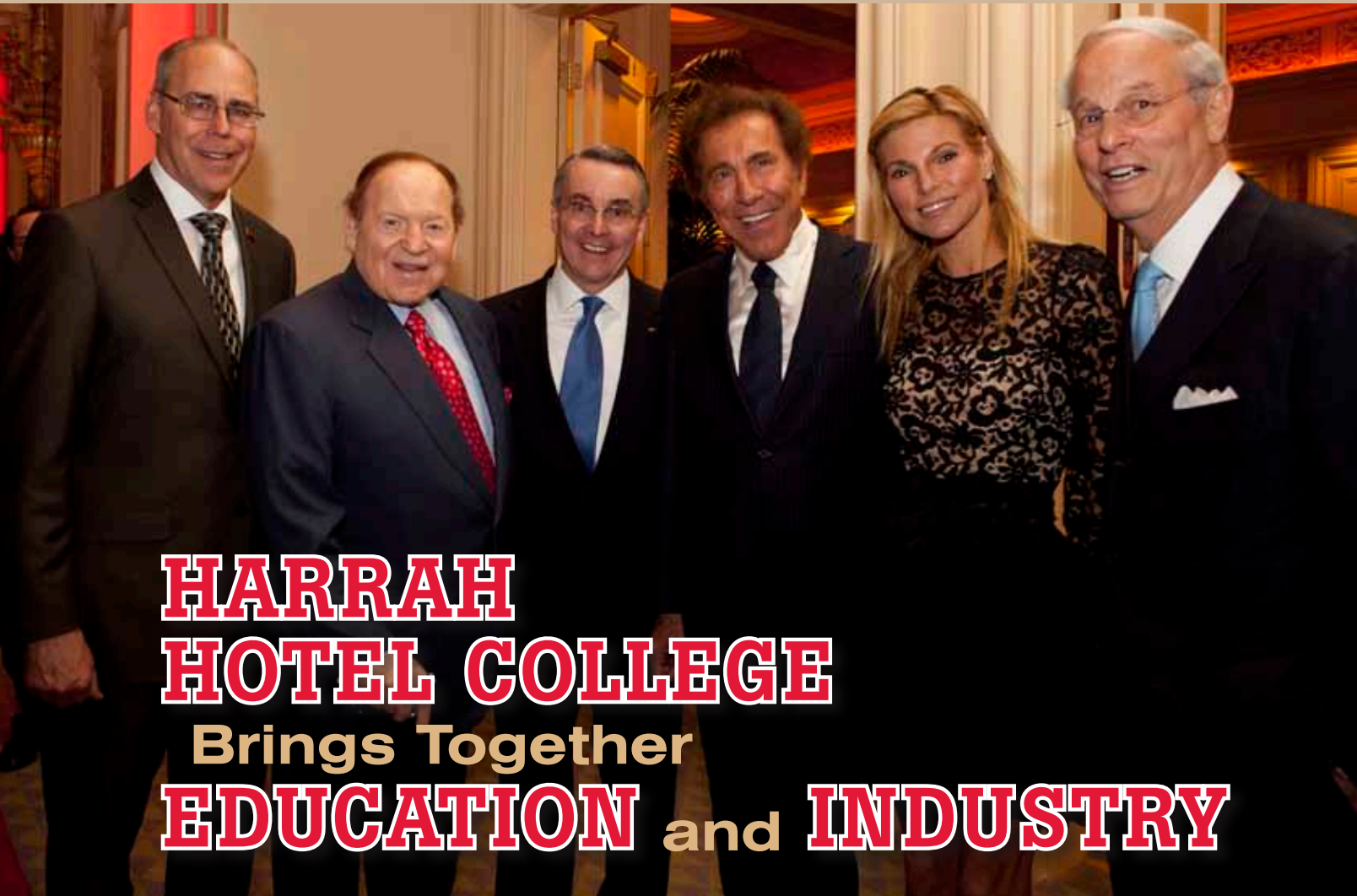


PREMIER

Fall/Winter 2012



HARRAH HOTEL COLLEGE Brings Together EDUCATION and INDUSTRY

UNLV President Neal Smatresk; Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer Sheldon G. Adelson, Las Vegas Sands Corp.; Harrah Hotel College Dean Donald D. Snyder; Chief Executive Officer Steve Wynn, Wynn Resorts; Andrea Wynn; and President of the American Gaming Association Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr.

UNLV

MHA Program *Turns 12*

Gael Hancock, '09 MS

It was the year 2000, and the Harrah Hotel College was ready to roll out a new degree — a risky undertaking at best. An online degree program was one thing, but at the graduate level? How would this even work? Who would take the courses? How would this degree be accepted in the industry?

Participation in the Master's of Hospitality Administration program during the first few years was exciting and occasionally challenging. "When we started in the program, there was no Skype, no easy file-sharing system, and Wi-Fi was virtually unheard of," says Amy Beaulieu, the first graduate of the program. "Dr. Curtis Love wanted us to connect with each other as a class. All of a sudden, through the mail, we were receiving these big microphones and speakers to connect to the computer — everything wasn't built in as it is today," Beaulieu continues.

Beaulieu and fellow graduate Niesa Silzer in Calgary, Canada, got acquainted in the program and are still friends today. They see each other at least once a year at various meetings and event conferences. Their lasting friendship is one of many that have developed through the MHA program. "I almost feel like I know the online students better than I know the students in class," says Love. "The MHA students will respond to discussion board questions with detailed stories, anecdotes, and personal opinions — responses you don't always get in a face-to-face class. I'm sure the students get to know each other very well."

Because the program requires three or more years of management experience in the hospitality industry, most of the students are between 30 and 50 years of age. They bring a wealth of experience to the classroom, and the students learn as much from each other as they do from the faculty through the discussion boards and collaborative projects. (Yes, they work, even in online classrooms.)

The MHA program has gone through a number of iterations during the last 12 years. Originally, the program had cohorts of students who entered at the same time, took the same classes, and graduated as a group. This didn't work for people in the hospitality industry, who often work 70-plus-hour weeks and even longer in a crisis.

Today, students can start the program at any time, register for the classes they want, and study when it is convenient. The program's 30 credits are usually completed in 18 to 24 months, but some have completed it in one year by taking two courses in each of the five eight-week sessions.

The fact that that the program qualifies for financial aid has contributed to its success.

Cynthia Mejia is currently a Ph.D. student at Texas Tech and a graduate from the program. Just after graduation, she said, "The MHA program definitely gave me an edge on the interview process. I really don't think anyone would have taken a serious look at me with three years off from the industry without some higher education under my belt." Mejia was a chef instructor at Le Cordon Bleu Institute of Culinary Arts Dallas before being admitted into the Ph.D. program.

The MHA program boasts 132 graduates and a current enrollment of 87 students. In December, the college will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the first graduate, with a reception following the graduation ceremony December 18. ■■

