name entertainment. I don’t think any of us, including my grandfather, had any idea gaming would become so widespread, having some form of gambling in nearly every state, and mean so many different things, in terms of entertainment.”

Is the growth of the industry helping the proliferation of women in gaming? “It’s evolving, there’s no question,” says Johnson. “I remember when my grandfather was the first to hire women dealers. That gave way to more women working in the business, and eventually, making their way up the ladder to today, where we have many women in key positions throughout the industry. As time goes on, I think we’ll see more (women in key gaming roles).”

Her perspective includes not just employers, but the entire market demographic as well. “In the early days, even the casino customer demo consisted almost entirely of men,” says Johnson. “Not until casino operators began to see the slot business take off did the business really start to reach women. Considering that most casino customers are women today, it seems only natural that women play a more integral part of operating the business.”

Typical of women in gaming today, Johnson is obviously very quick to credit those around her. “I think gaming is moving in the right direction, and I’m proud of where our company is today in that regard,” she says. “As an example, Judy Campbell leads our most successful riverboat operation, the Blue Chip Casino and Hotel in Michigan City, Indiana. She has been an employee for more than 20 years and has worked her way up over that time. I believe her story of success helps to create opportunities for other women throughout the industry, as well as our company. I think in a male-dominated industry, the more examples we have like Judy the more opportunities there will be for women in the future.”



Christie Eickelman,
Director of Worldwide Marketing,
Gaming Laboratories International (GLI)

She might have come from a small town, but just by being herself, Christie Eickelman embodies a solid definition of big-time success.

Born in tiny Belle Fourche, South Dakota, Eickelman started as a marketing representative at Sodak Gaming in 1991 “when Indian gaming was at the very beginning,” she says. Eventually—though actually over a very short time—she became director of marketing at Sodak. “I was one of the first 20 employees there,” says Eickelman. “My department basically designed the logo and the appearance of Sodak Gaming. It gives you great pride, but then you have to move forward.” In 1994, Eickelman’s drive for new experiences led her to a start-up gaming company in Grand Junction, Colorado as vice president of marketing and public relations. Following the position in Colorado and a short break from gaming, she arrived at Gaming Laboratories International in 1999 as marketing manager.

Typical of Eickelman, she climbed the GLI ranks quickly, becoming director of marketing and development, and then, in 2003, director of worldwide marketing. Also typical of Eickelman is that she is reticent, even dismissive, about crediting herself for any of this.

“I don’t view myself as an ego-based person,” she says. “I think there are a lot of women in gaming that no one knows about. I’m not involved in the industry from an oper-

ator or supplier standpoint. I came from that world, and I work with a lot of successful women in the supplier’s arena. And nobody knows about them. I choose to put the people at the forefront that I feel as a whole make the company a success. I think that was my biggest thing at Sodak Gaming. There were a lot of people that made it a success. It’s all a team effort.

“We have 250 people in North America that make GLI a success,” she continues about her current company. “And there are the behind the scenes people that make this company look as successful and be as successful as it is.”

Still, Eickelman seems very comfortable where she is. “Before, I wanted to conquer the world. Now I look back and say, ‘wow, that was exhausting... Now I just want to do a great job at what I’m doing.’”

“I don’t feel I’m a great woman in gaming. I just feel like I am doing my job, hopefully to the best of ability and hopefully learning from others as I go along.”

She talks about balance, and boundaries. “I’m single,” she says. “And sometimes (balancing work and off-time) is overwhelming for me, and I don’t know how men or women who might be married with kids can do it. I admire those people. If you feel it’s unbalanced, then you have to stop and look at where you’re at personally and professionally. People have to have boundaries and they have to set their limits as to what they will do and what they won’t do. You get to a certain level personally and professionally that you can hopefully make your own decisions. And the older you get the easier it is, hopefully.”

If she places importance on one thing for women, it’s setting goals. “If one bad experience happens, you can’t let that stop you,” she says. “People do sabotage themselves,

because it’s scary out there. But you have to continue toward what your dreams and your goals are.”

How does Eickelman define success? Given her small-town roots, she says that success is relative only to who you are. “The people in small towns are just as successful,” she says. “I always say that there are some people that like living in small towns—they love that feeling of belonging. And that’s a great feeling. I had different goals and different aspirations for myself. If that’s where they choose to be, then great success for them.”

The support she got from her small town, and her other mentors, are central to who Eickelman is. “Coming from a small town, I think the people that help you most there is your family,” she says. “And then from that point on, it’s just strong mentors in the business. I love the fact that the people around you, male or female, have something to teach you.

“I like to learn from other people. This is a thing that’s overwhelming for me on this... I don’t feel I’m a great woman in gaming. I just feel like I am doing my job, hopefully to the best of ability and hopefully learning from others as I go along.”

She acknowledges that some influences are better than others—and that some challenges remain for women in gaming and in other industries. “You can’t be afraid to ask questions,” she says. “But the person who has the knowledge can sometimes tend to talk down to you. And that will keep you from learning and growing to make yourself better.

“Unfortunately there is a glass ceiling, not just in gaming,” Eickelman observes. “I’ve never felt that male-female type thing. There are women out there that feel that, and they’ve been held back. This is a male-dominated business, but there are a lot of very successful women that have evolved in it and there’s going to continue to be more.”

Eickelman feels that women as a whole are a tremendous asset to gaming. “We all have a message,” Eickelman says, “and if we can get that out there to women who are up and coming, then the more successful the industry will be.”

What is Eickelman’s message? “Everything happens for a reason,” she says. “And you can choose to learn from it, or not.”



Staci Columbo

After 18 years in gaming, Staci Columbo still sparkles with passion. Her path through gaming—and life—is the result of that passion, combined with a good dose of hard work, and, perhaps, just a sprinkle of luck. She is one of the fortunate few who has formed her life according to who she is.

Born and raised outside Philadelphia, Columbo started her gaming career as a slot club representative at Atlantic City's Tropicana in 1987. "I fell into the position, as I think many have," says Columbo. "But within three days, I knew that this was the career for the rest of my life. It hit me like a thunderbolt. And I just fell in love with it. I loved everything about the business."

Typical of Columbo, she quickly tried all different shifts that the position offered. She cites Pam Popielarski, then the vice president of marketing at the AC Tropicana, as a major influence for her. "(Pam) allowed me to grow up in the business," says Columbo. "I was so energetic and I was so interested in all the pieces of marketing that I literally moved into every position in marketing in the seven years that I was in Atlantic City."

Columbo worried a little when she requested a transfer to the Tropicana in Las Vegas. Some around her questioned the decision, and she may have as well. "But in hindsight now I know that I was just so excited about knowing everything about the business," she says. "I just couldn't get enough of it."

In fact, she became both the youngest and the first female casino host at the Tropicana Las Vegas. "At this point in the industry in Las Vegas the slot host and the casino host were two very different departments," says Columbo. "I think that anybody can reflect back that even at that

A Very Purpose-Driven Life

Staci Columbo,

Corporate Vice President, Marketing & Advertising, Station Casinos Inc.

point slots were 'something that the wives did.' So I was a young female from Atlantic City coming into an all-male department. I think that some of the men would question how I got there. But it took a very short time seeing my commitment and hard work that I was 'one of the boys' very quickly."

By itself, being a woman in gaming doesn't occur much to Columbo. She is comfortable with herself, to start, and to her gender was never a factor. "I don't know whether it's because I entered into the business in Atlantic City, or the timing in the late 80s, but I wasn't as exposed to the alleged 'old boys club' as much as maybe others," she says. "In Atlantic City there were always so many women executives that you didn't think differently. I don't think you limited yourself as a female...there were so many women already in those roles that it was just never a thought. I don't feel that I've ever been denied a job, or gotten a job, because of my gender. It just really hasn't played a factor in my career."

That career took her to the Luxor, where she helped open the facility as special events and marketing manager. There, she met Diana Bennett, who "is without a doubt the second most influential person in my career," she says. "Diana brought into my experience the balance of personalizing yourself and spending a little bit more time getting to know the people you work with every day, and how that pays off. You always felt special with your time with her, you felt that she was listening to you. She recognized each individual effort. I still use so much of what she taught me by example today."

Following stints in senior-level marketing positions at Station and the Las Vegas Hilton, Columbo landed back at Station Casinos. The move was, as is everything in Columbo's life, driven by who she is. "I'm more comfortable in the local market," she says. "I enjoy getting to know guests and I enjoy being able to measure the success of my programs in a relatively short time. So the local market is a natural fit for my style and passion for the business. Station is not only a great place to work (the company was recently named one of the Top 100 Best Places to Work by *Fortune* magazine), but has a model that fits who I am."

She talks about her work with Stephen Cavallaro, Station's chief operating officer, very reverently. "What I think left most of a mark with Steve is that it could be fifteen hour days—

and there were a lot of them—and he always found the time to bring in a little bit of 'personal' to the day...just breaking it up a little bit, and making you want to work harder. That made me a better leader."

In fact, that time in her life, which also included the birth of her son, Noah, changed Columbo profoundly. "I think that if you had to ask people to describe me, they would say that I'm a workaholic, or I'm very intense, and you always know where you stand and I'm just there for results," she says. "And I think since I became a mother and I've been exposed to leaders like Steve, I'm a little bit more balanced and that shows in my style of leadership."

Columbo exercises her leadership on the board of directors for Shade Tree Shelter, a refuge for homeless and abused women and children. She also has her own project underway, called Noah's Animal House—named for her son, and for two of her greatest non-gaming passions, animals and her connection to God. That project will serve women, children and their pets in abusive domestic situations.

This reflects Columbo's passion, and her greatest wish for people. "I really think that your community commitments really have to come with what makes you tick," she says. "Each one of us is unique for a reason. I'm lucky enough that I was able to recognize what my gifts were. Some people, I think, don't ever slow down enough to find out what it is that stimulates them the most, or they never experience enough different things in order to go, 'oh, that's the one that I was most excited about.' Finding a career that you love is where it starts. So if people are in current positions or with current companies that in your gut you know are just not meant for you, I think people need to have the ability to take that risk and make a change. Because when you get it, you know it."

One word that adequately describes Columbo is "strong." According to her, strength comes from the ability to recognize experiences—both successful and tragic—as lessons. "I'm an example of somebody who can have both," she says. "I'm a single mom—his father's in heaven—and I still work a lot of hours and I still have my best friend (four-year-old Noah) and I'm his. If anybody thinks they can't do it, they can just run with me for a day. Because you can. You really can, and do it right. I think it is sacrifices, I think it is hard work, I think it is priorities. And I think you can do it all."