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Winter '21



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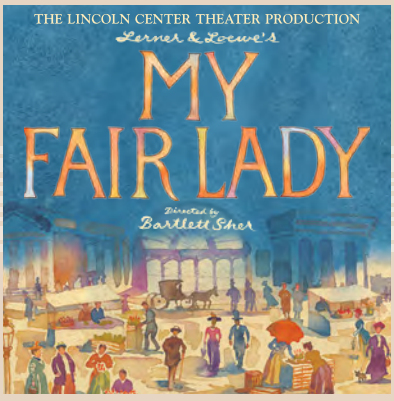

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Editor's Note

EAT SOME FEELINGS

Our Restaurant Awards issue is an annual celebration of culinary excellence in Las Vegas, but this year, all the glammy awards-show feels are a bit more complicated. Sure, there's surprise and excitement, there's pride and triumph, there's the thrill of victory and the agony of et cetera. However, I'd be remiss if we didn't take something like a metaphorical moment of silence as we continue to step cautiously into the New Whatever: A solemn acknowledgment of the widespread restaurant closures, the loss of livelihoods, and the upsetting disruption to Vegas' protean culinary brilliance. I feel like every restaurant currently existing in Las Vegas all deserve an extra sweepstakes hug for managing to, well, exist — never mind excel — through one of Las Vegas' most brutally challenging episodes.

Restaurants are vital to Las Vegas, and not just economically. Sharing food is at the center of our city's spirit and practice of hospitality. But, as we've all learned from the pandemic, restaurants also compose a fragile network held together by tenuous financial realities — slim margins, volatile supply prices, high turnover, and outmoded wage systems. Over the pandemic year, I learned a lot about the often improvised high-wire hustle that restaurants perform every day just to get by. My admiration for the magic they daily perform for locals and tourists alike has only increased. So, on the surface, this year's awards may represent a happy return to normal (whatever that means anymore), but our esteem for this year's honorees is anything but routine.

Andrew Kiraly
EDITOR

OH YEAH, ALSO

1. Six years after its season finale, *CSI* is back as (drum roll) *CSI: Vegas*. What's new in the rebooted version of this crime-forensics classic that brought a murdery vision of Las Vegas to millions of TV screens? Our film and TV critic Josh Bell does some of his own forensics on the revived show in Fifth Street, our weekly email newsletter. Check it out at knpr.org/fifth-street



2. DELETED SCENES FROM DUNE
1. Paul Atreides' messianic quest turns out to be mostly real-estate deals and so-so bars. **2.** Every time Arrakis resident spills water, they're knocked out by brutal hockey player. **3.** Jim Rhodes on windswept cliff: "Blue Diamond Heights will be an exclusive luxury community perched on the dramatic dunes of—" [swallowed by sandworm] **4.** Flashback to Duke Leto's first time ingesting spice; hugs everyone, listens to shitty techno music **5.** Harkonnen forces capture Arrakis with surprising speed; space media blames Biden **6.** Deserts forced to close when they can't hire enough sandworms to attack hapless interlopers. **7.** Infuriatingly, Clark County allows development right up to edge of Arrakis National Conservation Area. **8.** Rain falls. "We sure need that," says every dad on Dune.

ANDREW KIRALY; CHRISTOPHER SMITH; CSI: SONJA FLEMMING/CBS ©2021 CBS BROADCASTING, INC.

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PUBLISHER Jerry Nadal
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF REVENUE Favian Perez
EDITOR Andrew Kiraly
ART DIRECTOR Christopher Smith
DEPUTY EDITOR Heidi Kyser

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Justine Spencer, Kim Treviño

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DISTRIBUTION MANAGER Kim Treviño
WEB ADMINISTRATOR Stanley Kan

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Dawn-Michelle Baude, Jim Begley, Josh Bell, Brent Holmes, Bert Johnson, John M. Glionna, Melanie Hope, Alan Gegax, Christie Moeller, José Roach Orduña, Lissa Townsend Rodgers, Jason Scavone, Geoff Schumacher, Paul Szydelko, Greg Thilmont, Mitchell Wilburn, Rachel Wilson

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

Randi Lynn Beach, Brent Holmes, Sabin Orr

CONTACT

EDITORIAL: Andrew Kiraly, (702) 259-7856; andrew@desertcompanion.com
FAX: 888-JUS-TEXT
ADVERTISING: Favian Perez (702) 259-7813; favian@desertcompanion.com
SUBSCRIPTIONS: Kim Treviño (702) 259-7848; kim@desertcompanion.com
WEBSITE: www.desertcompanion.com

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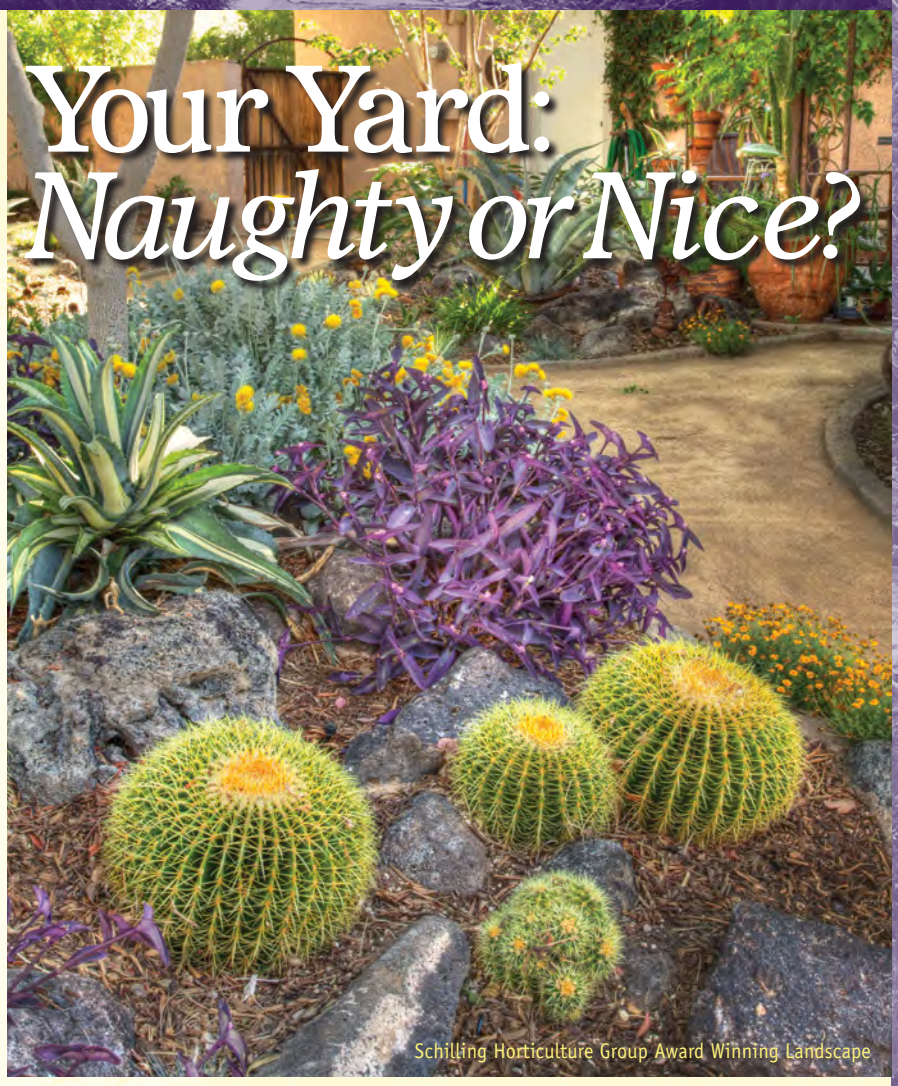
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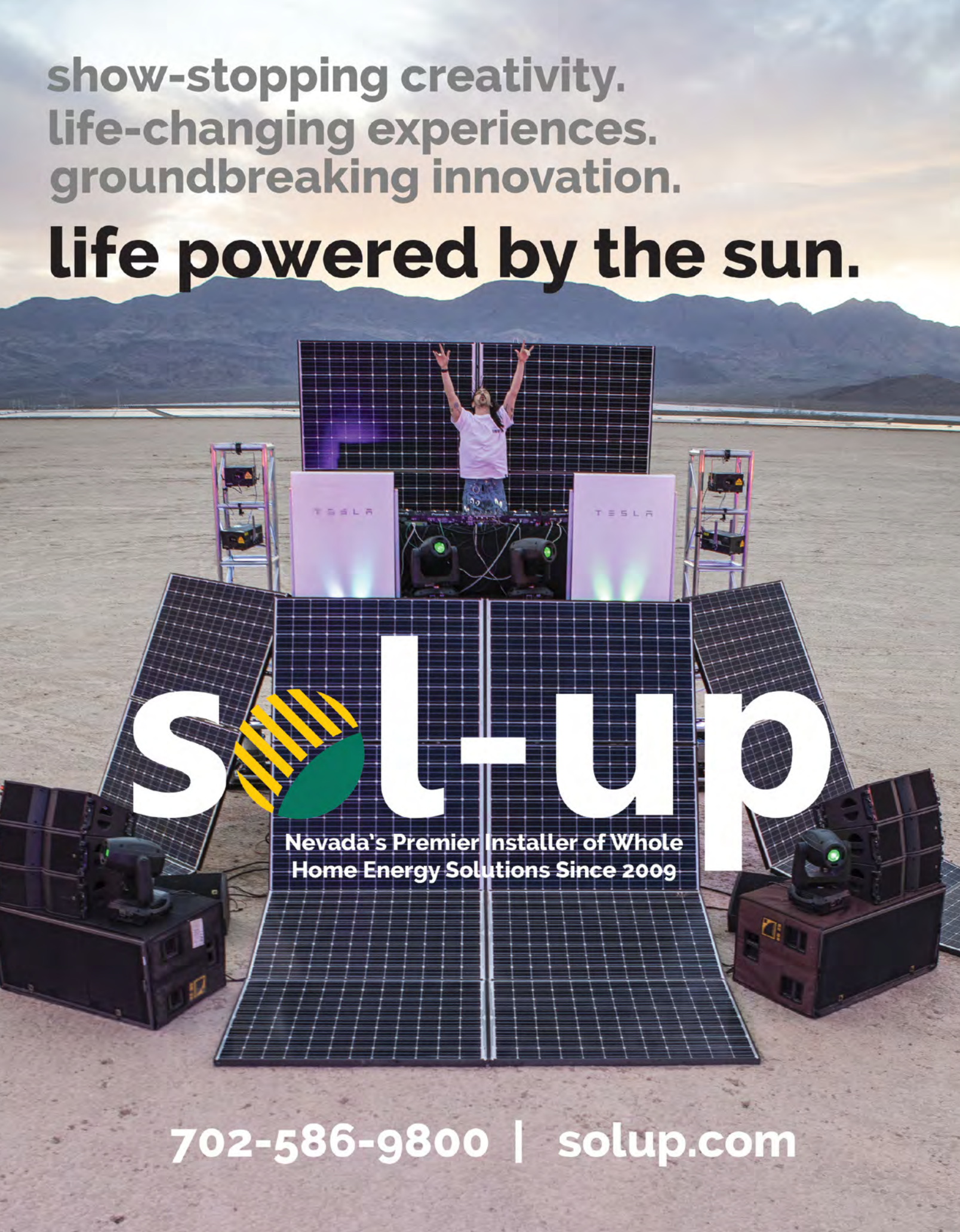

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ALL THINGS

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ECONOMY

We Got Served

Where have all our restaurant workers gone? The Great Resignation has Las Vegas sandwiched into a tough spot

By Andrew Kiraly

So much for the power of love. It turns out that all our lavish professions of support for "essential" restaurant workers amid the thick of the pandemic weren't quite enough to keep them around in the aftermath. The new daily special at your favorite spot is likely a sour dish called "Help Wanted." In other words, there's a dramatic shortage of restaurant workers in Las Vegas and across the U.S. According to the National Restaurant Association, 78 percent of restaurant operators say they don't have enough employees to meet customer demand, resulting in reduced hours, smaller menus, and shrunken seating capacity. That fact seems to hit with particularly grim resonance in Las Vegas, a city purportedly built on hospitality. We should be a little extra worried.

Where have all our restaurant workers gone? It's a disappearing act worthy of a Strip magic show. I've talked to nearly a dozen people at various points on the food-and-beverage industry map — from servers and bartenders to food journalists to industry executives — and their hypotheses jigsaw together to form a troubling composite of a long-neglected culinary underclass that's having a moment of deep reckoning with its chosen occupation.

The fact that restaurant workers are having a reckoning at all is kind of a big deal. Restaurant work — a harried, nonstop collective hustle that, I'm told, can be symphonically gratifying, yes, but is also psychically draining and physically punishing — doesn't seem to allow much time for a hard pause and a long look in the mirror. There's simply too much work to do. In that sense, the pandemic forced a reboot for a stratum of workers who, previously, barely had time to come up for air. Between stimulus money and unemployment checks, a little breathing room was, at last, an affordable luxury. In some ways, what we're witnessing is a capsule lesson in what a basic income can do for people: hoist from the workaday fray a stable platform from which to finally *consider your options*. Some workers went back to school to learn a new skill. Some got their

real estate licenses. Some discovered a new job market in the expanding realm of remote work opportunities. Others, constitutionally suited to the credo of tireless hustle that reigns in restaurant work culture, plunged into the gig economy.

This isn't to say that working in the food and beverage industry is hell. It's more like volume-driven, gratuity-powered restaurant work is its own kind of golden handcuffs; the churn gives and the churn depletes at the same time. Matthew Seevers was a longtime bartender at the Fiesta Henderson before he was laid off in March 2020. A member of the Culinary Union, Seevers is waiting for the Fiesta Henderson to reopen — waiting, but certainly not idling. He's since been cobbling together a paycheck with two part-time bartending jobs at Virgin Hotels and Area 15, and he's also gone back to school; he expects to graduate from CSN in fall 2022 with an associate's degree in cybersecurity. "I wasn't planning on starting a new career, but I had to find a plan B," he tells me. He enjoys bartending — "I love building rapport with locals, I love when they keep coming back, it's like a family situation" — but now he's got options. That's someone with 17 years of experience eyeing the door.

Which raises another question: In the turbid wake of The Great Resignation, what happens to all those person-years, that compounded expertise, those relationships, all that emotional intelligence, all those intangibles that compose the mosaic of hospitality culture? For a city whose brand banks on it and whose identity is rooted in it, this isn't just a labor shortage. It's a perniciously specific kind of brain drain — amid industries (food service and accommodations) that already have some of the highest turnover rates. Also as I write this, the Culinary Union has staged two marches on the Strip to draw attention to the fact that 21,000 union workers have not been hired back to their old jobs since the shutdown. It's not hard to imagine how such austerity measures are impacting service on the Strip.

One of the dismal ironies lurking beneath this is that despite Las Vegas' vaunted service and hospitality, we've never treated our rank-and-file workers as well as we should. The might of the Culinary Union is an exception in a "right to work" state whose spirit animal is something more like Station Casinos, which has been feuding bitterly with the Culinary for decades. Off the Strip, where collective bargaining power fades, it was only in 2019 that the state Legislature passed a law setting annual minimum wage increases through July 2024; the last boost was in 2010. A ballot question in 2022 will propose to amend the Nevada Constitution to provide an across-the-board $12 minimum wage and tie it to the federal minimum wage. I don't imagine it's something that restaurants — already navigating skinny profit margins, rising food costs, and supply-chain problems — are looking forward to. For their part, some restaurants are toying with pay structure in hopes of attracting and retaining talent. Brian Howard, owner of Sparrow + Wolf, is experimenting with tip-sharing to smooth out pay disparities. (Tip-sharing isn't exactly considered progressive, but at least he's questioning perverse compensation structures we consider "natural.") And, for a short time during the pandemic, popular Thai restaurant Lotus of Siam allowed patrons to pay an optional 3 percent fee that goes toward employee health insurance. If these tentative experiments are the start of chipping away at the strange, calcified micro-economies of restaurants, great.

Diners, too, are part of the help that's wanted. As consumers, we need to rethink some of the comfortable assumptions we literally bring to the table every time we dine out. Maybe we should be willing to pay more for restaurant food. Maybe tipping as a form of wage support should go away in favor of fair, consistent pay structures. Maybe we can remember that, behind the tourist-facing façade, Las Vegas is a town of proud, truly essential workers who make our promise of hospitality a reality. ✦

(The following contributed background for this article: Eric C. Gladstone of Feast of Friends; Greg Thilmont and Mitchell Wilburn, dining writers; Alexandra Dazlich of the Nevada Restaurant Association; Bethany Khan of the Culinary Union; Lorraine Moss, KNPR producer; and writers Kim Foster Brittany Bronson.)

DESIGN

Three of a Kind

In a world of Instagram moments, does resort design matter? Three new casinos embrace modern modularity

BY ***Lissa Townsend Rodgers***

The past year should have been a disaster for Las Vegas casinos — heck, back in March 2020, some were predicting the town would disappear altogether. Yet within eight months of each other, three new casino resorts opened in Sin City: Circa, Virgin Hotels Las Vegas, and Resorts World, a burst of debuts causing a stir that evoked the Dunes, Riviera, and Moulin Rouge all flinging their doors open in the spring of 1955. Much as those three properties said something about the globetrotting aspirations of midcentury tourists, this 21st-century trio tells us how people's expectations of a Vegas resort have changed — and how they've stayed the same.

Circa Resort & Casino is the first to be built Downtown in more than four decades, and its impact is visible — perhaps most visible — from a distance. While the rest of the hotel-casinos in the neighborhood look like office buildings with bits of sparkly adornment tacked on, Circa's shimmering marquee rises above the skyline like the tailfin on a vintage Cadillac. Inside, it's basically a Vegas-themed Vegas casino. "Building upon our location and history was at the forefront during the design process," says Alice O'Keefe, Circa's director of design and architecture. She explains how the local flavor flows throughout the property in design elements such as the framed shadow boxes in the elevator lobbies. "Each elevator has a different photo that captures one of the eras throughout our history," she explains, adding that the artwork on each floor is a unique collage with layered vintage photos. The throwback style continues right through to guest rooms' mid-mod Murphy beds and gilt wallpaper featuring casino chips and pinup girls.

CASA CALAVERA COURTESY VIRGIN HOTELS LAS VEGAS

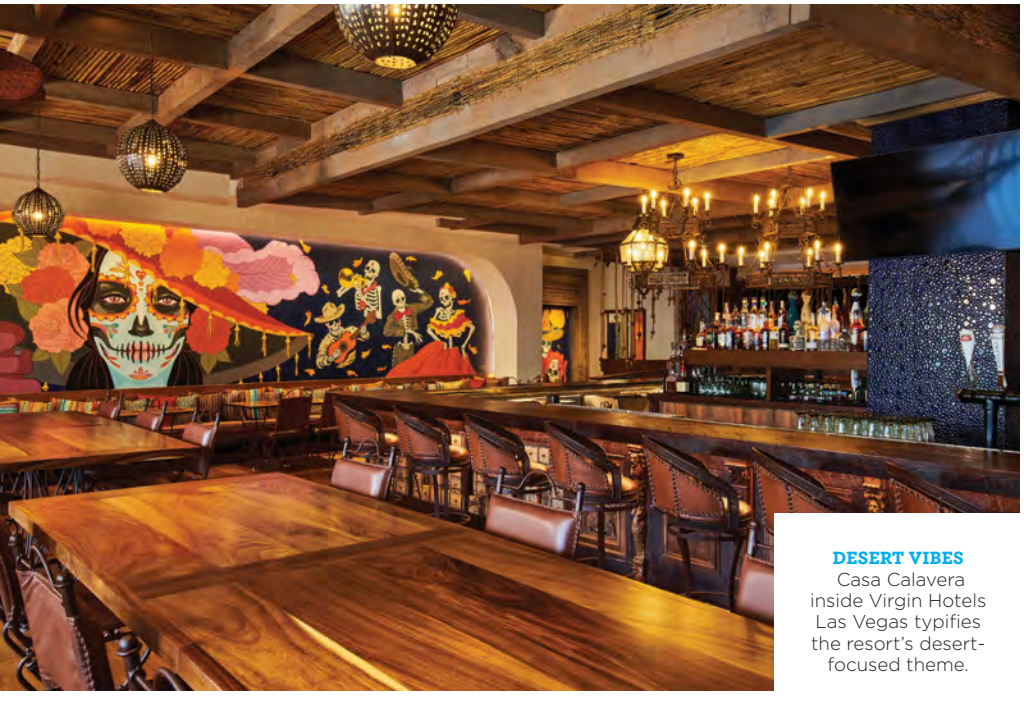
The apex of all this memorabilia is Vegas Vickie, the 25-foot-tall neon cowgirl who spent decades perched outside the Glitter Gulch strip club on Fremont; now she's the city's biggest lounge act, kicking her white boots toward a gold-draped bar. The other dominant feature is the two-story wall of video screens that comprise Circa's enormous sports book. There's not a lot of architectural flair to the interior, but uniquely Vegas artwork and memorabilia give the spaces presence.

One of the three new properties already had a history — albeit one whose wrecking-ball remnants were dispatched to the Neon Museum. Virgin Hotels Las Vegas, once the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, with its vast pool complex and huge collection of memorabilia, is now a desert-themed resort, with a flair for sepia tones, wood finishes, and lots and lots of geodes. Richard "Boz" Bosworth, CEO of JC Hospitality, considers it a variation on local flavor. "We wanted to reflect the journey through the desert, because you are traveling through the desert to this hospitality mecca," he says. The pool complex has been redesigned to favor corporate events over twentysomething bacchanals; the "lazy river" has been filled in to expand the restaurants' outdoor space.

The casino, a collaboration with Mohegan Sun, is now an unbroken field of slots and tables, as the Center Bar — the first stop on many a night's debauchery tour — has been entirely removed. "We were able to pick up another 10,000 square feet of gaming," Bosworth explains, although he notes that removing the plumbing was quite a hassle. The new bar setup is to the side, and beyond that is the Shag Lounge, a dimly lit spot adorned with Indian draperies and Oriental rugs — the sort of upscale hippie den where Jimmy Page would frolic with Miss Pamela, a distinctly different vibe from the Center Bar's see-and-be-seen scene. The Virgin is a place where you have to discover the bar beyond a jeweled screen, find the restaurants behind frosted-glassed doors — even jumbo artworks like a neon dinosaur sign and Justin Favela piñata lowrider are stumbled upon.

Resorts World Las Vegas is by far the largest of the new properties, holding three hotels and a cavalcade of amenities within its 87-acre footprint. The property was originally intended to have a more traditionally Asian design (panda habitat!), but when Kara Siffermann joined the team as vice president of interior design, she sought "more of a modern look and feel — something that could cross over and be an elegant, upscale property but still appeal to many different demographics." The Crockfords Casino & Lounge feels a bit *Dynasty* with chrome, brass, and a white baby grand piano, while the Genting Palace is one of the spaces that embraces an Asian theme but with a Shanghai Lily flair of Art Deco jewel tones. (I wish the multi-cuisine dining court had embraced its *Blade Runner* possibilities, though.)

The gaming floor is vast, topped with a coffered ceiling and circled by silver-and-



DESERT VIBES Casa Calavera inside Virgin Hotels Las Vegas typifies the resort's desert-focused theme.

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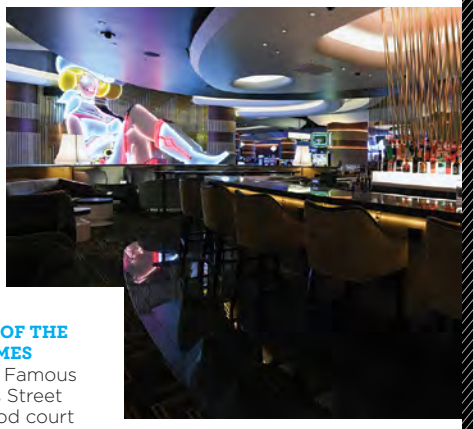

SIGNS OF THE TIMES
Above, Famous Foods Street Eats food court in Resorts World; right, Vegas Vickie greets visitors inside Circa

white pillars (which match nicely with the mirrored Rolls-Royce on loan from the Liberace Foundation), but the floor itself has been left fairly simple. "I think in the early '90s it was all about canopies and softness," Siffermann says, but she wanted something sleek and more flexible. "One of the unique things about our casino floor is it is a casino floor. You know where to go when you're ready to gamble." At one end of the gaming floor are the hotel lobbies; at the other is a glossy white shopping mall where winners can buy Judith Leiber handbags and losers can buy ice cream.

Once upon a time, every hotel-casino in Las Vegas had to have a show lounge and a steakhouse. Today, every property must have its Day of the Dead-themed Mexican restaurant, vaguely Gatsby cocktail lounge, hangover bridesmaids dayclub ... but the changes run deeper than just new fashions in nightlife. Theme used to be one of the main drivers of casino design — Caesars Palace, New York- New York, Paris — each prides itself on a whole-property vibe. The arrival of the 21st century has seen the single, high-impact identity dropped in favor of shiny towers with LED screens and sleek, generic interiors. When a sign needs to advertise a dozen restaurants and a half-dozen residencies, it's more important to have flexibility than branding. With food trends shifting faster than you can flip a burger, it's logical to have food and beverage spaces that can have their own identity — but can also be swapped out without ruining a whole style. The gaming floor used to deploy high design to distract from the rather utilitarian one-armed bandits lined up in rows. But today's slot machines are already relentlessly themed, whether it's a *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* machine topped with the glowing, larger-than-life visage of Gene Wilder or a cluster of 12-foot-high Buffalo Link games with a rampaging buffalo overhead and double-wide seats all round.

You'd think today's tourists, many of whom seem to take trips as much for the social media posts as the actual experience, would embrace aesthetic excess, but it only takes a few square feet in front of a neon cowgirl, paisley tent, or sequin-glittered Elvis mural to make an Instagram post. Why build a whole *Arabian Nights* city or Roman Colosseum when it's easier to throw up a minaret and pillar for guests to take a quick snap on the way to the Dean Martin's Wild Party slots? After all, despite the plethora of celebrity chefs, designer boutiques, decadent nightclubs, and pop-star residencies, Las Vegas casinos are still casinos: All you really need is a place to flip over the cards and roll the dice. ✦

Daniel Oppenheimer's *Far from Respectable: Dave Hickey and His Art* is a Texas mongrel. It's a book born out of the love of one man from Austin writing about another man from Austin via anecdote, confessional memoir, critical assessment, and scholarly exegesis. It's a mongrel with teeth. A few pages in and it's clear that Oppenheimer isn't just writing *about* Hickey. He's also, in his own way, writing *like* Hickey ... which means big ideas sidle right past if you're not paying attention.

Northwest of Austin, in our neon homeland of Las Vegas, the art-and-culture crowd remembers Hickey's irascible tenure at UNLV (1992-2010) and his $500,000 MacArthur Fellowship (2001). They remember how he held court in the velvety womb of the Peppermill lounge and curated the legendary exhibition, *Las Vegas Diaspora* (2007), which launched the careers of Tim Bavington, Sush Machida, and David Ryan, among others. Las Vegas is prime Hickey territory, Oppenheimer knows, but he's more interested in these questions: Are Hickey's award-winning books *Air Guitar* (1997) and *The Invisible Dragon* (1993) still relevant? And are they beautiful?

To find answers, Oppenheimer puts Hickey's position on art and democracy in his sights. A quick version of Hickey's argument goes like this: When we connect with works of art — visual, musical, literary, architectural — we're so thrilled or touched or abashed or bored by the aesthetics that we communicate our findings to others. These exchanges about the cultural objects we love or hate allow us to participate in, and construct, democracy from the ground up. Born of democracy, art influences democracy. The problem is that, as fellow reviewer Travis Diehl notes, Hickey largely omits the question of access. If not everyone gets a whack, then art's role in democracy is handicapped.



A BEAST FOR BEAUTY
Far from Respectable: Dave Hickey and His Art
by Daniel Oppenheimer
152 pages, $24.95
University of Texas Press

A more promising path from art to democracy is via Hickey's promotion of beauty — the foundation upon which he erected his genius

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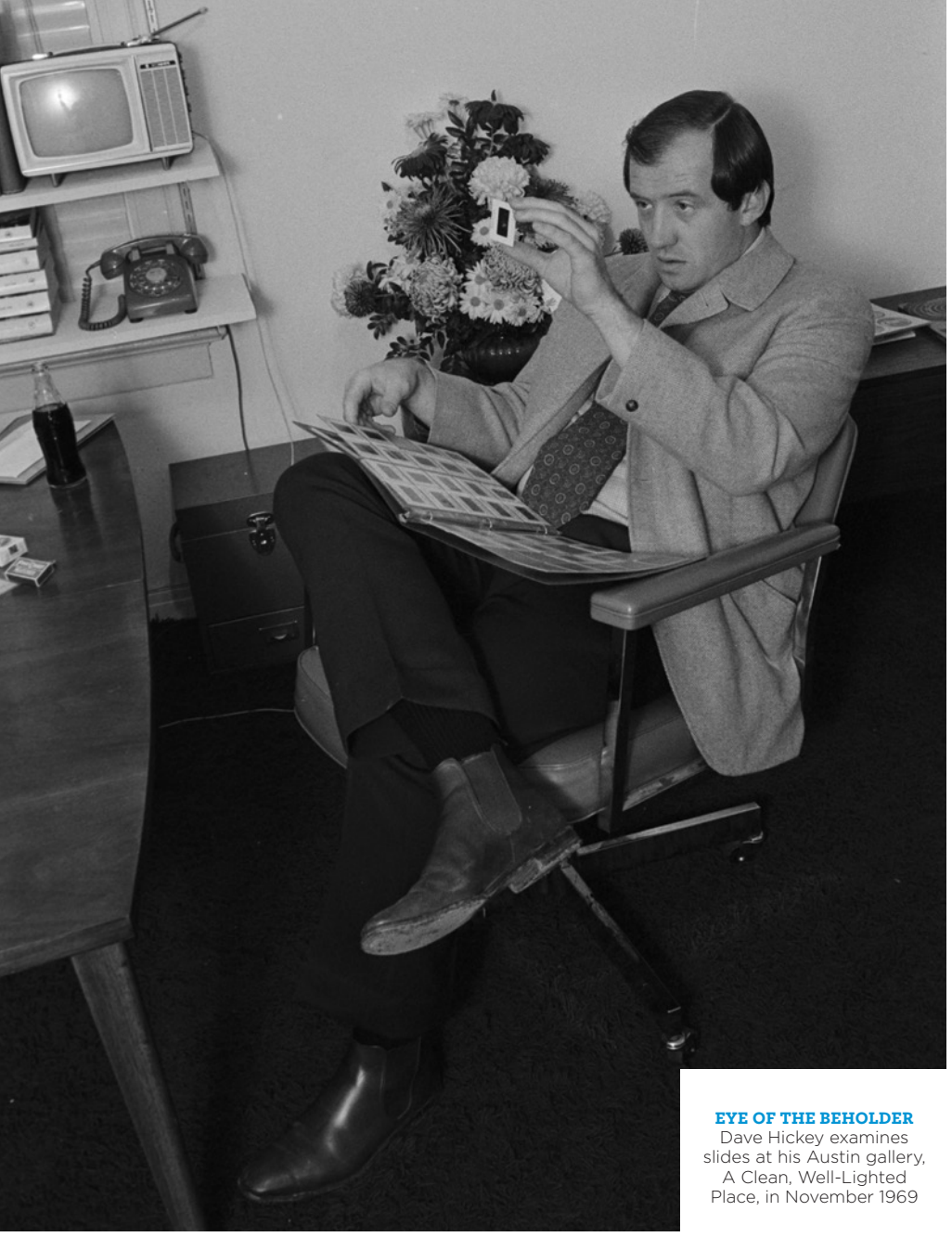

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER
Dave Hickey examines slides at his Austin gallery, A Clean, Well-Lighted Place, in November 1969

HICKEY PHOTO COURTESY THE AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN

BOOKS

Made You Look

In *Far from Respectable*, Daniel Oppenheimer considers the enduring beauty of Dave Hickey's ideas about beauty

BY ***Dawn-Michelle Baude***

in the 1990s. Oppenheimer neatly dissects Hickey's argument that defending provocative art against censorship by shouting "free speech" misses the point: It's the power of the artwork, or its "beauty," that should be defended because that's what got the censors so riled up in the first place. Explaining how and why Robert Mapplethorpe's homoerotic photographs are as beautiful as a Michelangelo fresco is more compelling than defaulting to the First Amendment. The latter is exactly what happened when Mapplethorpe's titillating exhibition was censored during the opening volley of the '90s culture wars. For Hickey, it was a missed opportunity. Explaining how and why that opportunity was lost occasioned not only some of Hickey's best writing, but also some of the best art writing of the 20th century — writing better than the art it describes.

Since Hickey made his reputation defending beauty, Oppenheimer brings in another writer, the philosopher Alexander Nehamas, to get at what Hickey meant. For Nehamas, beauty invites us to keep coming back for more. A person you're attracted to — or whom you find beautiful — makes you want to know more about that person. The same goes for books, art, music, and so on. You play "Billie Jean" again because it's not exhausted: It's still enticing you. Per Oppenheimer, while Hickey argued that our reactions to beauty prompt us to share our views (*Hey! Have you seen the latest Barrick exhibition?*), he missed the next step. Hickey explained how beauty is social, but omitted the come-hither quality in which beauty pulls us back, and deeper, again and again. The pull of what we personally find beautiful — the frayed edge of a cloud, the retro design of a video game — is open to all.

Well before the last chapter of *Far from Respectable*, it's clear that Oppenheimer finds Hickey himself beautiful. The Texan who led a messy, break-the-mold life marked by drug addiction and kamikaze surfer moves, who personified boomer bohemia and survived to tell the tale, who never left his Austin roots behind although he climbed to the pinnacle of the ivory tower, is beautiful. And Hickey's writing is beautiful because it keeps leading the reader deeper with its nimble allusions and astute connections. To write this review, I had to go from Oppenheimer's *Far from Respectable* back to Hickey's *Air Guitar*, and from there to Flaubert's celebrated short story "A Simple Heart," and from there to the Book of Job in the Old Testament. Instead of writing about Hickey's notions of beauty, I found myself, with an assist from Nehamas, performing them and, as Hickey predicted, sharing them.

One among many takeaways from Oppenheimer is that Hickey's ideas — which could explain the aesthetic rapture of a lowrider El Camino as easily as a Cézanne landscape — provide tools that we need in order to protect art from forces that would seek to oppress our encounter with beauty. Those forces, Oppenheimer observes, can come from those who call "on art to defend supposedly traditional values" or those who enforce "an ever-narrower vision of 'woke' culture." Democracy lies in the middle, where Hickey locates art as the shifting ground where we experience beauty and share the news. In encouraging us to defend our loves — and by doing it himself — Hickey, along with Oppenheimer, defend our fragile, and increasingly illiberal, democracy. Hickey couldn't be more relevant than that. ✦



CULTURE KLATSCH
Before the rise of Downtown as an arts and culture hub, Maryland Parkway reigned with a rich café culture.

THREE QUESTIONS

Bohemian Eulogy

If you lived in Las Vegas in the 1990s and were into arts and culture, Maryland Parkway was the place to be — a *Slacker*-worthy realm of cafés, record stores, poetry readings, and clove smoke. Filmmaker Pj Perez recently released *Parkway of Broken Dreams* (parkwayofbrokendreams.com), his documentary about that fabled time and place. We hit him with three questions.

Do you have a favorite memory from the Maryland Parkway scene?

The weird thing about that time and that place is that while it was happening, it felt like something special was happening, and it was very organic. That's what that whole scene feels like in retrospect. It feels like we were all at this really amazing grungy poetry indie rock wedding that everyone knows was really awesome, but you can't really pinpoint the things, because there was so much happening, and we were also all probably doing a lot of drugs. It feels sort of like it was a dream, but I think part of the reason why I also wanted to do the film was, well no, it happened. Here's the very concrete evidence that it happened, and it wasn't just a dream.

What does the short-lived Maryland Parkway scene say about the ability of Las Vegas to sustain cultural and artistic communities?

There's always an impermanence about everything in Vegas. Especially people who've lived in Vegas for a long time, or did live in Vegas for a long time, know that feeling of, oh, this building could get torn down at any time, this cultural institution could go away. Everything cool that ever happens always goes away very quickly. I don't know if that's the case anymore. I feel like the circumstances today are very different than they were even 10, 15 years ago, to be able to support long-term this sort of thing. What would happen back then is — and this happened all the way up until maybe the 2010s — everyone would go to one area, and then as soon as you had something else more interesting in another area, everyone would just abandon the (initial) area. And that's basically what happened with Maryland Parkway. I think that that's changed somewhat, but back then I think the impermanence was inevitable. You just took advantage of everything you could for as long as you could.



What lessons does this offer in terms of how cities in general can be more supportive of culture?

I think you need to have some sort of "official" cultivation or sponsorship of the arts or independent businesses or whatever it is, in order to layer over and also provide support under those things that may be very popular with patrons and participants, but might not be financially sound enough for those who are endeavoring to actually survive. That's probably part of why certain initiatives have worked Downtown, where they wouldn't work elsewhere, because you either had an outside incubator like the Downtown Project, which could finance projects, or you had the city of Las Vegas doing things like offering grants for building refurbishment or for signage improvement. They were doing these things to the layout of the streets to help improve the curb appeal of certain businesses. You need to have that sort of support so that you can actually have those cultural institutions that otherwise tend to just flounder. ✦ *Josh Bell*

MARYLAND PARKWAY AND PORTRAIT COURTESY PJ PEREZ



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HUMOR

Holiday Cheer Index

Rating the ho-ho-ho factor of various seasonal scenarios

BY *Andrew Kiraly*

MORE CHEERFUL!

"... and to all a good night!" Santa soars into sky on speculative crypto bubble

Climate change extends North Pole nudist season

Mrs. Claus' ASMR YouTube channel labeled NSFW

Christmas Spirit < Christmas Spirit OG Purple Kush

Bravo airs *Christmas with the Real Housewives of Cal-Nev-Ari*

"Impossible Turkey" is not fake meat, but actually feathered, crime-fighting vigilante

St. Nick seen at dispensary; "Self-care," he says w/ twinkle in eye

Jacob Marley's chains? Stuffed with cheese

Jeff Bezos' wallet grew three sizes that day!

After accepting all cookies, Santa beset by nonstop Facebook ads for joint pain remedies

In *60 Minutes* interview, Santa reveals Kris Kringle was original name for his Tinder catfishing account

NORAD Santa tracking unnecessary as entire Christmas gift delivery livestreamed on Twitch

Pulled over by NHP, Santa loses world's toys to asset forfeiture

Is that a Punisher bumper sticker on Blitzen's ass?

Michele Fiore announces she identifies as a porch pirate

Drought reduces eggnog levels to historic low

Fox News decries "Communist redistribution ritual" of Christmas after North Pole announces employee vaccine mandate

Pat Mulroy inserts third straw into gravy bowl

Santa's Shopify password leaked: EpsTe!nDidnTk1llh!ms3lf

Prancer and Dasher have falling out after heated argument over whether *Die Hard* is a Christmas movie

Holiday season delayed after Santa falls into epic slumber at annual health insurance open enrollment meeting

Because of social distancing, Santa forced to hurl gifts through windows

Santa knows: There's no vaccine for reindeer flatulence

At anti-vax Xmas party: horse d'ouevres

Some asshole feeds elves after midnight; marauding gremlins are new normal

LESS CHEERFUL!


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REFLECTIONS

Art From Tragedy

The Guatemalan government killed her father. Elena Brokaw seeks to remember him through art

BY ***José Roach Orduña***

The exhibit *Human Resource Exploitation: A Family Album* is an artistic collaboration that spans decades and crosses the threshold between life and death. Ramiro Antonio García Jimenez was a father, husband, leftist, cartoonist, and photographer. He was assassinated by a repressive Guatemalan government — funded and supported by the United States — for daring to believe a more just future was worth creating. His daughter, Elena Brokaw, still believes in that future.

Her photographic exhibit, *Human Resource Exploitation*, draws its title from a CIA torture manual taught to Latin American strongmen at the School of the Americas, today renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. Brokaw's project, comprising family photos, ephemera, and other materials, is an act of personal and political remembrance in the face of institutionalized amnesia. Its power lies in communicating how history acts upon a person's soul. Its images ask the viewer to face the very human consequences of our country's violence, and to never again look away.

I recently spoke to Brokaw about her show, on display at UNLV's Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art through Jan. 29. (Disclosure: Brokaw was my student in several classes, and I served as her thesis chair at UNLV.) This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What did you know about your father growing up?

I actually didn't know much about my father growing up. I knew that he was killed, but I think I was about eight years old told me that he had been assassinated — that she used that word. It had always been very opaque. Oh, he was just killed in your grandmother's store. But I was never given the reasons why. At first, I was led to believe that it was just a robbery gone bad. It wasn't until I was older that she started piecing out a little more information about how he died, but she still couldn't give me a lot of information about why he died.

Other things that I knew about him growing up: He was very, very tall — over six feet tall — which has been verified now that I've talked to more of his family, which is a little unusual for a Guatemalan man. Chapínos are normally very short, so for him to be over six feet tall is kind of this anomaly. He also had fantastically curly hair, so for that reason I've always loved my curly hair knowing that it came from him. And then she also told me that he was very kind — that was something that always came up.

How did that change as you took on this project?

The biggest change that happened for me was that when I was younger, I very much resented him. I saw his death as a choice he made between his country and his family because there were other members of the family who were able to leave. And I found out that he knew he was being looked for, and he chose to stay, and that has always been a really hard piece of knowledge to understand. Going into this project, I wanted to explore why anyone would have wanted to stay. When I started really working on this, I had my own son who was roughly three years old, and I could not imagine ever putting myself in a position where I had to choose between my son and something else. But I realized that for him, it wasn't a choice between his family and his country, it was a choice to help his country for his family. He wanted a more just society for his daughters to grow into.

Another realization I had about the armed conflict — I call it that instead of "civil war" because it wasn't a civil war, Guatemalans call it "the conflict" because they realize the international forces that were involved and what role the U.S. really played in instigating and supporting all of the violence — but you know, I've spent all this time researching all these violent events, but I had this moment at the National Library: I was talking to the director, who was friends with my dad, and she and another member of the organization that he belonged to, FERG, Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario Robín García, started talking, and they were describing their youth with laughter. They were telling me these stories that were full of joy and laughter, and they exuded this pride at having been a part of this.

It was the first time I realized that joy was a part of this story, too. These were young men and women who were on the cusp of their adulthood, who were there, who had this energy and this love of life, who wanted to change something, and they had all this passion. And they were full of joy. Yes, there was a lot of death and danger, but I hadn't

PHOTOGRAPHY ***Christopher Smith***

realized that there was a love of life that was central to how they lived.

In many ways, this photographic project is a collaboration. Can you tell me how you came upon these photographs and how you approached working with them?

I didn't know they existed. They were part of my mom's mythological papeles. Papelitos guardados. My mom was finally able to go down there (Guatemala), and she was able to bring them back. They really were everything she said they were. They grew! The more I investigate them, the more they grow. Within them there were 1,076 photo negatives that were originals of my father's work. He took them between 1977 to about 1980. Nobody had seen these. He was a photographer, so he always had a camera with him.

My mom entrusted me with them. She knew I'd wanted to start this project, so she said, *These are yours, for your book. I've done what I want with them.* She kept a couple of items that were special to her, but everything else was handed over to me. So, I spent my time in quarantine learning how to clean negatives, how to scan them, and this computer and scanner became my workstation during all the time we were socially isolated during COVID.

I was also able to work in a darkroom, through the UNLV Fine Arts Department. I was able to take a class and work in there, learn how to use the equipment, and really get a feel for what a professional photographer would do. I was able to see the process my dad would do when he would set up his own darkroom, which I did get to hear about. He would put newspapers on the windows to cover everything up to make a temporary studio. I got to learn how to think like the person who took this picture, which was my dad. It felt like a collaboration. These are his photos. The exhibit bears his name as well.

Your exhibition is called *Human Resource Exploitation: A Family Album*. Can you tell me about the title?

The title is the title of the CIA manual that was used in the School of the Americas. The history of this manual is actually kind of interesting. It was originally developed during the Vietnam War. It was a collection of knowledge the military learned during that war on how to interrogate subversives. It evolved into this manual that was then taught to Latin American military leaders on how to quell any sort of revolution, or any sort of opposing force within their countries. Military leaders were sent there — the president of Guatemala during the time my dad was assassinated was a graduate of the School of the Americas.

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In my own work, I explore many of the ways this country has immiserated Latin America. I know your work also explores these hemispheric dynamics. I often find myself wrestling with the following question: How do I reconcile living in the country that has in so many ways crushed the country where I was born? I don't know if I've managed to make sense of this myself, and so I apologize for posing this question to you.

When I was a teenager, I remember asking my mom if she thought my dad would have ever wanted to live in the United States. And her immediate reply was, No, we would have never lived here if he had lived. He would never have allowed it to happen.

I don't know that I have an answer to that question either. I cannot change what happened in the past — there's no way that I can — but maybe we can change the cycle everything is caught in. When Kamala Harris went to Guatemala, one of her first political statements was something about needing to encourage more foreign investment in Guatemala, and I thought, She doesn't know her history. The foreign investment has always been there, and it's always been corrupt. She shouldn't be encouraging outside forces to continue pillaging the country. At heart, I'm an idealist. I believe in justice and liberty, and I believe the future can be better. ✦

Human Resource Exploitation: A Family Album *is on exhibit at UNLV's Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art through Jan. 29, with a closing reception 5p Jan. 28.*

José Roach Orduña is an assistant professor of English at UNLV. His first book, The Weight of Shadows: A Memoir of Immigration and Displacement*, was published in 2016 by Beacon Press.*





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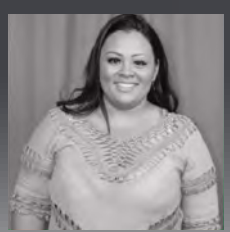

– **Tracy Hecker,** who is happy to be active and off the sidelines



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ENVIRONMENT

Design Flaw

Three people who've thought a lot about the most recent Clark County public lands bill weigh in on how we could do better

BY ***Heidi Kyser***

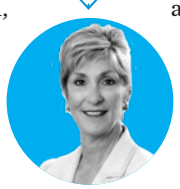
In March of this year U.S. Senator Catherine Cortez Masto introduced the Southern Nevada Economic Development and Conservation Act. More commonly known as the Clark County lands bill, it's the culmination of many years of work, mainly by Clark County's Department of Environment and Sustainability. If it were to pass, the bill would determine the future of development in Southern Nevada for decades.

The business and development sectors support the bill, saying it's needed to accommodate regional population growth. The environmental community, however, is divided. Several groups say they support certain parts, such as the designation of 1.6 million acres of wilderness, while others oppose the underlying philosophy — swapping developable land for conservation areas — as an outdated concept that promotes urban sprawl.

To explain what's in the bill and how it will affect the community, *Desert Companion* invited three experts with varying backgrounds: Bret Birdsong, a UNLV law professor and public lands scholar; Chris Giunchigliani, former Nevada assemblywoman and Clark County commissioner; and Phillip Zuwarus, a UNLV architecture professor who studies urban design and climate change. *Desert Companion* editors Andrew Kiraly and Heidi Kyser co-moderated the discussion, which you can find a fuller, video version of at desertcompanion.com. An edited selection of the most salient points follows.



Bret Birdsong: Let's start with, "Why do we need lands bills?" The fundamental reason is that we live on tiny islands of privatized land that are surrounded by vast seas of public land, land owned by the United States government. And so, the fundamental driver behind these bills is to create more private land so that we can build our communities and continue our population and economic growth. ... In Clark County, we've got close to 90 percent public lands, and we've developed most of it. And so, we're concerned now about where the land for future development is going to come (from).



Chris Giunchigliani: I've been gone (from the County Commission) since 2019, and in 2018, if I recall, was a resolution that was adopted that we then kind of added to a framework for the senator (Cortez Masto) to start working on. That was years in the making

in and of itself; internal fights between conservation and economic development were still part of that debate then. Did we really need to give a bunch of land away to developers? And if so, where, for what purpose? ... Fast forward to now, that's why you still have a split amongst many of the environmental and conservation groups. There are so many pieces that are liked within the bill, but that whole economic development, "Let's give it to developers" part really is not necessary any longer.

BB: There's always been this balance, politically, between making land available and designating land for conservation purposes in a permanent way, designating wilderness, expanding areas that we love, like Red Rock Canyon National Recreation Area, and also creating a funding source so that the money that has come from auctioning off these federal lands is then used for conservation purposes.



Phillip Zawarus: I agree with Chris on the separation of the economic development side from the conservation. That's a very challenging subject, because then you have to start to think about shifting from traditional zoning ordinances to what we refer to now, with future development, as smart growth. ... When you look at it from a climate change perspective, and dealing with CO2 sequestration, we need to have less of this hard juxtaposition between conservation areas and developable land. There needs to be more of a coexistence between the two.

CG: Can you take the politics out of it? No, because everything's political, no matter whether it's from elected officials or just everyday neighbors fighting over something. But I'm still a firm believer in, let's look at the policy and start from that. So, you at least dehumanize it as much as you can and look at numbers and science and what you learned. What failed? What worked? Have those conversations. We don't do a lot of that, whether it's in the legislature or the local level.

BB: We've always used our public lands to promote the public national interest. We made them available for development when that was the policy. What's the biggest crisis facing us right now? The climate crisis. We use public lands to promote renewable energy development. We use it for transmission because we need to transition our economy to more electric and less fossil fuel. We, from a national perspective, might think about: How do we make federal land available in order to help communities develop in a smart way, facing the biggest crises that we have right now like climate?

PZ: Right. We are in this climate crisis. We've actually done a great job of cutting down on CO2 emissions and changing regulations and policies to prevent CO2 from getting into the air. However, the other piece of that pie is that we aren't really preserving our carbon sinks. So, what is it that's going to actually sequester, take out the CO2 that's already in the air? And those are through our natural and undisturbed lands. There's this misconception with the Mojave Desert, and most desert ecosystems, that they're barren lands that don't really provide a lot of ecosystem services. But that couldn't be further from the truth. The soil itself does a lot in that CO2 sequestration process.

BB: Everywhere that we live around the Las Vegas Valley is also desert tortoise habitat. And desert tortoise are listed under the federal Endangered Species Act as a threatened species. It's a violation of the Endangered Species Act to harm those tortoises. We can't go out there and hunt them, we can't pick them up, we can't harass them, and we can't destroy their habitat — unless we get a permit for otherwise lawful activities, like living our lives or building homes for us. There's a way to not violate the Endangered Species Act, but you have to prepare something called a habitat conservation plan. ... Clark County says we're running out of land available to be developed under the current approved (plan). So, we need more land, and we're going to designate more protected land, so that that can get credit for mitigation under the (plan), too. ... This bill still maintains the scientific integrity of the review of the Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan, which would be amended.

CG: I don't see why you need to give 120,000-plus acres for OHVs (off-highway vehicles). Why? There's not even been an environmental impact done on that part of it. So why — who's that expansion for? Does somebody think that that's a great economic development piece? Well, for every $10 that you lose in habitat and cooling canopy and destroying that desert crust, as Phillip was speaking to, it'll cost you five times as much (as you'd gain).

PZ: I think we're just not good at designing our cities. It doesn't get classified as or considered vacant lands, but look at how many surface parking lots we have. That is just an absolute waste of land that can be developed. We dedicate a lot of space to very wide roadways. So, that would save a tremendous amount of space, if you start to aggregate the city of Las Vegas. If we were smarter and went toward a densification model, we could easily start to accommodate those growing needs. It's a matter of not looking for that low-hanging fruit of available land and being more prescriptive with what we do.

CG: You don't need 840,000 more people here in the next 30 years (as the Center for Business and Economic Research projects, providing the basis for the legislation). We'd be crazy to promote that. Where's the water? I mean, let's be honest, where's the water?

BB: The best ideas of smart growth will require a fair amount of retrofitting of the area that we've already developed. Smart Growth ideas are not rocket science. We know lots of great ideas: build transit corridors, build pocket parks, build urban tree canopy, make the benefits of nature available to all people in the city, not just to the wealthiest. ... We don't do a particularly great job of that here with what we've built over the years through sort of haphazard development rather than planning it. So, as a matter of national policy, perhaps we should be thinking: How do we make Las Vegas a climate leader?

CG: Excellent point. I mean, it could be as simple as putting rooftop solar on old apartment buildings and getting rid of the old air conditioner units, which cost poor citizens, the poorest of the poor, because that AC unit is antiquated. There are ways to improve people's quality of life. Your social justice issues can be dealt with, with some of those types of retrofitting. Yeah, the opportunity's there; it's sometimes getting the will to do it.

PZ: Retrofitting is way more expensive than utilizing the available undeveloped land. You need to incentivize developers to want to do these infill projects or to retrofit. And so, I think that's more of where the discussion has to go toward, is incentivizing that retrofitting process to offer tax credits, offer other types of incentives for developers to want to spend a little bit more time, spend a little more money in order to get some tradeoff in return, because that's the only way you're going to get developers to buy in.

BB: Everything is connected. You know, one time I was in a panel with the former mayor of North Las Vegas, I think was Michael Montandon. And there was some discussion about narrow streets: Why don't we have — Why do I live in a residential community developed in the 1960s, that has a 60-foot right of way? We don't need a 60-foot right-of-way. It would slow down traffic if we had narrower streets, and if

WATCH They had a lot more to say! Watch a video version at desertcompanion.com.

people were parking on streets. And he said, "Well, the problem is, is my fire department says that all of their trucks need 40 feet to turn around in order to provide for public safety." Well, why don't we buy smaller trucks? So, everything is connected.

PZ: Las Vegas is so big, we need to really focus and strategize which communities need assistance the most. ... And there's certainly a pattern that's continuously coming up, especially as you look toward the east valley. It has the highest concentration of food deserts, it has the highest concentration of urban heat island, least rainfall and access to water resources, least or least-dense tree canopy, worst transportation system. Instead of trying to figure out a solution to all parts of the valley, develop a strategic plan for those needs of communities, and start to prioritize it that way. I think that's when you're going to really start to make a difference.

BB: In the life of this bill, I think what happens (next) is, it goes through the regular order of legislative development. There'll be markups by committees. Eventually, there might be votes, or it gets reported out to the floor. What tends to happen with these localized public lands bills is, they're going on in all places around the country. Eventually, there's a bunch that are more-or-less right, and they get bundled together as an omnibus public lands bill, and put together for a vote. ... And so, I think that there is time for larger conversation about what is the best way to do this.

CG: Your voice still matters. So, put a call into your congresswoman or senator and say, "Hey, we like this, this, and this, but take the time to do it right. Separate the legislation." And volunteer to be on a working committee. Voice your concerns to your commissioners. Participate in Transform Clark County (master planning process). Weigh in on that land use stuff. ... And then get involved in the organizations that reflect where your interests are ... I love this place, and I want it to be the best that it can be. And I think we still have an opportunity, because we're still a little bit small. I just think I'm forever hopeful. ✦



OUTDOORS

Open Season

Fall is a good time to hike around the Vegas Valley, but ... what's open now?

BY ***Alan Gegax***

Fall is the most popular season for outdoors activities around Las Vegas, when the oppressive heat finally abates and the air turns temperate. Navigating the various COVID-related closures and restrictions has been difficult, but currently, all of Southern Nevada's parking lots, trails, and outdoor spaces are open as normal. Visitor centers and other park buildings do require indoor use of face masks, though, regardless of vaccination status.

Here's the 4-1-1 on the area's popular recreation spots:

Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area

Now through May 31, 2022, a reservation is required to enter the Scenic Loop from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The loop is open from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day through the winter months. The visitor center and the gift shop are open 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. Interpretive talks are held on Tuesday mornings, and guided hikes are scheduled on Sundays. To mark National Take a Hike Day, November 14, the Southern Nevada Conservancy will host a hike to La Madre Springs, one of the few reliable sources of water in the park. *West on Charleston Boulevard, past the edge of town, redrockcanyonlv.org*

Mount Charleston

The Spring Mountains Visitors Gateway is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday-Sunday, offering interpretive talks and interactive programs every day. The main building has a gift shop, restrooms, and water. Beginner-level, family-friendly trailheads can be found here, too. The group picnic area remains closed, but all other infrastructure is open. *West on Highway 157 from US95, gomtcharleston.com*

Valley of Fire

Valley of Fire is a great place to enjoy breathtaking sandstone without the

PHOTOGRAPHY ***Christopher Smith***



WALK THIS WAY Left, the Clark County Wetlands Park; right, Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area

crowds of Red Rock. Rangers partner with local hiking experts (including me!) to offer a variety of guided hikes on New Year's Day every year. The visitors center is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. *North on I15 to Exit 75, parks.nv.gov/parks/valley-of-fire*

Desert National Wildlife Refuge

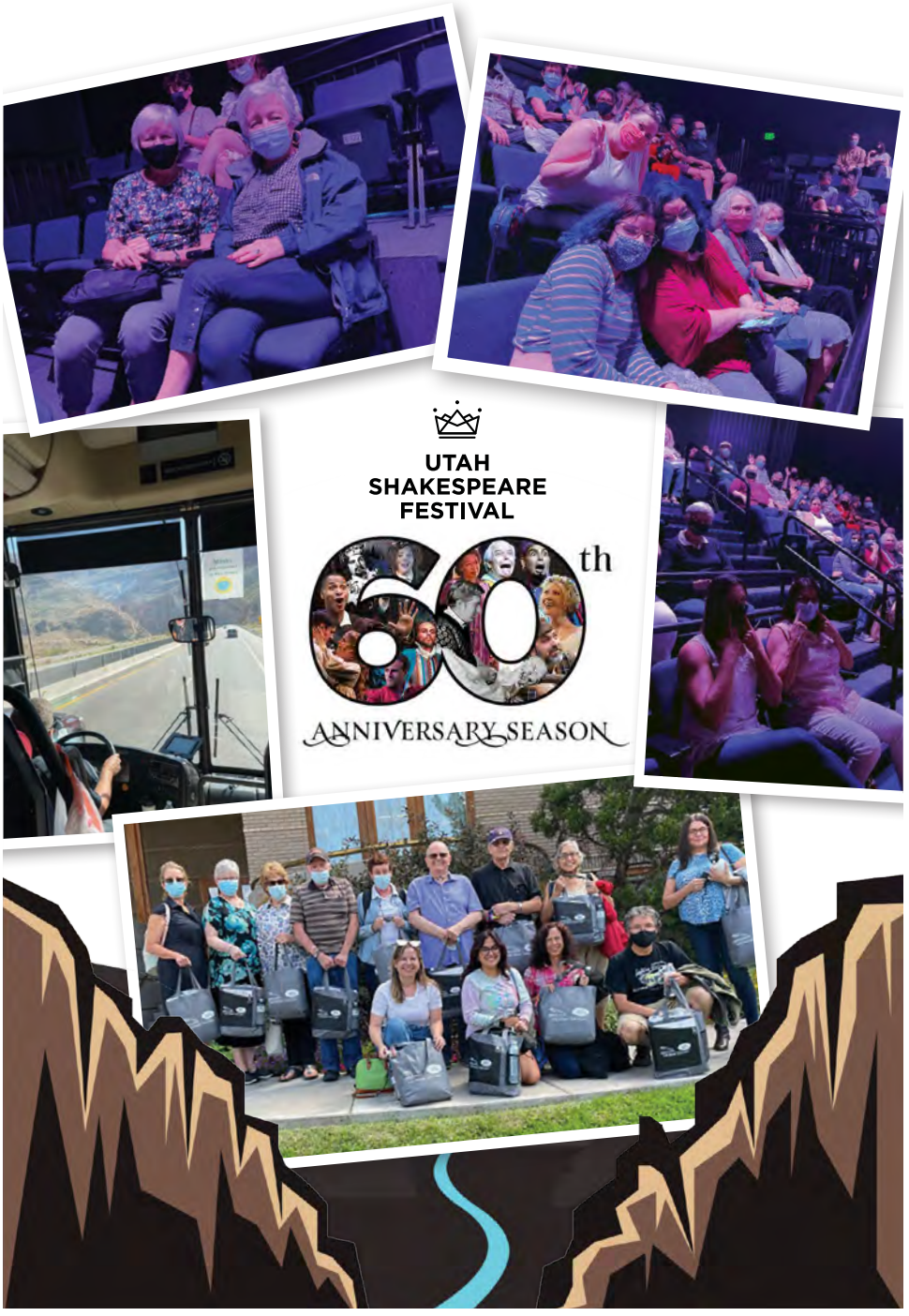
Corn Creek is the only visitor center that remains closed; however, the restrooms are open and potable water is available. DNWR's roads and trails are open as well. The Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages DNWR, has proposed gated access and a $10 entry fee to help deal with increasing crowds here and at Pahranagat Lake. The public comment period ended in September, and any changes would not go into effect until late 2022. *US95 North to Corn Creek Road, fws.gov/refuge/desert*

Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area

The visitor contact station is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. seven days a week. Because of the sensitive nature of the site, the petroglyphs are only accessible during these hours, and pets are not allowed in Petroglyph Canyon. *Multiple entry points with varying levels of accessibility, blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/nevada/sloan-canyon-nca*

Clark County Wetlands Park

The Wetlands Park hosts numerous nature walks and interpretive talks every weekend, and there is a guided birdwatching event on November 21 (registration required). The visitors center is open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. *7050 Wetlands Park Lane, Las Vegas, clarkcountynv.gov* ✦



Our Summer Travel Series to the Utah Shakespeare Festival was a blast! Thank you to our members who joined us this Summer and thank you to the Utah Shakespeare Festival for hosting us again. Until next time …

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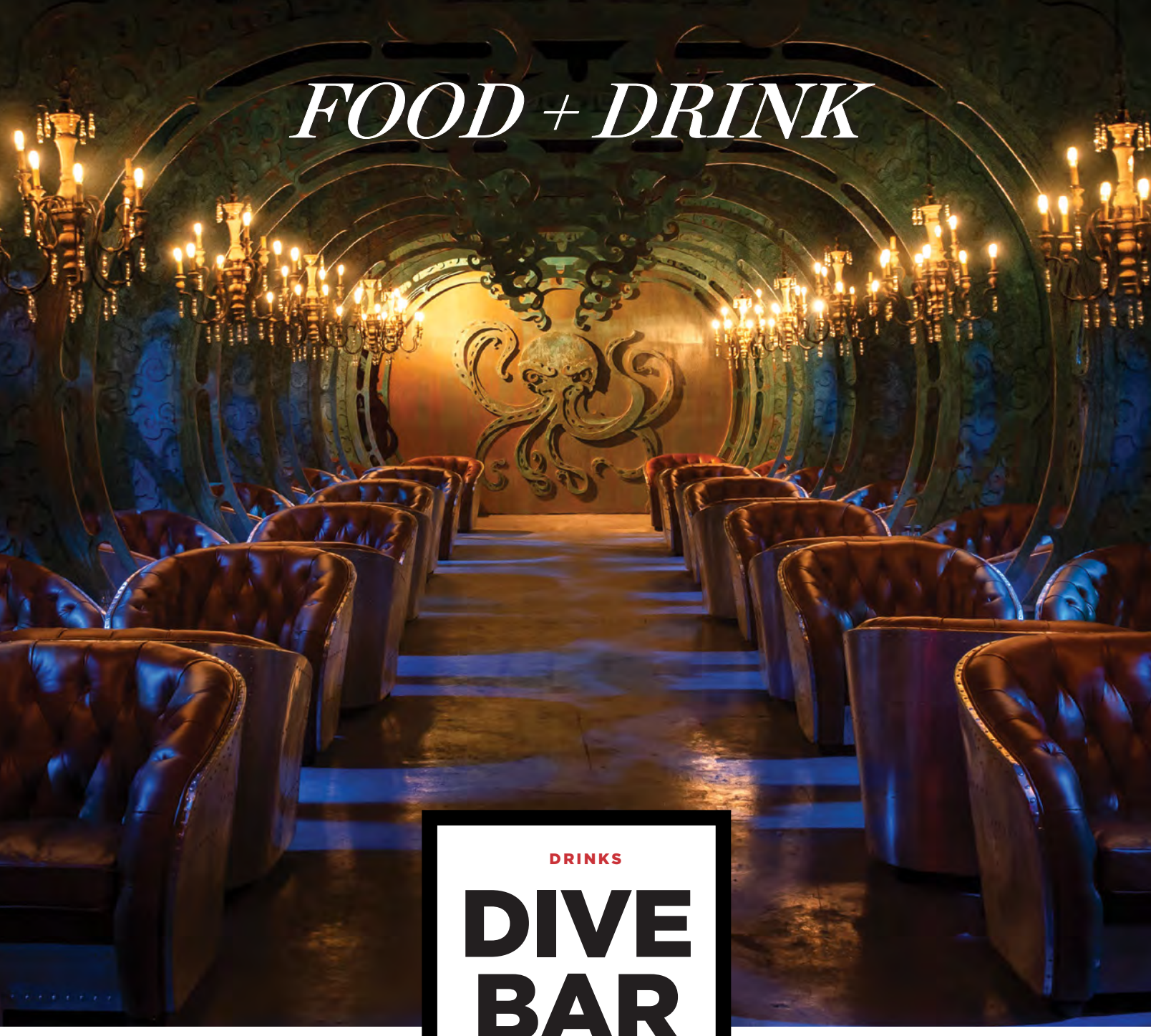


DRINKS

DIVE BAR

With a steampunk submarine vibe, Lost Spirits Distillery serves fine liquors crafted by weird science

BY JASON SCAVONE

Bryan Davis sits in the dark, laughing.

We're seated in a cramped room at Lost Spirits Distillery designed to resemble a kind of luxury Victorian submarine. Spinning red lights slice through the locked-closet gloom. Klaxons blare. "I guess you have to have a certain sense of humor," he says, giggling.

When the fake submarine finishes its faux dive, Davis leads the way to the grand set piece of Lost Spirits, which opened this summer at Area 15: a *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*-inspired lounge with twin sets of club chairs lining the room, leading up to a woodcut octopus at one end. It feels like Ernst Stavro Blofeld will come waltzing in at any moment to upbraid SPECTRE's leadership committee.

Davis brings out a glass of American-made whiskey tuned to taste like an Islay Scotch. Neither as aggressive as Ardbeg nor as evocative of ships breaking against a rocky shore as Laphroig, it nonetheless has a deep smokiness and smooth finish. You'd be comfortable sipping it next to fellow Scotchophiles as the lounge's chandeliers synchronously sway and flicker with a *Frankenstein* electric hum that drowns out Leonard Cohen moaning "Everybody Knows" over the speakers. The whole place smells like paint and fresh-cut wood. Ironic, considering the operation was built on the illusion of old, long-aged timber.

Davis, who has a degree in art and spent a year designing amusement park rides, got into the spirits business when he went in big on his passion project, decamped for Spain, and brought his first product, Obsello



EAT THIS NOW
WET BURRITOS
AT BURRITOS GUISOS DE EL CANELO

Is this the third or fourth time this week? I've lost count. What I've dedicated the last four ... five? ... days to consuming is a dense group of stew-like dishes wrapped delicately into hand-made, fresh-pressed flour tortillas. These dishes aren't pretty or even well-organized. They're messy affairs, dripping with fluids, moistening hands and mouth. Beneath their delicate wrappers, though, lie dense black holes of compounded flavor. I've tasted every single thing on Burritos Guisos de el Canelo's menu. (It's pretty easy, since there are only 12 items.) Every single one is beautiful in its own right.

Take the rajas, a crema, green pepper, and corn concoction that tastes like a more mature creamed corn. Or the pollo, wood-grilled chicken with an intense chipotle sauce capable of weakening the knees. The chilorio (my fave) is a pork and potatoes dish delivering hearty satisfaction without weighing you down. And, of course, Burritos Guisos serves birria, the super-trendy tomato and beef dish that no one's been able to get enough of lately.

Burritos Guisos de el Canelo
23 N. Mojave Road
702-354-9001

Have you noticed the rise in foods like birria during our continuing pandemic? It feels like a collective yearning to feel comforted, safe, cared for. Where a burger or a pizza might satisfy some animalistic craving, and fine dining may intrigue a more analytical palate, the food served at Burritos Guisos de el Canelo dives deeper. This is true soul food. ***Brent Holmes***

absinthe, to market. As that Iberian adventure wound down, Davis and his girlfriend, Lost Spirits co-owner Joanne Haruta, returned to Monterey County in California, where Haruta's mother owned part of an artichoke farm. They took a 1972 mobile home and turned it into their workshop on the property as they delved into Lost Spirits, reviving long-forgotten liquors — and honing a method to dramatically reduce the aging process from decades to days.

On the first stop on this tour, Davis pours a brandy that's rich and complex. It hits like a 12-year single malt. It aged over the course of only several dozen hours. The forbidden knowledge of dark liquor sorcery made it possible. Or chemistry. Possibly both.

For the last six years, Davis has been turning out spirits using his own propri-



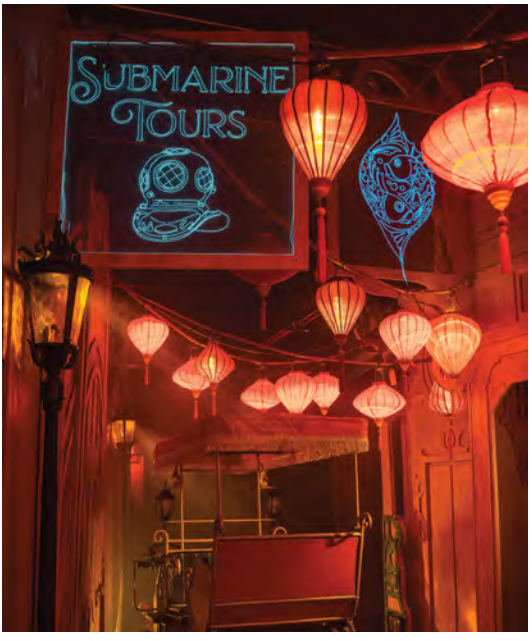
etary technique that, long story short, shines intense light on a glass cylinder full of wood and booze to mimic the aging of raw hooch in barrels. The technical explanation for why the process works is dizzying for anyone unfamiliar with the chemistry behind distillation, but it works. As soon as he had dialed in the process, Davis knew it was game on.

"It was like, oh, shit, we actually did it. I think this is kind of bigger than us," Davis says. "We were just a little tiny 2,000-case craft distillery in an artichoke field with the most important piece of technology in the last 100 years of the beverage industry."

Davis and Haruta eventually relocated to Los Angeles, where they first opened a no-frills tasting room in 2017. The frills soon followed as Davis went back to his amusement park roots to add embellishments that turned the L.A. outpost into a hotspot for disquisitive dipsomaniacs. Lured east to Las Vegas by the people behind Area 15, Davis and Haruta are doing the L.A. model here, just bigger, badder, and brandy-er.

The distillery tour checks off exotic locales that incorporate two of Davis' twin loves: rum (a Havana nightclub staffed by holographic singers in full, glitchy *Max Headroom* glory), and Victorian literature (a dank English village, the aforementioned Jules Verne trip). But between the Six Flags Over Moe's Tavern stops, there are moments of genuine art and science. Davis' handmade copper still is gorgeous — and massive. The dragon head that tops it isn't quite *Game of Thrones*-sized, but it's not far off. Another section of the tour leads to a glassed-off R&D lab and a look at Davis' wood-destroying reactor that runs at surface-of-the-sun levels of brightness. (Seriously, the light is the equivalent of the equator at noon, times three.)

LIGHT YEARS AHEAD
Lost Spirits employs a proprietary technique that uses bright light to mimic the whiskey aging process.



All of it is in service of the sauce. For this outpost at Area 15, Davis is bottling four new tipples and Lost Spirits' signature navy-style rum. (Coming in at a burly 122 proof, it goes down so hot it'll get you ready to swordfight a pirate — it also comes with the story of where the term "proof" came from. It involves lighting gunpowder soaked with rum. Frankly, we've all been drinking wrong this whole time.)

The new offerings include a rum made with Pacific Ocean brine; an English-style rum distilled from Japanese ingredients including Okinawan black sugar and Mizunara oak; a Cuban-inspired anejo blanco rum; a raspberry brandy; and soon, a passion fruit brandy.

Brandy, woefully forgotten in the craft distillery renaissance, is a current favorite of Davis'. (He's quick to point out that's what Dorian Gray was quaffing in the opium dens, not any fruit of the poppy.)

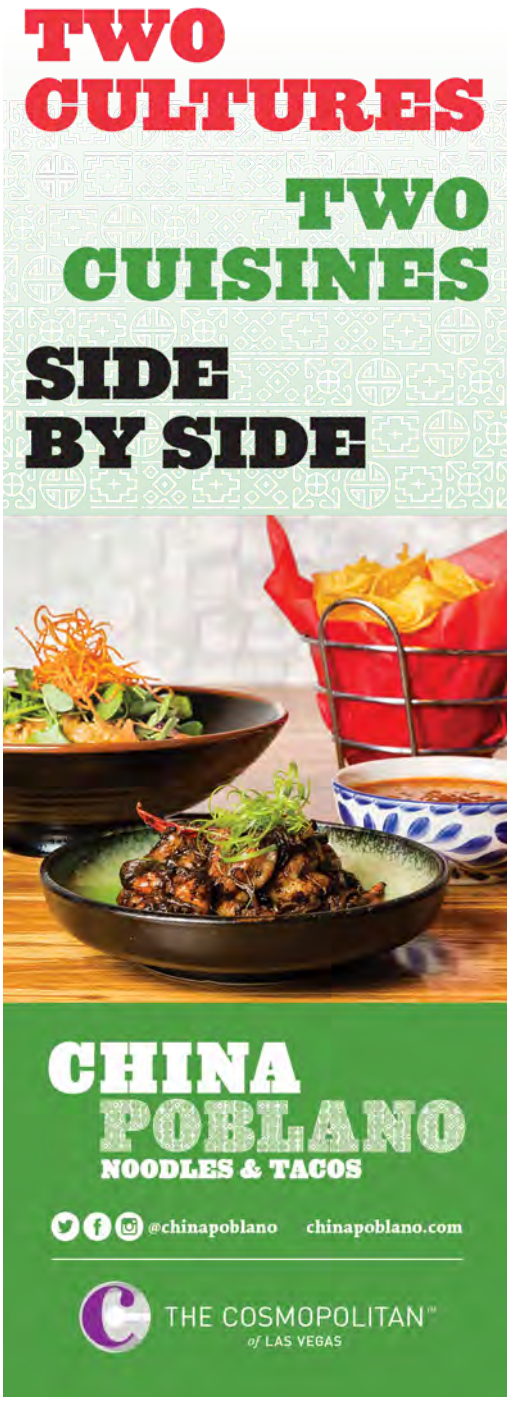
He says the plan is to keep building onto the distillery. The first addition will be a jungle set using leftover cooling water from the stills. He has plans to serve a $240, 12-course tasting menu in a room off the lounge. (There's a mural of an octopus with a man's face on one end. It's unsettling.)

Michelangelo apocryphally said all he had to do to sculpt David was look at a block of marble and take away anything that wasn't David. Davis — a sculptor himself back in his art-school days — may have subtracted years from the distilling of rum and brandy, but he's still more about addition, addition, addition.

"(Studying distillation) just sort of drove the need to understand the artistic medium, which was no different than clay," Davis says. "It just so happens that you can't see it. It's all theory and math. As we got better and better and better at it, it became an opportunity to do really cool stuff nobody else was doing. Now you're starting to create like avant-garde distilleries for the first time. And then we layered all this shit on it somehow." Davis' game-changing scientific spirits are certainly worth the deep dive. ✦

Lost Spirits Distillery is now open at Area 15. Visit lostspirits.net for more info.



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MEMOIR

I WAS A TEENAGE EXTREMIST

As an awkward teen, I was indoctrinated into far-right ideology. It took years — and devastating personal loss — to free myself

BY ***Bert Johnson***



In the eighth grade, my homeroom teacher had our class do a project exploring our idea of a "perfect world."

My fellow students put forward a variety of utopian visions: One kid based his project on the Buddhist idea that people can't know pleasure if they don't also experience pain; another classmate lifted his project straight from Creed's rock anthem "With Arms Wide Open." But the project I remember most came from one of the girls in class, who, responding to the horrific school massacre in Columbine just one year earlier, envisioned a world in which all the guns had been collected and melted down.

I remember trembling with rage as I struggled to keep quiet, knowing full well that I couldn't take the bait I imagined she was offering me.

To my younger self, the idea that you could reduce violence by getting rid of firearms was anathema. But more importantly, I saw the prospect of disarming the American public as an existential threat.

* * * * *

I was a chubby kid. Bookish and awkward, I never played sports or felt like I was really growing up to fit the stereotypical mold of what a man should be. I was obsessed with toughness because it seemed so far out of reach. But when I thought about what I could do with a gun, I felt powerful, like I could do anything. Guns — and the philosophy I attached to them — offered me a chance to feel strong and heroic.

My relationship with firearms wasn't always so radical. When I was growing up in the Bay Area, my dad and I loved shooting. It was really *our thing* — something other members of our family had little interest in — and we spent hours at shooting ranges and gun stores. Sometimes, as a special treat, we'd make the four-hour drive up to Reno to attend the gun shows that still come through town every few months. In fact, I still have the .22 bolt action rifle he bought when I turned 12 — a common rite of passage in the U.S. It's been years since I took it to the range, but I've never been able to get rid of it, either.

Starting around eighth grade, however, my relationship with guns shifted from recreational to ideological. For example, I started to believe that owning and learning to use guns was not just a hobby, but a *duty*. When I turned 21, I told myself, I would get my concealed carry permit so that I would always be ready to stop an attempted assault.

That's pretty standard fare. If you browse the pages of *Guns & Ammo* magazine — or the Instagram accounts of gun-toting influencers — you'll see intense debates over the relative merits of revolvers versus semiautos, or which concealed carry holster is best to pair with your Dockers. But as my dad and I got more involved in the self-described "gun culture," we started to collect literature with an increasingly fringe perspective on the role of firearms in civil society.

One book in particular was critical to my radicalization: *Unintended Consequences*, by John Ross. Essentially, it's an 800-page anti-government manifesto that details the strategy behind a decentralized guerrilla campaign seeking to completely deregulate the civilian arms market. The main characters use targeted assassinations of politicians, law enforcement officials, and bureaucrats to force the federal government to abandon all forms of gun control, right back to the 1934 National Firearms Act — one of the earliest federal statutes directly related to firearms. That law imposed taxes and regulations on the possession and sale of fully automatic machine guns. It was passed in response to the escalating violence among organized crime syndicates during Prohibition. But to Ross, it signifies the first step down a "slippery slope" of

ILLUSTRATION ***Brent Holmes***

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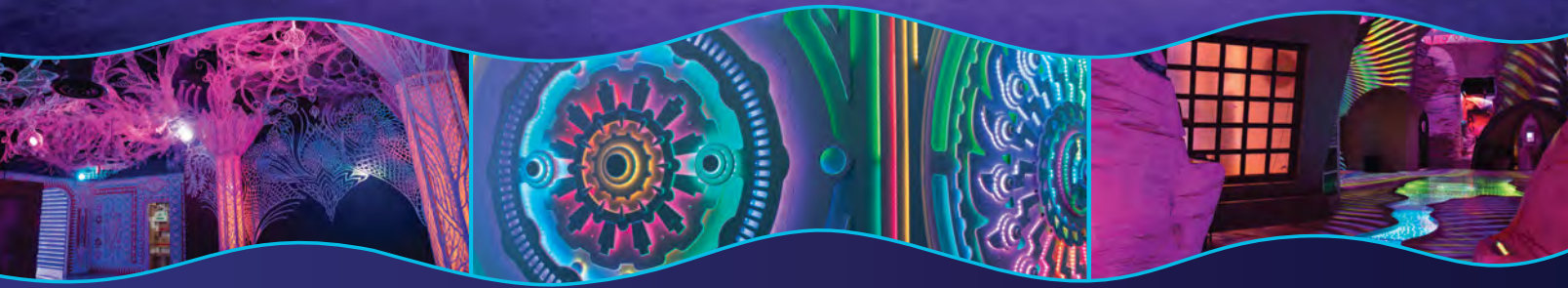

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government overreach seeking to disarm sovereign citizens and thereby force them into a kind of modern slavery.

I devoured the book, reading it cover-to-cover at least twice. Since I had already been primed to believe the Second Amendment gave the Constitution its teeth, it was a relatively short step to accept that killing government officials was justifiable in the defense of a "strict constructionist" interpretation of our founding document. Thanks to the book's insurrectionist bent, I believed it could be not only reasonable, but perhaps necessary, to kill public officials if they worked against my interests.

My head was filled with dark fantasies about fighting off "jackbooted thugs" arriving in black helicopters to seize the weapons my dad owned, although I was fortunately never in a position to act on any of them. I imagined myself picking off federal agents from behind cover, a lone sniper standing against the forces of tyranny.

I would be so deadly accurate, I thought, that they would be forced to fall back like they had at Ruby Ridge — except in my version of the story, their retreat would be so disorganized I'd have the chance to escape.

After a day at the range, while my dad and I painstakingly cleaned the guns we'd used, I would weigh the relative merits of each one in my mind: the semiautomatic .308 would be ideal if federal agents were more than 75 yards away, for example, and it stood the best chance of overcoming their Kevlar vests. If they surprised me at closer range, a .40 caliber Glock would put lead downrange quickly enough to buy some time. But the AR-15 always seemed to jam, so that wasn't on the list. I just thought it looked cool.

My imaginary violence didn't extend to people who supported gun control, however. For the most part, I thought they were just rubes who had been taken in by cynical politicians. The gullibility I saw in them only made it seem more urgent that I continue to stand up for gun-owning, earnest Americans everywhere.

❊ ❊ ❊ ❊ ❊

Crucially, I never saw these ideas as being outside the mainstream. In other words, it was an invisible ideology.

Eventually, however, I learned that many of the people I met at gun shows took things even further. They were convinced that gun control was really part of a much larger program to subdue red-blooded Americans under an autocratic globalist regime dominated by a secretive cabal, sounding much like the outrageous conspiracies peddled by QAnon and Alex Jones. Some of them called it the "New World Order." Others used a more direct epithet: the Zionist Occupied Government, or ZOG. It would be decades before I learned that conspiracy theory had its roots in the neo-Nazi skinhead movement, but I still knew it was dangerous. I also understood that the Jewish community, mistreated and scapegoated by Western governments for centuries, would have been in no position to orchestrate a global power grab.

One evening at a gun show in the summer of 2002, after a long day of browsing folding tables covered with every kind of handgun, rifle, and shotgun imaginable, my dad and I struck up a conversation with another attendee. We talked about the war in Afghanistan (which was still in its early stages and apparently going well) and that perennial bête noire of American gun enthusiasts: liberal politics.

"The B-52s should save some of the bombs they're dropping in Afghanistan," our new friend told us. "On the way back, they should drop them on Berkeley."

I felt a sudden jolt of revulsion at the idea, but I swallowed it down as quickly as I could. I hoped it didn't show on my face.

I'd become interested in libertarian ideals through my early interest in punk rock and anarchism; the two ideologies share a superficial similarity that, to my 13-year-old mind, offered proof that I could embrace conservative values while still exploring youthful rebellion. I wanted to rock the boat without really rocking the boat.

But the ardent anti-fascism I cultivated as a punk clashed with the antisemitism on display at gun shows. At every gun show I've ever been to, I've seen booths offering Hitler Youth daggers, Waffen SS caps and Confederate uniforms. This hateful memorabilia — often displayed unironically alongside T-shirts extolling the ideal of "personal liberty" — are typically excused as being offered for history buffs.

❊ ❊ ❊ ❊ ❊

I'd like to say that I outgrew my corrosive ideas about gun ownership quickly, but that would be a lie. It took years to undo the programming I'd received, which told me it was my right as a white American man to respond to political trends I disagreed with by using armed violence.

The first shock came when I was 18. One day my dad drove to the beach in Bandon, Oregon, looked out at the horizon, and shot himself to death.

While it was a devastating blow, at the time I didn't connect his suicide with his ready access to firearms. I now realize that owning guns puts people at heightened risk of self-harm, because it makes suicidal ideations — which are impulsive by nature — much easier to act on.

Instead, my deradicalization really began thanks to the harsh economic reality of working part-time to put myself through junior college. Being a gun guy started to lose its shine as soon as it was *my* money I was spending on ammo, range fees, gun locks, and all the other paraphernalia. As a teen, I got a thrill from watching my dad drop hundreds of dollars in cash on an unregistered handgun in the Reno-Sparks Convention Center. But as a young adult, I couldn't bear the thought of walking past long rows of folding tables loaded with weapons I couldn't afford.

The experience of going to school was also critical to dismantling my insurrectionist ideology. My classes in history and government challenged those beliefs by offering a more nuanced perspective on the world. Learning how to think critically helped, too.

Perhaps more than the curriculum itself, my classmates forced me to confront the cognitive dissonance I'd tried to ignore as a younger person. Junior college attracts students from a variety of backgrounds. Some, like me, didn't have the grades to get into a four-year university and were trying to find direction. Others were parents, who attended classes in between jobs and took care of their children as they worked towards a better future for their families. Some came from working-class neighborhoods, while others came from other countries. By the time I transferred to the University of California, Berkeley as a history major, I'd gotten to know more about the world as it *is* instead of what I thought it *should be*. I knew and respected people whom I assumed I would have hated just a few years before. Increasingly, the extremist rhetoric I'd internalized began to look more like a fever dream than moral instruction.

We're living in a time of galloping radicalization. The Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol was the most visible expression of that, but it's been happening — and continues to happen — in more subtle ways. It's frightening to watch our society pull itself apart, because a democratic system like ours is a fragile, precious thing, and it depends on shared values. But I also know from my own experience that there's still hope for the young people caught up in the culture war — a war we'll never win with guns. ✦

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BLACK FRIDAY SALES EVENT



LET THE DOGS OUT
Two members of the McDermitt Bulldogs practice their rushing skills on the field.

COMMUNITY

THE SEASON THAT WASN'T

Sustained by long-ago football glory, a troubled Northern Nevada town struggles to recapture its gridiron dreams — and its identity

BY ***John M. Glionna***

MCDERMITT

The skies are still smoky from stubborn Western wildfires on this late August afternoon as the boys of fall take the field for the season's first football practice. A few teenagers throw wobbly passes, stretch tightened calf muscles on the grass, moaning as they hit the ground during drills. As a team, they're sons of farmers and ranchers, and brown-eyed boys from the nearby Native reservation. Even though they're still out of shape, these McDermitt Bulldogs hold out cautious hope that this season will be better than the last — that they can make tackles, score touchdowns, win games, and make this community proud.

For generations, isolated communities across rural Nevada have played a scaled-down brand of football with eight players instead of the traditional 11. That's so even the tiniest whistle-stop hamlets like this one can join America's autumnal rite of rooting on a scholastic football team as brisk September gives way to a colder October.

Two seniors in particular have plans to make the year special. Starting quarterback Lane Barnett is a soft-spoken 17-year-old and recent New Mexico transplant who hopes a good showing will attract the eye of small-college talent scouts. And Tristan Bitt, a mercurial teen from the Paiute-Shoshone reservation, has trained all summer to take the big hits as the team's go-to running back. (Come winter, he'll play scrappy point guard for the school's basketball team.)

In towns like this, the few kids who do play sports are pressured to play them year-round — or entire seasons could be canceled. Counting just 28 students total in grades nine through 12, McDermitt Combined School is the smallest school in the state's lowest-level football league, with just five graduating seniors in the 2022 class.

Everybody who goes out for a sport here gets to compete. No one rides the bench.

The result is that few residents can remember the last time a graduating senior went on to play college football, let alone garner a scholarship. Lane Barnett and Tristan Bitt aim to change that.

GLORY DAYS

FOR HALF A century, McDermitt has set a lofty standard for its football Bulldogs. Since it first built a roughshod playing field here in 1965, this once-bustling town on the Nevada-Oregon border has been a bastion of gridiron success, where able-bodied farm boys baled hay at first light before school and on weekends made smash-mouth tackles on the football field.

Long before the Pahranagat Valley High School Panthers made Alamo proud (and made national sports-page headlines) in 2016 with a 104-game winning streak that included eight consecutive state titles, the McDermitt Bulldogs ruled rural Nevada football. Not only were the original Bulldogs going to beat you, opponents knew, they were going to hit you as well — and hard. The Bulldogs won a few state championships, and folks here loved them for it, honking car horns to send the team bus off to an away game, throwing parades and block parties when they brought home another trophy.

Then came McDermitt's economic fumble. In 1992, the local mine closed for the second and final time, and a once-thriving population of a thousand residents began its decline to the few hundred who

PHOTOGRAPHY ***Randi Lynn Beach***

live here today. Company-hired families who provided the newest crop of football freshman moved away in search of better opportunities — taking their boys with them.

Since then, the Bulldogs have become a team that rarely wins, populated by kids who wouldn't make it at any other high school. Most are too timid, too small, too overweight, too out-of-shape. For almost a decade, the depleted Bulldogs have been led by Richard Egan, a tribal coach of Shoshone-Paiute heritage. Standing at 6-foot-1, he's a proud man who sports the athletic build of a one-time ranch cowboy. He played on McDermitt's undefeated 1982 team that won a state championship in the eight-player division.

His could well be the toughest high school football coaching job in America. The Bulldogs haven't been back to the playoffs in almost three decades — since the year the McDermitt mercury mine closed. And, unlike their opponents, they don't even have a cheerleading squad to root them on. This spring, in a COVID-delayed football season, they lost all four games, failing to even score a single touchdown, losing by a combined total score of 300 to 2.

Without wealthy benefactors as in towns with thriving mines, the Bulldogs play with hand-me-down uniforms and equipment. Their field, which sits north across the Oregon line from the Nevada school buildings, is a lonely outpost surrounded by dirt roads and wild horses. A single set of bleachers serves both the home crowd and visitors alike. It's one of the few fields across the league without those vaunted Friday night lights that are part of a young football player's fantasies.

Still, Egan will not allow a culture of losing to develop here. Following each game, he and assistant coach Jack Smith gather their boys at midfield, reminding them to keep their heads up, pride intact. Their strategy: learn to lose without seeing your spirit crushed. Ignore the scoreboard and the taunts of the other teams. Just play. Have fun. And learn.

During one recent season, Egan brought his Bulldogs to play the Eureka Vandals in their lush new stadium along U.S. Highway 50, a gleaming sports temple complete with a state-of-the-art weight room, field lighting, and synthetic playing surface — all built by local mining money. The McDermitt boys marveled at a world far more privileged than any they knew. But Egan wouldn't let them feel outclassed by another boy's entitlement.

"Sure, these kids are lucky to have everything they have," he says. "But they can only put eight players on that field, just like us. So once we step off that bus, we represent our community, our school, and our families. But mostly, we represent ourselves."

The Bulldogs lost that day, 64-12. But the coach had made his point.

This spring, a high school referee was so impressed with how the Bulldogs handled a lopsided defeat at the hands of their arch-rivals, the Owyhee Braves, that he wrote a letter to Humboldt County School Superintendent Dave Jensen. The boys didn't curse or complain or quit, even when down by 70 points.

"My name is Alden Donston and I'm sending you this quick note to share with you my experience with the McDermitt football team this past Friday," he began.

"I was an official for their game and all I can say is that McDermitt should be very proud of those eight boys and the way they carry themselves on the football field. Even when the scoreboard was not in their favor, they continued to compliment their opponents on their play, help them up after each play and displayed a very positive no-quit attitude."

Egan is teaching them how to lose gracefully. "Some coaches, if they're not winning, they won't stick around," he says on that first day of practice. "But I'm part of this program. As long as they come out to play, I'm not going to give up on these kids."

Yet one thing Egan cannot control are the numbers of players he inherits each year. In 2013 and 2019, the Bulldogs were forced to cancel their entire season because not enough boys showed up to play. During the good times, McDermitt could count on 30 players. But on this day in August, the coaches have only six. The Bulldogs need eight to compete, and the first game is less than a month away.

GHOSTS FROM THE PAST

TO UNDERSTAND MCDERMITT'S love affair with eight-player football, it's not enough to hear the story of the boys of the present. You've got to include some ghosts from the past.

And when it came to cheap-steak toughness, no Bulldog was as leathery as Todd Murrah. He grew up here playing kickball, booting that rubber spheroid over the tops of buildings. He never liked the idea of playing formalized football because he was, quite frankly, afraid of taking those big hits. His father, Tuffy Murrah, a business owner and scrappy, would-be boxer, made Todd try out for the team. The coach made him kicker, a position he played all four years. Back then, the state line crossed right through



the Bulldogs' home field, the southern end in Nevada, the north in Oregon. A referee once told the young Murrah he was the only player who could kick a ball from one state and have it land in another.

But Todd Murrah did more than kick. He also played running back his last two years, making the all-state team each season, running for 26 touchdowns as a senior, the year the Bulldogs won the 1973 state championship. Along the way, he invented the McDermitt strong-arm. "I used to run real low and when a guy came up to tackle me — doink! — I'd come up and hit him in the face mask with my free arm," Murrah recalls. Rather than dodging tacklers with any fancy footwork, Murrah bulldozed them. He *sought out* contact.

That strategy resulted in broken bones in both hands, but Murrah kept on playing. They took off his casts before games and taped him up tight. After tackles, he often struggled to get up off the ground because his hands throbbed with pain.

"He's the toughest man I know on the football field," Bulldogs coach Dan Armstrong told Winnemucca's *Humboldt Sun* at the time. "He has no finesse but he just doesn't like to go down."

As a senior, Murrah was voted both class flirt and most athletic, a potent combination. There was talk of college scholarships from both Idaho and Nevada, but Murrah moved on from football after that. He married twice, had two kids, and for three decades owned the Say When casino in McDermitt. Years later, Murrah helped establish a Little League football club in town, where boys in grade school and junior high learned how to play the sport. By the time they were freshman, they knew the game enough to propel the varsity team to state champions. Murrah coached one group of Little Leaguers for six straight years, leading them from the third to eighth grades. In that span, they never lost a game, finishing 55-0.

The junior league was eventually disbanded. Now, three decades after Todd Murrah coached, his son Ryan restarted football Little League in 2019, leading a new generation of McDermitt kids — boys and girls alike — to winning ways. "I've got big shoes to fill," Ryan says.

Looking back, could football have been Todd Murrah's ticket out of McDermitt? Does he regret not taking the game to the next level?

"I didn't really like football, not until I was a senior," the old running back says. "I didn't think I was good enough or even big enough to play college ball." He pauses. "I think I could have been a good kicker, though."



FIELD DAYS
Bulldogs Coach Richard Egan played on McDermitt's undefeated 1982 team that won a state championship in the eight-player division.

'WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LOSE'

BY FAR, TRISTAN Bitt is the best athlete on the 2021 Bulldogs, the fastest and most willful. He's a latecomer to football who dreams of making the all-star team as a basketball player this winter, so he's worked out hard to drop 15 pounds over the summer. Tristan is always the first to complete his practice laps, and gently encourages younger players when they start to lag in the intense August heat. As a boy, he spent a few years in Alaska and still has clan there. When he graduates next spring, he'll be torn between staying in Nevada to qualify for free college tuition or returning north to figure things out on his own, closer to relatives.

For now, he's a Bulldog. And he's not ashamed of those final scores.

"What does winning teach you?" he says. "To prepare yourself for the world, you've got to know what it's like to lose."

Tristan is mercurial — one moment he's moody and quiet, the next he's laughing, slapping backs, howling at the moon. He's the youngest of six, and rankles his father inside their one-story reservation home. Like the son, the father can be matter-of-fact. When Tristan irritates him, the words are few, the punishment swift. "Pull weeds," he'll say.

Probably more than any other player, Tristan adulates his coaches. He even calls Egan "Dad." One afternoon, during practice, Tristan silently walks up to Smith and embraces him. It's a surprising moment.

The boys watch. They know that Tristan and Smith — the school's head basketball coach — train one-on-one year-round to keep the boy in shape for basketball season. Smith is like a second father to Tristan. The grasp is short-lived. Then Tristan, as though realizing he has hugged one parent and not the other, walks over and gives Egan a quick hug.

"What does winning teach you?" Tristan Bitt says. "To prepare yourself for the world, you've got to know what it's like to lose."

Nobody says a word. They all know what has just occurred. A boy thanking his two mentors for their continued guidance.

Still, for the coaches, starting quarterback Lane Barnett remains a work in progress.

During the spring games, Lane was con-



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TEAM DREAM
Seventeen-year-old Lane Barnett is a recent New Mexico transplant who hopes a good showing on the field will attract the eye of talent scouts.

tinually sacked by oncoming rushers, who busted through the Bulldogs' weak front line. "I'm too slow playing for a team where the line can't hold them for more than one second," he admits. "They're on me pretty quick."

Lane went to a summer quarterback camp so the coaches anticipate results, yet at the first few practices, they watch him amble around the track. With their arms crossed, they scrutinize his form.

"He doesn't run very hard," Egan says.

"He's got one gear," Smith adds.

"Half of it's mental," adds Egan.

Lane admits that all the Bulldogs are out of shape. "We can blame ourselves for that," he says. "It takes an individual to do the work to get in shape. Not only at practice, but at home and on the weekends."

'WE'RE BETTER THAN THAT'

AS AUGUST TURNS to September, with the boys preparing for their season opener against the Carlin Railroaders, the Bulldogs never quite reach the required eight players needed to take the field. One day seven appear, the next just five. Egan can't explain it: The boys lack energy and desire. His generation came to play, to hit hard and win, while these kids are softened by junk food, TV, and video games.

But with only eight players, his kids must play both offense *and* defense. Many have described the amped-up, high scoring eight-player affairs as basketball on grass. There's no rest, no breathers. While bigger teams have replacements to spare, the Bulldogs must compete on every play of every game. That makes for a long, tough, exhausting season, and Egan knows that. But what can he do? He's got to make these boys football-ready for another campaign.

After one lackadaisical practice, the coaches bring up the springtime horror story, being outscored 300 to 2. "We want to be better than we were last year," Egan says. "I don't want to be standing out here on the field after another loss, saying, 'We are who we are.' We're better than that."

Within days, the fortunes of the two top Bulldogs Lane and Tristan profoundly diverge. Lane begins to step up. His passes are crisper. He's assuming the role as a team leader. When a freshman skips practice, Lane gets on his case. "Either come to practice or quit," he tells him. "Make up your mind." The kid shows up the next day.

Then, on Labor Day weekend, Tristan informs his coaches that a medical checkup has revealed he may have suffered a concussion, the result of a brutal hit at practice.

"My head aches," he says. "Loud noises bother me. Even the gym noises are too loud." He has scheduled a CAT scan and must wait for the results, so he'll miss practice for at least another ten days. Now Tristan stands with the two coaches on the practice field, no longer in uniform.

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Egan turns to his star athlete. "We need to get you back out here," he says solemnly. "We can't win without you."

Days later, the coaches call an emergency huddle. Their season has reached a crisis point. Only six players regularly show up for practice. League rules say each player must practice for at least 10 days before the first game. They're not going to make it.

The boys hold a private, players-only meeting as their season spirals out of control. Some perch atop helmets. Others lay on the grass under the goalpost. Tristan confesses that his possible concussion made him consider quitting the team. "This stuff is serious," he said. "You have to be on watch all the time after one concussion. I wanted to quit, but I couldn't do that to myself or to you guys." He pauses. "Guys, this team is in trouble. Hell, we're McDermitt. Kids don't want to practice. They don't want to be forced to play."

Lane speaks up.

"That's no excuse," he says. "McDermitt is the best opportunity all of us have to play. If you go to a big school, you never even get put into the game, because you're usually not good enough to get on the field." He looks at the others. "We're all friends here," he adds. "We're a team. We can do this."

KING OF PAIN

BEFORE HE BECAME a paternal coach, Richard Egan was a paragon at issuing pain.

"Other guys dreaded even practicing against him. He brought the heat," says Nick Wilkinson, the Bulldogs quarterback during the 1982 season, who now runs a ranch outside town. "If you weren't watching, with your head on a swivel, you were going to get hit, hit hard, and hit mean." As Wilkinson recalls, Egan broke the legs of two opponents, boys with the misguided idea that they could bring down a freight locomotive as it rumbled downfield. The 1982 Bulldogs not only won all their games, but they held opponents scoreless for the entire first half of the season, in the end outscoring other teams 282 to 34.

Egan grew up on a reservation in Owyhee, the Bulldogs' perennial football rival, but moved in with relatives in McDermitt because he saw opportunity here. Back then, coach John Moddrell took one look at his new running back, 195 pounds of meat, bone and gristle, and told a friend, "We're gonna win a championship this season." They won, and won repeatedly, because of Egan's pure grit.

"Once, I ran the ball on a play that started on the 15-yard line, a T-formation," Egan recalls. "There was a kid playing defense, standing on the goal line, and I must have knocked him backward five yards."

Touchdown, Bulldogs.

"The field was slick, and I got tackled by my jersey and hit the ground hard," Egan recalls. "I was dizzy."

"You okay?" coach Moddrell asked him on the sidelines.

The young running back told him that he'd landed on his head.

"He reached into his pocket, took out some smelling salts," Egan says. "Then I went back in."

'WE'LL CALL IT A SEASON'

AT 3 P.M. on Sept. 7, the day after Labor Day, coach Egan addresses his seven Bulldogs. The last holdout player has finally decided he will not play.

Their season is over.

The other boys knew this was coming, but they're gut-punched just the same.

The coach holds out a last possibility. "We'll give him until 3:30," he says. Maybe he'd change his mind, come walking through that door. "If not," Egan says. "We'll call it a season." His face is red.

The holdout is young, yet he holds the key to the fate of the older boys. Still, the coach cannot let him take the blame. "Maybe he has some personal problems we don't know about. When the time comes, he'll straighten everything out."

Tristan and Lane sit on the bench, downcast.

At 3:15 p.m., Lane volunteers to call the boy at home for a last-minute plea. It's like phoning the governor for an 11th-hour stay of execution.

He walks into the coach's tiny office and closes the door behind him. He sits in the coach's chair and leans over as the phone rings. You can almost feel a boy's dream leak from the room. Finally, he puts down the receiver. "He's not answering," he says.

It's 3:23 p.m. A few moments later, the two coaches stand with their backs to the showers. The boys sit in a single row, like in a Norman Rockwell painting that evokes both the hope of youth and its disappointment.

"It's a pretty tough one to swallow, guys," Egan tells his players. "I thought we'd be making memories, so you'd have stories to share 20 years from now, something you guys could talk about as you grow older together."

The players slap backs, shake hands and take selfies.

And then, these Bulldogs pack up their belongings and filter out of the locker room, a final, disheartening end to their season that wasn't. ✦



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Leading our 2021 support of organizations dedicated to protecting the environment is long-time beneficiary **Get Outdoors Nevada**, committed to encouraging others to discover, experience and connect to our state's natural wonders, vast and unique landscapes. We also continued to partner with **Green Our Planet** to help establish learning and pollinator gardens at Summerlin schools that not only provide hands-on teaching opportunities, but also serve as rest stops for migrating monarch butterflies.

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Education has long been a pillar of our corporate giving program not only in Summerlin, but valley-wide through our support of **Clark County School District** and the **UNLV Foundation.** We continue to provide annual college scholarships to deserving students in our community through our own nonprofit, **The Summerlin Children's Forum.**

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The Summerlin® Children's Forum (SCF) is a nonprofit organization established in 1997 by leaders of the Summerlin master-planned community and its developer, The Howard Hughes Corporation®. The organization is dedicated to recognizing academic excellence. Since inception, the Summerlin Children's Forum has provided college scholarships and school enrichment grants totaling nearly $650,000. Today, Summerlin Children's Forum is focused on its annual college scholarship program that is open to all graduating high school seniors who reside in Summerlin.

Vegas PBS

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1640 East Flamingo Road, #100
Las Vegas, NV 89119
702-369-4357
info@helpsonv.org
helpsonv.org

MISSION

A recent fire at HELP of Southern Nevada's social services building caused smoke and water damage, with the agency's Homeless Response Teams and Adult Housing Programs staff – 67 employees - displaced to HELP's other buildings or working from home.

To make the best of a bad situation, HELP is working with an architect to redesign the building floorplan. We will not only repair fire damage but remodel the workspace into a more efficient work environment, that allows our agency the ability to increase capacity, expand programming, and get more unhoused clients off the streets. Donate today: *http://weblink.donorperfect.com/HelmsHelps*

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OLIVE CREST

Strong Families, Safe Kids

CONTACT

Olive Crest
4285 N. Rancho Dr, STE 160
Las Vegas, NV 89130
702-685-3459
Jenny-fay@olivecrest.org
olivecrest.org/nevada

MISSION

Since 1973, Olive Crest has transformed the lives of over 175,000 abused, neglected, and at-risk children and their families. The organization works tirelessly to meet the individual needs of kids in crisis by providing safe homes, counseling, and education for both youth and parents. Programs reflect a conviction that strengthening the family is a powerful way to heal children. With unwavering compassion, Olive Crest maintains lifelong commitments to the children and families we serve. In 2020 alone, Olive Crest served over 2,000 children and families in Southern Nevada, and over 18,000 across all regions.

the YMCA

CONTACT

YMCA of Southern Nevada
4141 Meadows Lane
Las Vegas, NV 89107
702-877-9622
info@lasvegasymca.org
lasvegasymca.org

MISSION

Established in 1944, the YMCA of Southern Nevada is a 501c3 nonprofit and one of the longest-serving and most-respected organizations of its kind in Las Vegas. The Y is one of the nation's leading nonprofits, strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Across the country, 2,700 Ys in thousands of communities engage 22 million men, women and children – regardless of age, income or background – to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve the nation's health and well-being, and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors towards a purpose to deliver lasting personal and social change.

encircle

CONTACT

Encircle Family & Youth Resource Centers
331 South 600 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84102
info@encircletogether.org
encircletogether.org

MISSION

Founded in Provo, Utah in 2017 and opening in Las Vegas in 2022, Encircle is a nonprofit organization with the mission to bring the family and community together to enable LGBTQ+ youth to thrive. Many young people who arrive at Encircle live in rejecting households and experience deep-seated feelings of guilt, shame and fear. These factors are warning signs that a youth is at risk for self-harm. Encircle's programs and therapy are designed to help LGBTQ+ youth navigate, rebuild, and strengthen familial relationships. In turn, Encircle helps parents and communities learn to accept LGBTQ+ youth through our "No Sides, Only Love" approach.

SPONSORED BY

COX

CONTACT

Trauma Intervention Program
of Southern Nevada, Inc.
500 N. Casino Center Boulevard
Las Vegas, NV 89101
702-229-0426
info@tipoflasvegas.org
tipoflasvegas.org

MISSION

The Trauma Intervention Program (TIP) of Southern Nevada, Inc.'s mission is to ensure that those who are traumatized in emergency situations receive immediate emotional and practical assistance. To accomplish this goal, TIP partners with emergency response agencies in Clark County (police and fire departments, hospitals, coroner's office, etc). These agencies request TIP's specially-trained volunteers to respond to emergency scenes where the volunteers are able to assist victims, families and witnesses with emotional and practical support during the investigative process. In 2020 volunteers responded to more than 1,600 scenes of tragedy where they assisted almost 8,000 individuals in crisis.

CONTACT

The Just One Project
711 N. Rancho Drive, Suite 100
702-462-2253
info@thejustoneproject.org
thejustoneproject.org

MISSION

Keeping our community connected by inspiring people to get involved, give back, and make a difference. The Just One Project mobilizes volunteers to build stronger and healthier communities.

The monthly Pop Up & Give is Nevada's largest mobile food market. Through Market 2 You, homebound senior clients are served groceries and Meals on Wheels. Clients shop in the no cost Community Market with wraparound services. Community Connect Rapid Rehousing is designed to transition homeless clients into stable housing. At Camp Just One, kids participate in civic engagement, psychoeducation and self development through a licensed psychologist, with support from community leaders.

CONTACT

The Unforgettables Foundation
of Southern Nevada
702-900-3215
unforgettables.org

MISSION

For many families, the anguish and heartbreak of a child's death is accompanied by the additional burden of financial incapacity. The simple truth is that many families are unable to afford a dignified, respectful burial for their beloved child.

The Unforgettables Foundation of Southern Nevada is a 501c (3) non profit organization established in 2015 in an effort to carry on the mission of the first chapter which was established in 1999 in Southern California. The mission of The Unforgettables Foundation of Southern Nevada is to assist financially challenged families who are faced with the death of a child to provide a dignified funeral or cremation. The mission further continues to be proactive with programs that work to avoid deaths that are preventable. As a local charity, all monies raised in Southern Nevada are solely used to assist Southern Nevada families.

To learn more or to donate please visit *unforgettables.org* or contact us at 702-900-3215.

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IN THE SPIRIT OF GIVING 2021

SPRINGS PRESERVE

CONTACT

Springs Preserve
333 S. Valley View Boulevard
Las Vegas, NV 89107
702-258-3258
foundation@springspreserve.org
springspreserve.org

MISSION

Our mission is to create a visitor experience that builds culture and community, inspires environmental stewardship and celebrates the vibrant history of the Las Vegas Valley. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1978, the Springs Preserve is a 180-acre cultural institution designed to commemorate Las Vegas' dynamic history and provide a vision for a sustainable future.

The Preserve features museums, galleries, outdoor events, colorful botanical gardens and an interpretive trail system through a scenic wetland habitat.

CANDLELIGHTERS

CHILDHOOD CANCER FOUNDATION OF NEVADA

CONTACT

CandleLighters Childhood Cancer Foundation of Nevada
8990 Spanish Ridge Ave., Suite 100
Las Vegas, NV 89148
702-737-1919
info@candlelightersnv.org
CandleLightersNV.org

MISSION

For over forty years our mission has been to provide emotional support, quality of life programs and financial assistance for children and their families affected by childhood cancer. Approximately 80 families each year in Southern Nevada hear the words "Your child has cancer". We are there for those families when they receive this devastating news. We help alleviate the isolation many families feel at the time their child is diagnosed by offering a variety of services which are available at no cost to the families. Candlelighters offers support through all the different stages of cancer treatment the families may experience: diagnosis, treatment, recovery, potential relapse, residual medical issues and at times, death. With donations from generous people like you, families can continue to receive the help and hope they need to bravely fight their battle with childhood cancer. Please help light the way for these families by donating, volunteering or participating in an event. ...because kids can't fight cancer alone.

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REISMAN SOROKAC

AL assistance league® Las Vegas

CONTACT

Assistance League of Las Vegas
6446 W. Charleston Blvd.
Las Vegas, NV 89146
702-870-2002
assistanceleaguelv@gmail.com
allv.org

MISSION

Assistance League of Las Vegas has been serving Southern Nevada for 45 years by providing goods and services to children in need. As an all-volunteer organization, every donation benefits our programs. Operation School Bell, our signature program, annually provides thousands of Clark County School District students with new clothes, shoes, and school supplies, creating an enhanced self-esteem for learning. In addition, AL's Closet program supplies new clothes and shoes at sixty elementary schools for immediate need.

Our newest program awarded $225,000 in scholarships to local students to attend Nevada universities and colleges. We are committed to serving and enriching the lives of children in need. You can help with a tax-deductible donation or by donating and shopping at our recently expanded volunteer staffed Thrift Shop. We are the best Thrift Shop in town!

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TIBERTI MANAGEMENT COMPANY

CONTACT

ImpactNV
6657 S. Tenaya Way, Suite 200
Las Vegas, Nevada 89113
info@impact-nv.org
impact-nv.org

MISSION

ImpactNV is Nevada's sustainability advocate working to celebrate the state's leadership while addressing it's most pressing environmental, social, and economic challenges through public/private partnership. As a statewide coalition builder, resource, and convener, ImpactNV hosts an annual sustainability summit, publishes an interactive State of Sustainability data portal, and partners on innovative community projects that help demonstrate Nevada as a quality place to live for residents and a sustainable destination for visitors. In addition, ImpactNV has developed a suite of impactful and innovative programming that encourages clean energy, environmental conservation, social equity initiatives, and seeks to improve the quality of life standards and economic wellbeing throughout the Silver State.

CONTACT

Delivering with Dignity Las Vegas
PO BOX 1766
Las Vegas, NV 89125
702-570-7693
tiffany@moonridgefoundation.org

MISSION

Delivering with Dignity was launched by The Moonridge Foundation on March 23, 2020, as an emergency response to the healthcare and economic crisis created by the novel coronavirus and has grown exponentially in its effort to help the most vulnerable and isolated individuals in Southern Nevada. Through partnerships with locally owned restaurants, leading nonprofit agencies, private corporations, public partners and community volunteers, the program delivers high-quality meals directly to the doorsteps of residents in need and keeps dozens of restaurant staff employed.

CONTACT

Volunteers in Medicine
of Southern Nevada
1240 N M.L.K. Blvd,
Las Vegas, NV 89106
702-967-0530
florncj@me.com

MISSION

Our mission is to provide quality healthcare and promote health equity for people without access to healthcare in Southern Nevada within a culture of compassionate caring. Since 2010, Volunteers in Medicine of Southern Nevada has provided free healthcare services to uninsured adults and children who do not qualify for Medicaid and are unable to afford private health insurance. Our service model leverages paid staff with volunteers and students, along with in-kind services made available from private healthcare organizations and community-based partners. This model allows VMSN to provide free primary and specialty medical care including medications, supplies, laboratories, screening and diagnostic imaging, social and behavioral health intervention services, and dental care to over a thousand patients per year. As a nonprofit health organization, VMSN operated on a $1.7 million dollar budget while bestowing more than $8 million dollars in care and support at no cost to the community.

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FULFILLMENT FUND
LAS VEGAS

CONTACT

3850 Annie Oakley Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89121
702-305-2989
FulfillmentFundLasVegas.org

MISSION

Fulfillment Fund Las Vegas' mission is to inspire first-generation students and remove barriers to post-secondary access and post-secondary graduation.

OUR VISION

We see a community in which all students, regardless of their circumstances, will one day have the opportunity to attend college, graduate, and actively participate in transforming their communities to create a better society.

WHO WE SERVE

The Fulfillment Fund Las Vegas College Access Program serves over 2500 students at Chaparral High School, where every student who walks through the doors is eligible for our college access support. Our college counselors serve over 400 junior and senior students, assisting them through each step of choosing a post-secondary path. After graduation, students are eligible for FFLV's Post-Secondary program which currently serves nearly 400 FFLV scholarship recipients enrolled in both in-state and out-of-state institutions.

SUMMARY OF SERVICES

Fulfillment Fund Las Vegas's College Access Program, based at Chaparral High School, is a to-and-through approach to helping students fulfill their post-secondary education dreams. We offer in-classroom college access lessons beginning freshman year and follow through with individualized college counseling to ensure students and families have the guidance they need to navigate the complicated college-going process. FFLV provides students with college application fees, ACT and SAT registration and test prep, AP test registration, and college visits. Upon graduation, FFLV students are eligible to apply for FFLV's Post-Secondary Program, which includes a financial scholarship and student support throughout their post-secondary journey. FFLV also provides comprehensive family programming, providing tools to families to best support their student's goals. Counselors host financial aid workshops as well as sessions covering college application, post-secondary enrollment, and student transition. By providing programming to both students and their families, FFLV ensures that everyone is on the same page when it comes to fulfilling their student's potential.

HELP STUDENTS FIND FULFILLMENT

By donating to Fulfillment Fund Las Vegas, you ensure that the obstacles to a post-secondary education don't become insurmountable barriers to a fulfilling life. Each dollar given goes directly to supporting our students through the process of learning about their options after high school, enrolling in a post-secondary institution of their choice, and accomplishing their educational goals. For more information about how you can help students find fulfillment, visit *www.FulfillmentFundLasVegas.org/donate*.

CONTACT

Nevada Child Seekers
6375 W. Charleston Blvd. Bld. L-180
Las Vegas, NV 89146
702-458-7009
NevadaChildSeekers.org

MISSION

"Missing" "Taken" "Abduction" " Runaway." Words that strike fear into parents. Words that send Nevada Child Seekers into action! Over 8,000 children are reported missing each year in Nevada, and approximately 200 are considered endangered or abducted, according the Nevada's Missing Children Clearinghouse. Nevada Child Seekers was created in 1985 in response to these alarming statistics to address the plight of missing children in our communities. As we experience rapid growth in population, so does the need to provide additional help and support to families and law enforcement for the location and reunification of our missing children. Over the years services have expanded to include safety education programs, counseling referrals, support groups and active participation with the Nevada Amber Alert Committee. We host hundreds of child safety assemblies a year from K-12 grade. Empowering our children with the tools and resources to protect themselves and one another.

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FOR ORAL SURGERY
OF LAS VEGAS
Carlos H. Letelier, M.D., D.M.D., D.D.S.
Specializing in Dental Implants

CONTACT

Touro University Nevada
874 American Pacific Drive
Henderson, NV 89014
702-777-3100
TUN.advancement@touro.edu
tun.touro.edu

MISSION

Touro University Nevada's mission is to provide quality education programs in the fields of healthcare and education in concert with the Judaic commitment to social justice, intellectual pursuit, and service to humanity.

A non-profit, Jewish-affiliated, private university, Touro University Nevada was established in 2004 to help address and serve the critical needs in medicine, health care, and education in the State of Nevada.

Today, Touro is the state's largest medical school and enrolls more than 1,500 students in degree programs in osteopathic medicine, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, physician assistant studies, medical health sciences, and education.

SPONSORED BY

Touro University Nevada

CONTACT

Brownstein
100 North City Parkway, Suite 1600
Las Vegas, NV 89106
702-382-2101
bhfs.com

MISSION

At Brownstein, our culture of being all in and giving back to our local communities began more than 50 years ago. Today, we continue to invest in our communities and foster these values through board service, volunteerism, sponsorships, donations and pro bono legal services. Our commitment to philanthropy goes beyond words and dollars. We empower our employees to volunteer their time and talents in a way that is meaningful to them. From hosting hands-on volunteer opportunities to helping employees identify nonprofit and civic board positions that fit their passions, together we give back to make our communities stronger.

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600 E Warm Springs Road
702-263-0034

the NOODLE den

Chef Guoming “Sam” Xin, also known as “the Noodle Man”, is ready to launch the highly anticipated Noodle Den featuring his popular hand-pulled noodles and dumplings. The Noodle Den will boast an array of traditional Northern Chinese dishes and feature an exhibition kitchen for guests to see Chef Sam’s team creating savory works of art.



COMING THIS FALL

SAHARA

2535 S Las Vegas Blvd, Las Vegas, NV 89109
702.761.7000 | saharalasvegas.com

desert COMPANION

RESTAURANT AWARDS 2021



Smoked duck breast with cherry molasses barbecue sauce from our New Restaurant of the Year

We'd love nothing more than to spend this introduction pondering with guarded optimism the future of the Las Vegas restaurant scene in our fragile New Normal but, at this point, we're a little afraid of jinxing things. That said — okay, we'll bite — there is reason for optimism. (Isn't that the Vegas way?) This year's Restaurant Awards honorees are both local stalwarts and fresh upstarts who've embraced simple, enduring values amid an age of so many uncertainties: quality food, outstanding service, and inviting ambiance. Going back to basics never tasted so good — and witnessing the resolve and determination of Las Vegas restaurant professionals amid such challenging times only sweetens the menu. Congratulations to the winners of *Desert Companion*'s 2021 Restaurant Awards.

Written by
JIM BEGLEY, JOHN CURTAS, LISSA TOWNSEND RODGERS, GREG THILMONT, AND MITCHELL WILBURN

Photography by
SABIN ORR AND CHRISTOPHER SMITH

Kaiseki Yuzu

ASIAN RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR



IN HIS NEW CHINATOWN SPOT, CHEF KAORU AZEUCHI PERFECTS HIS CULINARY VISION

Readers with a good memory may recall that Kaiseki Yuzu was a previous recipient of this same award in 2017. However, *this* incarnation of Kaiseki Yuzu is decidedly different: Instead of being tucked behind an AutoZone on East Silverado Boulevard, Kaiseki Yuzu has been nestled next to a Chinatown repair garage since early 2020. This move allowed chef/owner Kaoru Azeuchi to build out the space as a true kaiseki-only restaurant, the vision he aspired to since coming to the valley in 2014. He's certainly making the most of it; Kaiseki Yuzu remains a unique dining experience in the valley.

For the uninitiated, kaiseki is a progressive, multicourse dining experience highlighting seasonal ingredients, but the presentation is as ornate and refined as the food. While sushi is a part of the experience — sashimi is highlighted in the *tsukuri* course and a brief nigiri offering arrives later in the meal — it is not necessarily the focus.

At Yuzu, after being led down a simple hallway into the cozy dining room with a six-person counter overlooking the kitchen, the meal progresses through a series of courses with traditional designations. These include *tsukidashi,* the opening salvo of cold appetizers ranging from a delectable pressed cod to jellyfish swimming in a mild vinegar; *yakimono,* the grilled course which, on a recent visit, included buttery A5 wagyu cooked atop a *binchō-tan* grill; and *agemono,* the fried course showcasing delicate tempura. But — and this is the charm and appeal of Kaiseki — every experience is different. One thing you can rely on, though, is that the food remains as exemplary as ever. *Jim Begley*

3900 Spring Mountain Road #A-5
702-778-8889
kaisekiyuzu.com







SEASONAL SIMPLICITY A selection of Kaiseki Yuzu creations. Clockwise from top right: scallop crab cake; toro, eggplant, bluefin, and skipjack; kobachi (Japanese kale), uni, and leek; and chutoro (medium-fatty tuna), skipjack, and snapper





RESTAURATEUR OF THE YEAR



Gino Ferraro

Ferraro's Italian Restaurant & Wine Bar

WITH IRON DISCIPLINE, GINO FERRARO AND FAMILY HAVE BUILT AN IRREPLACEABLE CULINARY INSTITUTION

To be a great restaurateur, one must be a world-class worrywart. Gino Ferraro certainly fits the bill. He seems to be continually bracing himself against some imminent, operatic tragedy about to befall his restaurant — a misstep in service, some fine detail not quite up to snuff. This is not to say Gino Ferraro is never happy. To see him touching every table, decanting an aged Barolo, or advising customers what to order, is to see a professional at the top of his game — albeit one who knows how vigilant he must be to stay there.

His passion for food and wine runs deep. What began as a wholesale/importing business in Las Vegas in the early 1980s quickly became a tiny trattoria/retail store on West Sahara Avenue, then a full-blown Italian *ristorante*, replete with wine and piano music, then to its current digs on Paradise Road, where he and his family have flourished since 2009. Three versions of the same restaurant in 35 years, each one bigger and better than the last, is a feat almost unheard of in this industry. Ferraro's has always been classic without being stuffy and old-school without being hidebound. The formula: A hospitality-first philosophy backed with a menu of favorites (a legendary osso buco) and Italian standards (a simply perfect spaghetti *aglio e olio*), along with lighter fare (a gorgeous Caprese salad) guaranteed to satisfy the old guard and adventurous gastronomes alike.

To pull off this feat for a decade takes the soul of an entrepreneur, the stamina of a bricklayer, and the discipline of a drill sergeant. The fact that Gino and his family — aided by his wife, Rosalba, and chef/son, Mimmo — have kept Ferraro's at this level of excellence while surviving the rigors of COVID is a feat as impressive as his award-winning wine list. Come any night and you'll see Gino on the prowl, eagle-eyed, surveying his guests like a paterfamilias looking after his flock. Look a little closer and you'll see a twinkle in those worried eyes — a sense of satisfaction from knowing he and his staff have done all they can to ensure your happiness, since 1985. *John Curtas*

4480 Paradise Road
702-364-5300
ferraroslasvegas.com

NEIGHBORHOOD RESTAURANTS OF THE YEAR

Elia Authentic Greek Taverna

THE RECIPE IS SIMPLE: EVERY DISH IS COOKED FROM THE HEART



The cuisine of Greece is a victim of its own clichés. Ask an American to define a Greek restaurant, and they'll describe a sea-blue and white room reeking of garlic and bouzouki music, along with boring gyros, wet-cardboard souvlaki, and baklava as dense as a doorstop. Elia challenged those tired tropes when it opened a few years ago, and in doing so, immediately became our best Greek restaurant, right down to the indecipherable Greek lettering and unpronounceable names on the menu. (Not to worry — translations are provided.) The aim is to make you feel like you're on a side street in Athens, sipping Retsina at a local taverna, and Elia hits the mark. Better yet, when everyone else was simply trying to survive 2020, owners Savvas Georgiadis, Alexandros Gkikas, and Keti Haliasos made a bold move to a larger location on West Sahara Avenue, and never missed a beat. The new digs, complete with bar and outdoor patio, have given their cooking a larger stage as they serve up fresh roasted lamb, salt-baked fish, fried zucchini chips, and spicy tyrokafteri (cheese dip). Thus has Elia become a taverna to call our own (and practically a club for the local Greek-American community), but also an education in how real Greeks eat (more fish and veggies, less pita bread and chickpeas). Nothing is by-the-numbers here. It is cooking from the heart, by Greeks eager to share their country's food and wine. "Authentic" may be a problematic word in some food circles these days, but this is the real Greek deal, and Elia wears its name like a point of Hellenic pride. *John Curtas*

8615 W. Sahara Ave.
702-284-5599
elialv.com





MEDITERRANEAN FOR MILES
From top: Elia's paidakia (lamb chops with lemon potatoes and Greek oregano); spanakopita (spinach and feta pie); and psita htenia (seared scallops with radish sprouts and mandarin orange)

Johnny C's Diner

THIS RETRO-STYLE DINER TAKES AMERICAN CLASSICS TO A NEW LEVEL

Located by a massive motorcoach park packed with RVs, Johnny C's Diner isn't the easiest place to spot — but once you find it, you won't forget it. Created by renowned chef John Church, this retro-style breakfast and lunch eatery has become a must-go casual dining destination for local food lovers. Formerly a top toque at leading Strip spots such as RM Seafood and Aureole, Church (along with his skilled open-galley kitchen staff) serves up enhanced versions of Americana classics, like a perfectly rolled "OG" omelet filled with creamy Boursin and melty American cheeses with abundant snipped chives on top. Love flapjacks? Here, silver dollars are topped with griddled foie gras, black pepper, orange segments, and maple syrup. The restaurant's avocado toast is among the prettiest (and tastiest) in town; the lemony Hollandaise sauce on the eggs Benedict is outstanding; and the stuffed "mashed browns" are a dream.

The lunch menu is equally as impressive. The house burger and the Hen House fried chicken stackers are stellar, and both the fried mortadella and Cubano sandwich take layered meats to the next level. For chilly weather treats, the gooey mac is gonzo with its five kinds of cheese and a Cheez-It dust crust, and the poutine is as savory as any brown gravy this side of Quebec. Don't forget the orange cake for dessert — it's a Church family recipe from Michigan. *Greg Thilmont*

8175 Arville St.
702-263-0146
johnnycsdiner.com



A FINER KIND OF DINER
Clockwise from top: Johnny C's avocado toast with red wine onion and basil; pan-seared foie gras pancakes; orange creamsicle cake





PASTRY CHEF
OF THE YEAR

Florent Cheveau

Burgundy Bakery & Café

A 'THOUSAND LAYERS' OF DELICIOUS IN EVERY BITE

Lovers of French pastries could not have been happier when, seemingly out of nowhere, Florent Cheveau (a former MGM executive pastry chef and World Chocolate Master), opened the Burgundy Bakery & Café on West Sahara Avenue earlier this year — at a time when the prospects for success looked as sunken as a fallen soufflé. After Cheveau took over a fast-food smoothie space across from the Village Square Theaters, his timing turned out to be as perfect as his croissants. People were hungry for handmade food, and anyone who bit into one of his macarons or cinnamon rolls knew they were in the presence of something special. These are baked goods on par with the best restaurants in the toniest hotels, and here they were, for taking home or eating in, seven days a week. His savory quiches, croque monsieurs, and sandwiches are just as compelling as his sweets, but what keeps us coming back is a *mille-feuille* ("thousand layers") of incomparable buttery-lightness woven into breakfast pastries that take us straight back to Paris. *John Curtas*

9440 W. Sahara Ave.
#105, 725-204-6557
burgundybakery.com



EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE AND MANAGEMENT
2021

Al Solito Posto

TIVOLI VILLAGE FINALLY HAS THE CROWN JEWEL IT'S LONG DESERVED

Created by James Trees, the restaurateur behind the wildly popular Esther's Kitchen in the Arts District, this epicurean hotspot has been a city-wide draw since it opened earlier this year. Bringing an upscale take on East Coast Italian-American cuisine to the edge of Summerlin, Al Solito Posto has achieved a hallmark in offering the finest front-of-house service in the Las Vegas Valley.

Led by Carlo Cannuscio (left), development partner, and David Bonatesta (right), beverage director, echelons of team members — bartenders, captains, servers, runners, and bussers — work to-



gether seamlessly. It's more elaborate, structured, and precise than the service programs you might find at other Italian restaurants, but just because it's regimented doesn't mean it's rigid. Rather, Al Solito Posto's customer-facing team is filled with lively personalities. (And every one of them is ever-ready to deftly but inconspicuously knife-sweep crumbs off your tablecloth at a moment's notice.)

Of course, the back-of-house staff under Executive Chef Steve Young is essential in this well-honed customer service system, and in a few classic dish presentations, you can see the teamwork come to tableside fruition. For the bread course that starts each dinner, a captain or server creates a melange of kitchen-roasted confit garlic cloves, sea salt, fragrant minced herbs, and olive oil for focaccia dipping. With the classic minestrone, a pottage of garden verdure and cannellini beans is artfully bathed in tomato-basil broth. And for dessert, each serving of tiramisu is enrobed in espresso sauce for a sweet production. No matter what dish is served at Al Solito Posto, it's delivered with thoughtful style and class. *Greg Thilmont*

420 S. Rampart Blvd. #18
702-463-6781
alsolito.com





The Silver Stamp

BAR OF THE YEAR

IT IS THE PERFECT PLATONIC IDEAL OF A BEER BAR

Every bar wants to create a cozy, comfortable atmosphere; few bars achieve this beyond a wall of graffitied-up dollar bills or Polaroid gallery of smiling regulars. The Silver Stamp instead opts to re-create the finished Midwest basement bar of your cool bachelor uncle who hosts the Friday Odd Fellows meetings: wood-paneled walls, oil landscapes, a wall of vintage beer cans, and just about every unique piece of promotional beer furnishing made in the 1970s. Owners Rose Signor and Andrew Smith put love into every stitch and nail, and it shows. Not to be outshined, their tap and bottle list is one for true connoisseurs, boasting barleywines, sours, and imperial stouts.

One of the enterprising minds behind the rise of Atomic Liquors after its renovation, Signor poured her hard-earned expertise into Silver Stamp, assembling a set of the best 20 taps Downtown. Besides great beer, they offer just three other things I've found to be imperative to a convalescent night out, compared to a dyspeptic one: Underberg digestif bitters, pickled eggs, and hot dogs. No matter what bacchanalian debauchery preceded it, those three items are guaranteed to erase all bad decisions.

The Silver Stamp is the beer bar that all other beer bars want to become. It's the Platonic ideal of beer bars. It is effortlessly genius, utterly unserious, and yet lovingly refined. *Mitchell Wilburn*

222 E. Imperial Ave.
702-527-1784
silverstamplv.com

HIDDEN GEMS OF THE YEAR

SoulBelly BBQ

It lives where the circles of a hipster Venn diagram of barbecue, microbrew, and Main Street overlap, but SoulBelly BBQ manages to keep a relaxed, neighborhood feel. Amid giant smokers on the patio stacked with brisket, ribs, sausage, turkey, bacon, tri-tip, and pork belly, chef Bruce Kalman plays all of the classics — two-meat combos with beans, slaw, or mac 'n' cheese — but he also offers some new renditions: the wedge salad, a hunk of iceberg slathered in creamy dressing and heaped with pork belly; the Disco Fries, loaded with pulled pork, cheese, and pickled vegetables. The Belly of the Soul's sandwich of brisket, egg, and onions (both fried and pickled) is deliciously excessive, but the real standout is the burger, a thick patty of smoked brisket on a fluffy roll. SoulBelly's bar program emphasizes variety: Beers range from old-school Lone Star to local stouts and sours; cocktails include a twist on the Sazerac and the fruity-bourbony Jiggly Juice, which comes in a Capri Sun-like pouch. Like the menu, it's big helpings of a little something for everyone. ***Lissa Townsend Rodgers***

1327 S. Main St.
702-483-4404, soulbellybbq.com





Saga Pastry + Sandwich

Scandinavia and Las Vegas have as much in common as pickled herring and high-stakes poker. Nonetheless, this sleek breakfast/lunch spot on Eastern Avenue is always humming with regulars — folks who lust for Swedish waffles, "Danish Dogs" (Denmark's unique contribution to the tube steak oeuvre), and the most unusual sandwiches in Vegas. The waffles come either flat or folded, stuffed with savory fillings, or dripping with berries and sour cream. One bite and you'll see why chef/owner Gert Kvalsund proudly displays his "best waffle" accolades, and has pretty much retired the award. He also does classic pancakes, pastries, and good Lavazza coffee, but what keeps us returning are his Saga Smørbrød: open-faced sandwiches overflowing with your choice of lightly cured ham, salmon, and/or the sweetest Arctic shrimp you'll ever taste. ***John Curtas***

10345 S. Eastern Ave. #100
702-260-0860, sagapastry.com

Guerrilla Pizza Company

There are few restaurants more hidden — and fewer more deserving of the title "gem" — than Guerrilla Pizza. With humble beginnings as the bootstrapped side-hustle of Robby Cunningham, a Detroit-style pizza savant, it's our best example of the crispy, cheesy, spicy rectangles you can find anywhere in Motor City. It will also turn your idea of a good pizza joint on its head: Guerrilla is nestled in the kitchen of the Hard Hat Lounge, cranking out creamy, doughy goodness topped with the signature two spicy stripes of sauce. Alternatively, try one of Cunningham's unique creations that playfully stretch the definitions of pizza, such as a Detroit coney dog pizza (a limited-time special), or go for the best vegan slice in town. Believe me when I say it will convert the New York-style pizza devotee into a zealous Motor City heresiarch. *Mitchell Wilburn*

In the Hard Hat Lounge
1675 S. Industrial Road
guerrillapizzacompany.com



Jamón Jamón Tapas

Filled with charming Iberian décor, Jamón Jamón boasts a menu that ambitiously spans the peninsula. Starting with small plates is a must. Ease into the savory world of tapas with *pan con tomate* (crusty bread slathered with fresh tomato sauce); hearty *torta española* (potato omelet); and crispy croquettes filled with creamed Amish chicken. From there, expand into charcuterie platters filled with cured meats such as *chorizo* and *salchichón* and robust cheeses such as Manchego and Mahón. For big gatherings, it's all about the paella — wide pans filled with fragrant, saffron-infused rice, and stewed ingredients such as green onions, cauliflower, shrimp, mussels, black sea bass, pork ribs, even rabbit. The wine selection is



BBQ COURTESY OF SOULBELLY/BRONSON LOFTIN; WAFFLE, TORTA ESPAÑOLA AND PIZZA: CHRISTOPHER SMITH; QUESADILLA COURTESY OF LA CRUDA

excellent, as is the house sangria and even the zippy, alcohol-free lemonade. A retail section replete with Spanish delicacies — top-notch canned tuna, raw honeycomb — rounds out this culinary trip to Spain. *Greg Thilmont*

6135 W. Sahara Ave. #2-3
702-762-2844
jamonjamontapas.com

La Cruda by El Compa

In a well-worn Valley View Boulevard strip mall north of DI is a gem of a spot: La Cruda by El Compa. Loose translation: The Hangover by the Buddy. But rather than serving out *cervezas* intended on inflicting hangovers, they're delivering dishes intended as a cure with a menu steeped in traditional hearty Mexican dishes. Probably the most storied hangover cure is *menudo*, an offal-laden soup popular after a night of drinking. But my preference is the *birria de chivo* — a seasoned, stewed goat served in a variety of manners at La Cruda. Fried *quesotacos* seeping with *birria* broth and crusted with griddled cheese are a treat, but even better is the quesadilla, a seemingly endless amalgam of gooey cheese and unctuous meat. Order enough of either and be rewarded with a free side of consommé. The rich, layered broth — which would be just at home at a fancy Strip venue as it is among the folding chairs at La Cruda — is practically worth the visit itself. *Jim Begley*

3111 S. Valley View Blvd. #101
702-913-7918



Bazaar Meat
by José Andrés

STRIP RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

THIS STEAKHOUSE THAT'S SO MUCH MORE THAN A STEAKHOUSE CONTINUES TO EXCEL

When he isn't out saving the world, José Andrés oversees a galaxy of restaurants that are the envy of every chef in America. He's more of a philanthropist than a working chef these days, but his ThinkFoodGroup has been running four gorgeous eateries in Las Vegas for more than a decade, and their excellence continues to impress, from the molecular ('e' by José Andrés), to tapas (Jaleo), to the Mexican-Chinese mashup that is China Poblano. But the one restaurant that is sui generis and without peer is Bazaar Meat. It is all about meat, of course, but it's also a tour de force of Iberian cuisine — from the wacky (foie gras cotton candy) to the sassy (chicken *croquetas* served in a shoe) to the substantial (haunches of some of the best beef on the planet). Calling it a steakhouse doesn't do it justice, since you can compose a meal here any number of ways — from completely vegetarian to nothing but raw fish — and it remains the go-to place in Vegas for all those iterations of Spanish pork. COVID put a crimp in this restaurant's style as it did all up and down the Strip, but Bazaar's bounce-back has been impressive. Amid layoffs and capacity restrictions, José's showplace soldiered on in its back corner of the Sahara Las Vegas, enduring more hardship than any gastronomic restaurant deserves — much less one that's easily one of the top 10 steakhouses in the country.

Bazaar Meat is more than a steakhouse. It is also a wine bar, a ham bar, and a raw bar. It announces its brilliance from your first look at the meat locker (behind a wood-fired grill the size of a small truck), and keeps the magnificence going from one course after the next. The menu is shorter than it was two years ago, and the wine list is now two pages instead of twenty, but the precise cooking (now headed by veteran executive chef Candace Ochoa), impeccable service, and sharp management remain intact. Bazaar Meat has weathered quite a storm, and still operates in choppy seas, but through it all, José has kept his Spanish flag flying high. *John Curtas*

Inside the Sahara
Las Vegas hotel-casino
saharalasvegas.com



HOW BAZAAR!
A trio of Bazaar Meat dishes: In the shoe, chicken-bechamel croquetas; "bagel and lox" cone with salmon roe and dill cream cheese; gazpacho shot

Golden Steer Steakhouse

HALL OF FAME AWARDS

IT'S A BELOVED, BONA FIDE VEGAS CLASSIC FOR A REASON

If there's an ultimate type of Las Vegas restaurant, it's a steakhouse. And if there's an ultimate Las Vegas steakhouse, it's the Golden Steer. Beloved by longtime locals and first-time tourists — as well as celebs from Dean Martin to Nicolas Cage — the Steer has been icing cocktails and grilling steaks for more than six decades.

The first step into the restaurant takes you back to classic Sin City: red velvet wallpaper, polished oak bar, Western-themed art, the Great American Songbook playing quietly in the background. Many of the booths bear brass plaques engraved with the names of legends who made them "their" seats, whether it's Muhammad Ali, Mario Andretti, or Marilyn Monroe. During COVID, the Steer maintained distancing by filling some booths with mannequins styled as the celebrities who once occupied them. Dining across from a plaster replica of John Wayne may sound unnerving, but it was exactly the sort of whimsical weirdness that makes Vegas.

Of course, all the style in the world means nothing without substance on the plate. The Golden Steer menu has remained largely the same — ribeye, porterhouse, filet, chateaubriand, wet-aged for 30 days and handled by butchers who've been there for 30 years. Sides are the steakhouse standards, but expertly rendered (the mushrooms are worth a trip in themselves). Appetizers have the same *Mad Men* flair — shrimp cocktail, Oysters Rockefeller, escargot, and the Steer's legendary tableside Caesar salad. (Some of the veteran staff actually spun their Caesar salad bowls, or flambéed Bananas Foster, for Sinatra back in the day.) Tableside service may seem like a quaint throwback, but at the Golden Steer, it's a flamboyant floor show that also creates spectacular dishes.

Since opening in 1958, the Golden Steer has seen several owners, bankruptcies, ups and downs. Michael Signorelli bought the restaurant 20 years ago; his daughter, Amanda Signorelli, has taken over operations, tweaking the wine list, enhancing the dining room, and expanding the Golden Steer brand into mail-order. In a world that never stops changing, let's raise a glass to constancy: When it comes to capturing the flavor of Las Vegas — its history, its atmosphere, its food — the Golden Steer remains the gold standard.

Lissa Townsend Rodgers







SURF, TURF, AND EARTH
From top: Golden Steer's Jumbo Western Australian lobster tail; "The Gunslinger" ribeye; Bananas Foster

308 W. Sahara Ave.
702-384-4470
goldensteerlasvegas.com





Restaurant Guy Savoy

GUY SAVOY USHERED IN A NEW ERA OF VEGAS DINING THAT ENDURES

Since opening in May 2006, Guy Savoy has presided like a chapel of fine dining over the Las Vegas Strip. Its splendor announces itself from the huge double doors that greet you at the entrance, leading to a dining room with a ceiling that reaches even higher, resulting in muted conversations and hushed tones. The cathedral metaphor is apt; the French treat their cuisine as a religion, and their greatest restaurants are temples of the culinary arts. There are only a handful of restaurants in America where such reverential attention is paid to what's on the plate, and Restaurant Guy Savoy is one of them.

What Guy Savoy means to our dining scene cannot be overstated: When Savoy arrived with his brigade de cuisine 15 years ago, it confirmed Las Vegas' stature as a world-class dining destination, one that even the supercilious French had brought to their bosom. In planting his flag here, Savoy, along with compatriots Joël Robuchon and Pierre Gagnaire, recognized our tourist industry as an eager market for their impeccable cooking, with a restaurant scene (and talent) on par with much larger cities with much deeper culinary traditions. Having the world's best in our own backyard fostered a climate of excellence that raised everyone's standards.

The significance of their arrival was felt for more than a decade. International acclaim, national media, food festivals, awards, and other world-renowned chefs followed. Suddenly, people from all over the world were coming here just to eat, and our very own French Revolution from 2005-2009 was the reason for it. Savoy's influence has been unmistakable, but what garners him Hall of Fame status is doing it so well for so long. Through the Great Recession and now a pandemic, this dining room has never faltered. When everyone was still on their heels from shutdowns in mid-2020, Caesars Palace made the bold move to reopen this dining room, and was rewarded with an avalanche of reservations — pent-up demand for one of Las Vegas' most expensive meals, for cooking that sets a world standard and embodies the ultimate haute cuisine experience, from one of the world's greatest chefs. It reinforces how important Guy Savoy has been, and continues to be, to Las Vegas' culinary reputation. *John Curtas*



DELICATELY DELICIOUS
From top right: Guy Savoy's langoustine with caviar, mango, and miso; a selection of root vegetable preparations; dessert trio with dark chocolate, caramel, and popcorn confections

Inside Caesars Palace
caesars.com

CHEF OF THE YEAR



James Trees

Esther's Kitchen/Ada's/ Al Solito Posto

HE'S A PROLIFIC PERFECTIONIST WITH NEARLY FLAWLESS CULINARY INSTINCTS

After serving under a variety of world-renowned chefs, in early 2018 Las Vegas native James Trees returned to his roots with the opening of Esther's Kitchen. Amid the Arts District's ascent, the casual, hip spot for his take on Italian fare wowed diners with stunning housemade pastas, innovative cocktails (including an incredibly impressive selection of *amari*) and an in-house sourdough served with a seriously addictive anchovy butter. It quickly became one of the hottest seats in town, embodying Trees' culinary traits: an eye for detail, a willingness to tweak tradition, and a commitment to sourcing the best ingredients. 2019 welcomed his second restaurant: Ada's Kitchen at Tivoli Village. The more casual spot focusing on pizza, pasta and, yes, ice cream was also well-received, bringing his simple but precise flavors to the west Valley. It's no secret that Tivoli Village is a notoriously difficult location for sustaining concepts, but Ada's persevered. Then 2020 happened.

But 2020 doesn't seem to have stopped Trees; it only seems to have motivated him further. After being named a James Beard Finalist for Best Chef: Southwest, he nimbly navigated pandemic complications with the construction of outdoor dining pods at Esther's (which have since become a mainstay) and even closed for a deep clean when his staff came down with some cases. In 2021, he proceeded to open a trio of new restaurants. First was Al Solito Posto in Tivoli (see p. 69), just steps away from Ada's. Think of it as Esther's older sibling with a higher-end, more traditional menu that exudes culinary confidence and subtle flair. This debut shifted Ada's Kitchen to reopen as Ada's Wine Bar, a wine-lover's venue with excellent Mediterranean and Spanish tapas, representing Trees' first local venture outside the Italian peninsula. And with the opening of Resorts World, Trees' ultracasual Mozz Bar, focusing on sandwiches and mozzarella, opened in the Famous Foods food court. This quartet of destinations puts Trees among the most prolific of local chefs — but one whose zeal for perfection and unerring instincts for bold, simple flavors elevate him to a class of his own. *Jim Begley*

Main St. Provisions

AT ONCE RUSTIC AND REFINED, MAIN ST. PROVISIONS IS THE BEST THING TO HAPPEN IN 2020

It took nerves of steel to open during the pandemic, but that's what restaurateur Kim Owens and executive chef Justin Kingsley Hall did with Main St. Provisions. Construction delays, common to renovations of older Arts District spaces, pushed what was intended to be a 2019 opening well into COVID. The wait was worth it. The arrival of Main St. Provisions became one of 2020's few bright spots.

The bright, inviting venue represents a long-awaited return to a regular kitchen for chef Hall. As Main St. Provisions' opening date drifted, the longtime valley chef made numerous appearances at various charity and other public events, keeping him and the restaurant in the public eye.





AMERICAN BEAUTIES
Clockwise from bottom left: Main St. Provisions' venison tataki with whiskey shoyu dressing; new harissa carrots with tomatillo sauce; poached rabbit sausage with pan-roasted mushrooms and potato dumplings

NEW RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR



For anyone who knows Hall's cooking — think rustic Americana with classic techniques — Main St. Provisions' menu is a welcome sight. Paper-thin venison tataki wades in an oaky whiskey shoyu dressing, complementing the delicate meat without overwhelming it — demonstrating the Hall's deftness at establishing balance with flavor-forward ingredients. The strikingly savory roasted new harissa carrots are a throwback that had originally gained notoriety at Hall's SLO Boy pop-up. The whipped cheddar potatoes are an epiphany; on this exceptional dish, Hall doesn't shy away from the butter or the Beehive cheddar cheese from Utah. The rich rabbit boudin is not just a superb rabbit dish, it's simply one of the valley's best dishes of *any* kind, swimming in a savory jus practically worth bottling. Main Street's bench of culinary talent is deep: Don't miss executive sous chef Jessica Perlstein's rotating crudo, combining whatever's market-fresh with her ever-changing whims. It's an easy excuse to make a weekly visit.



Owens' warm hospitality directs a friendly, efficient front-of-house operation which, alongside a charming drink menu (the world needs more pickle-infused drinks like the sharp Harvey Dent) round out the dining experience. As does an utterly unforgettable Basque cheesecake, the exclamation point to any memorable Main St. Provisions meal. *Jim Begley*

1214 S. Main St.
702-457-0111
mainstprovisions.com



Cipriani

RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

A TIMELESS PARAGON OF ELEGANCE AND EXCELLENCE, CIPRIANI TAKES US BACK TO THE FUTURE

Cipriani is neither new nor cutting-edge nor unique to Las Vegas. Nevertheless, it represents something special to our restaurant scene: an outpost of a luxury brand celebrating a style of dining that seemed in danger of extinction just a few years ago. In an era overrun with casual gastropubs, a retro-chic restaurant trading in classic Venetian recipes might have seemed as out of place as Dolce & Gabbana at a beer bash. But it opened in 2018, appealing to locals and tourists alike looking for something more refined than formulaic Italian. Then COVID hit, and Cipriani became more than just a restaurant. It was a beacon to all seeking a good meal on the Strip, a lunch and dinner stalwart, open every day, keeping hope alive that Las Vegas might yet return to its former glory.

For a restaurant tracing its origins to 1931, the cuisine is remarkably timeless: simple, sophisticated Northern Italian fare with nary a garlic clove in sight. In place of tomato sauce and cheese you get refinement: top-shelf salumi, carpaccio (invented by founder Giuseppe Cipriani in 1933), spoon-tender baby artichokes, baked tagliolini with ham, and pastas that celebrate rich noodles rather than disguise them. The unsung heroes of the menu are the meats (including the elusive fegato alla Veneziana, a liver dish so coveted by connoisseurs it is almost mythical), pizzas (expensive but worth it), and vanilla gelato so good it ought to come with a warning label.

And then there's the service: snappy barkeeps (always ready with a Bellini), crackerjack waiters, and sharply dressed managers, all at the top of their game. The staff does everything from cosseting celebrities (yes, that was Jay-Z and Beyoncé making an entrance) to boning fish to spooning up desserts in multiple languages. (The Cipriani brand is huge with jet-setting internationals.) Here it all flows effortlessly: old-school attentiveness done with an understated flair in synchronicity with the posh surroundings. More than anything, this ristorante signifies a return to a time when atmosphere and elegance went knife and fork with good food, when classic cooking was the rule, when meals were something to be celebrated with family and friends in high style. Everything old is new again, and Cipriani is taking us back to the future with the most stylish Italian in town. *John Curtas*

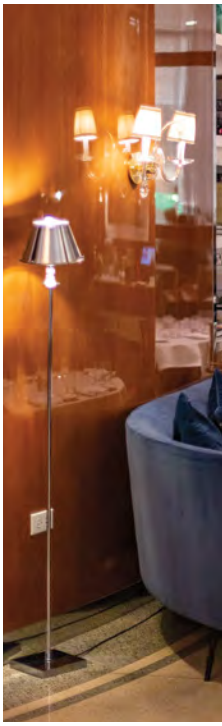
In Wynn Las Vegas
702-342-9600
cipriani.com











ELEGANCE ON A PLATE
From left: Cipriani's simple prosciutto preparation; carpaccio "alla Cipriani"; burrata "alla Mediterranea" with cherry tomatoes and black olives; baked tagliolini







Value Pricing for Select Dates

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The NUTCRACKER





Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography by James Canfield

December 11–26, 2021

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— DUJOUR MAGAZINE

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DANCER PHOTO BY BILL HUGHES

A gift for the ages

Compiled by
CHRISTIE MOELLER

Here's a gift list sure to please everyone — from every generation — on your holiday giving list



LEGO IDEAS FENDER STRATOCASTER
Build the ultimate axe for your inner rock star. **$99.99. LEGO in the Fashion Show Mall**

Gen X

Dispel holiday angst with a little nostalgia and a touch of indulgence



CREATE YOUR OWN REEL VIEWER
Assemble your own pictures into a reel and indulge in the unmitigated nostalgia of clicking through them with this binoculars-style viewer. **$14.95-$29.95, *Uncommongoods.com***



JONATHAN ADLER ROCKET TEQUILA DECANTER
Accented with 16-karat gold, these porcelain decanters hold nearly 25 ounces of your favorite spirit. **$212 each, Neiman Marcus in the Fashion Show Mall**





JAXON LANE BRO MASK
A sheet mask designed for men's skin targets dull, red, and lined patches, and can be customized for faces with beards. **4 pack for $28, Neiman Marcus in the Fashion Show Mall**



FACIAL REJUVENATION LED LIGHT THERAPY MASK
This strap-on plastic face mask includes seven different combinations of 113 LED lights to give your skin a boost. **$147, *Sculptskinbar.com***



APPLE IPHONE 13
The latest version of the world's most ubiquitous pocket computer boasts its best-ever camera and improved durability. **From $799, Apple in the Fashion Show Mall, Downtown Summerlin, and Town Square**



PATCHOLOGY MISTLE TOES DUO FOOT EXFOLIATION & HYDRATION SET
This 2-piece set includes one treatment each of a foot peel and softening mask. **$27, Nordstrom in the Fashion Show Mall**



'GROWTH' PLANT CHARM
Made to spruce up plain pots, these little charms indulge both one's plant addiction *and* their need for validation. **$20,** ***flourishandcharm.com***

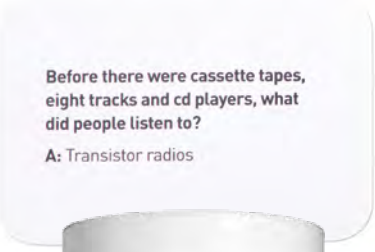


CAMP CRAFT COCKTAILS BLOODY MARY INFUSION KIT
Add 12 ounces of alcohol to the dehydrated lemon, cilantro, garlic pickle, and sriracha salt blend, refrigerate it for three days, and you've got yourself a pitcher of eight Bloody Marys. **$25, All For Our Country in Fergusons Downtown**

Millennial

Give the gift of self-care — with a welcome touch of whimsy







MILLENNIALS VS. BOOMERS
Settle generational scores with this 200-card trivia game that pits the out-of-touch against the self-obsessed. **$18,** ***Uncommongoods.com***



TAZZY LOLLIPOPS
Acai Berry, sour watermelon, and spicy mango candies attract "do-gooders" by being gluten-free, kosher, low-calorie, vegan, being made in the USA at a women-owned company, and having no added sugar. **3-pack for $18,** ***tazzy.co***



CAMPO ESSENTIAL OIL DIFFUSER
Available in black or white, the ceramic vase-shaped infuser disperses scented steam throughout a room. **$97, Neiman Marcus in the Fashion Show Mall**



PROSPERITY CANDLE
Light a flame and meditate on abundance to the scent of cypress, aventurine, and cinnamon with this soy-based candle. **$14.99,** ***Tarottea.co***



INFUSE AND POUR ALCOHOL KIT
Dehydrated fruits and spices are the basis of these farm-to-glass craft cocktail infusion kits. **$25,** ***Uncommongoods.com***

Gen Z

Tech for fun, comfort, and family connection





KODAK ULTRA MINI PORTABLE PROJECTOR
Create a movie or photo exhibit up to 80 inches wide with HD resolution on any surface with this plug-and-play projector that's compatible with most entertainment devices. **$199, Best Buy**

QUIKSILVER WORKWEAR STYLE BUCKET CAP
Blocks of khaki and spinach green alternate in the lid and brim of this military-inspired fabric headgear. **$40, Quiksilver in the Miracle Mile Shops at Planet Hollywood**





STORM CLOUD WEATHER PREDICTOR
Thermometers are for the unimaginative; this fanciful barometer gauges the weather using a specialized liquid that changes patterns. **$25, Firebox.com**





QUIKSILVER WOMEN'S SOFT MOOD JACKET
This boxy zip-up softens a '90s grunge look with brushed wool and diamond quilting. **$130, Quiksilver in the Miracle Mile Shops at Planet Hollywood**

NIKE AIR ZOOM ALPHAFLY NEXT NATURE
The most sustainable version of Nike's popular running shoe comprises half recycled materials: water bottles diverted from landfill and waste from Nike's own factories. **$120, Nike in the Forum Shops at Caesars**





NINTENDO SWITCH OLED MODEL
The latest addition to the Switch family of game consoles has a 7-inch OLED screen, adjustable stand, 64 gigs of internal storage, and enhanced audio. **$349.99, Best Buy**





CRUISER PLUS TURNTABLE
Crosley has updated its classic portable record player with Bluetooth connectivity and other features. **$89.95, *Crosleyradio.com***

Holiday Events

The holidays are upon us, and there's so much to see, do, and eat! Get in the festive mood with this ultimate list of events

Compiled by **MELANIE HOPE**

THROUGH NOV. 30

FALL HARVEST FESTIVAL OF LANTERNS

Immerse yourself in the beauty of handcrafted lanterns designed and lit by gifted artisans, plus a petting zoo, hay maze, and yummy seasonal specialties. **Fri–Sun 5–9P, $26 adults/$22 kids 12 and under. Cowabunga Bay, *cowabungabayvegas.com***

THROUGH JAN. 2

HOLIDAY CACTUS GARDEN

More than one million lights will be strung throughout the 3-acre garden. Stop inside for a chocolate sample and great gift ideas! **5–10P, free. Ethel M Chocolate Factory and Botanical Garden, 2 Cactus Garden Drive, Henderson, *ethelm.com***

THROUGH JAN. 9

GLITTERING LIGHTS LAS VEGAS

Nevada's largest drive-through light show, this annual event showcases more than 1 million LEDs and more than 400 animated displays over 2.5 miles. **Sun–Thu 5–9P/ Sat and holidays 5–11P. $25–$85 per vehicle (season passes available). Las Vegas Motor Speedway, *glitteringlightslasvegas.com***

NOV. 18

THE PRESIDENT'S CONCERT

The UNLV Wind Orchestra, featuring guest conductor Col. John R. Bourgeois, director emeritus of the U.S. Marine Band, plays a special concert for our service members. **7:30P, $10/$8 seniors, students, and military. Artemus W. Ham Concert Hall at UNLV, *unlv.edu***


Holiday Cactus Garden

NOV. 19–21

THE HOUSE WITHOUT A CHRISTMAS TREE

Based on Gail Rock's popular story, this opera follows a precocious daughter, Addie, who struggles to understand her father's resentment about the holidays. **Fri 7:30P/Sat–Sun 3P, $15–$30. Summerlin Library Theatre, *opera lasvegas.com***

NOV. 19

37TH INVITATIONAL MADRIGAL/CHAMBER CHOIR FESTIVAL

The UNLV Chamber Chorale performs classic pieces. **12P, free. Artemus W. Ham Concert Hall at UNLV, *unlv.edu***

NOV. 19

BLUE 13 DANCE COMPANY

This fun performance includes Bollywood inspired "Diya aur Toofan" (the flame and the storm), new solos, and duets created during the pandemic, plus excerpts from the critically acclaimed "Terpsichore in Ghungroos." **7:30P, free. Main Theater at Clark County Library, *lvccld.org***

NOV. 20

CELEBRATING THE FRUITS OF OUR LABOR: A FALL GARDEN FAIR

Explore methods of growing with gardening lectures, a turnip contest, and plenty of fresh, organic, locally grown produce to purchase. **10A–1P, free. Summerlin Library, *lvccld.org***

NOV. 20

TELEBRATION!

Tellers from Nevada Storytelling Guild will share their storytelling talents with the community in a celebration of the many types and styles of story. **1P, free. West Charleston Library, *lvccld.org***


UNLV Jazz Ensemble

NOV. 21
LAS VEGAS SINFONIETTA
The professional chamber orchestra presents classical music. **3P, $25. Main Theater at Clark County Library,** ***lasvegas sinfonietta.com***

NOV. 22–23
THE NUTCRACKER 2021
Arabesque Dance and Fitness Studio presents the beloved holiday ballet. **6P, $20. Main Theater at Clark County Library, (702) 202-4505**

NOV. 23-28
A CHRISTMAS CAROL
This reimagined version of the timeless tale of isolation and redemption features cherished Christmas carols and Bradley Whitford as Scrooge. **Tue–Sun 7:30P/Fri-Sun 2P, $30–$40. Reynolds Hall, The Smith Center,** ***thesmithcenter.com***

NOV. 26–JAN. 2
MAGICAL FOREST AT OPPORTUNITY VILLAGE
Enter a winter wonderland with millions of sparkling lights, nightly entertainment, the Forest Express passenger train, Cheyenne's Enchanted Carousel, Boris the Elf's 3D Experience, and much more! **Thu–Sun 5:30–9P, $15–$22/children 3 and under free. Opportunity Village, 6300 W. Oakey Blvd.,** ***opportunityvillage.org***

NOV. 27
CELTIC THANKSGIVING VIII
The Las Vegas Pipe Band will give you another reason to be thankful with their special brand. **4P, $10–$12. Main Theater at Clark County Library, (702) 523-7250**

DEC. 1–31
CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION FESTIVAL OF LANTERNS
The magic of Christmas comes to life with festive lanterns, Santa, Candyland, a 20-foot decorated tree, and holiday delicacies. **Nightly 5–9P, $26 adults/$22 kids 12 and under. Cowabunga Bay,** ***cowabungabayvegas.com***

DEC. 3–12
THE VELVETEEN RABBIT
The Rainbow Company Youth Theatre presents the sentimental childhood classic just in time for the holidays. **Fri 7P/Sat 2P and 7P/Sun 2P, $6. Charleston Heights Arts Center,** ***rainbowcompany.org***

DEC. 4
THE LAS VEGAS GREAT SANTA RUN
Your registration for this fundraiser includes a full Santa suit, a medal, swag bag, and the opportunity to be a part of the largest gathering of Santas in the world! Virtual options available. The race benefits Opportunity Village. **8A, $40. Fremont Street,** ***opportunityvillage.org***

DEC. 4
DOODLEBUG BAZAAR
Get all of your holiday goodies and gifts. **9A, free. Boulder City Recreation Center, 900 Arizona St.,** ***visitbouldercity.com***

DEC. 4
SILVER STATESMEN BARBERSHOP CHORUS HOLIDAY CONCERT
This family-friendly show features a concert of popular and traditional seasonal tunes. **2P, free. Main Theater at Clark County Library,** ***lvccld.org***

DEC. 4
HOLIDAY ON BROADWAY
A musical celebration of the season with famous, and not-so-famous, Broadway tunes. **7P, free. Henderson Amphitheatre,** ***operalasvegas.com***

DEC. 4
LAS VEGAS PHILHARMONIC VERY VEGAS HOLIDAY
Keith Thompson hosts as the talented singers and full symphony perform classic seasonal favorites and local originals. **2P and 7:30P, $29–$121. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center,** ***thesmithcenter.com***

DEC. 5
SOPHISTICATED LADIES — A TRIBUTE TO NANCY WILSON & NATALIE COLE
Melanie Moore presents a tribute to two of the best voices in contemporary music. **2P, $20. Main Theater at Clark County Library,** ***lvccld.org***

DEC. 5
LOVE UNDER THE CHRISTMAS TREE
Giada Valenti will kick off the holiday season with songs from her new Christmas album. **7P, $35–$55. Myron's at The Smith Center,** ***thesmithcenter.com***

DEC. 7
UNLV CHAMBER ORCHESTRA IN CONCERT
The orchestra's season includes a variety of standard symphonic orchestral repertoire ranging from early Baroque through modern contemporary. **7P, free. Main Theater at Clark County Library,** ***lvccld.org***

DEC. 9
A JAZZY HOLIDAY CONCERT WITH NIK AT NITE
Nik at Nite and his band bring a touch of class, romance, and excitement to their heartfelt and passionate performances. **1P, free. Laughlin Library,** ***lvccld.org***

DEC. 10
CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS WITH UNLV JAZZ
Get in the holiday spirit with the UNLV Jazz Ensemble as they present their annual concert filled with nostalgic and heartwarming holiday melodies. **7:30P, free. Summerlin Library,** ***lvccld.org***

DEC. 10
JESSICA FICHOT'S HOLIDAY AROUND THE WORLD
Accompanied by her accordion, toy piano, and fiery band, Fichot draws from her multi-ethnic French/Chinese/American heritage to create an intoxicating multilingual fusion of Holiday Songs from all over the world. **7:30P, free. West Charleston Library,** ***lvccld.org***

DEC. 11
JINGLE BELL RUN
Raise funds and awareness for the Arthritis Foundation in the annual kids run. Becahealth restrictions, this year's event will be virtual, but participants will still get their shirts and jingle bells. **8A, $25–$75. Online,** ***events.arthritis.org***

DEC. 11
CAPTIVATION DANCE AFFILIATES PRESENTS "THE NUTCRACKER: REMIX"
Enjoy a new take on the old classic. **1P, $15–$17. Main Theater at Clark County Library,** ***lvccld.org***

DEC. 11
LAS VEGAS CLASSICAL GUITAR ENSEMBLE HOLIDAY CONCERT
Enjoy an afternoon of music

featuring guitar repertoire spanning centuries and continents with a touch of holiday cheer. **3P, free. Summerlin Library,** ***lvccld.org***

DEC. 11

UGLY SWEATER BEST DAM WINE WALK

Get your awful holiday sweater judged as you taste wines and treats while enjoying the festive decorations all over town. **21+ only. 4–8P, $27.91. Check in at My4Sons at Historic Downtown Boulder City,** ***visitbouldercity.com***

DEC. 11

ANNUAL NIGHT OF LIGHTS — ST. JUDE'S RANCH FOR CHILDREN

This might be the biggest yet! Families will enjoy live entertainment, s'mores by the fire pit, hayrides, cookies with Mr. and Mrs. Santa, and reindeer games. **5–8P, $10+. St. Jude's Ranch, 100 St. Jude's St.,** ***stjudesranch.org***

DEC. 11–26

THE NUTCRACKER

The larger-than-life spectacular family tradition returns to the stage! **Multiple times and days, $30.95–$180.95. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center,** ***thesmithcenter.com***

DEC. 12

JESSICA FICHOT'S HOLIDAY AROUND THE WORLD

A second chance to see Fichot as she draws from her multi-ethnic heritage to create an intoxicating multilingual fusion of holiday songs from all over the world. **2P, free. Windmill Library,** ***lvccld.org***

DEC. 12

LAS VEGAS BRASS BAND: HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Enjoy traditional and modern arrangements of seasonal music from traditional hymns to holiday classics. **2P, free. Main Theater at Clark County Library,** ***lvccld.org***

DEC. 18

B. SHARP SCHOOL OF DANCE PRESENTS "CHRISTMAS ANGELS"

Get in the holiday spirit with a blended show of dance. **1P and 5P, $20–$25. Main Theater at Clark County Library, (702) 788-0159**

DEC. 18

DAVID PERRICO POP STRINGS ORCHESTRA — CHRISTMAS CONCERT

The concert will feature a 16-piece all-female string section with music arrangements by Perrico of Christmas holiday music classics. **7P, $29–$45. Myron's at The Smith Center,** ***thesmithcenter.com***

DEC. 19

VINTAGE CHRISTMAS

The show is a nostalgic Christmas special featuring the timeless music of Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Bing Crosby, Rosemary Clooney, and many other legends. **3P, $29–$45. Myron's at The Smith Center,** ***thesmithcenter.com***

DEC. 19

LAS VEGAS MEN'S CHORUS CONCERT

The chorus celebrates the season. **4P, $15–$30. Main Theater at Clark County Library, 702-505-1886**

DEC. 31

RESOLUTION RUN 10K/5K/1M

Get an early start to your New Year's resolutions. Finishers of this slightly hilly course receive a shirt and a medal — plus free beer and vodka from a local distillery and all-you-can-eat hot dogs. Walkers and strollers welcome. **12P, $25–$55, Kellogg-Zaher Park, 7901 W. Washington Ave.,** ***tripledarerunns.com***

JAN. 1–FEB. 13

LUNAR NEW YEAR AFESTIVAL OF LANTERNS

The park will showcase magnificent Chinese lanterns including sparkling fountains, Asian folklore, and traditional cuisine. **Thu–Sun 5–9P, $26 adults/$22 kids 12 and under. Cowabunga Bay,** ***cowabungabayvegas.com***

JAN. 13

MARIACHI WINTER FESTIVAL

The best and brightest will be playing mariachi favorites as well as interpretations of holiday classics done the mariachi way. **7P, free. Main Theater at Clark County Library, (702)-507-3459**

The Gift of Giving

There are several ways you can give to others this holiday season. The following organizations are seeking donations, volunteers, and other support

Compiled by **MELANIE HOPE**

ADULT DAY CARE CENTERS OF LAS VEGAS AND HENDERSON

As an alternative to expensive in-home care, this organization helps keep your loved one home longer through visits, day centers, and social programs.
Needs: Monetary donations, visits, entertainment, event planning, facilities support and class leadership.
Volunteer: 702-648-3425, adultdaycarelv.org

AID FOR AIDS OF NEVADA

AFAN provides medical case management, medical transportation, education, prevention, housing, and nutritional services for adults and children affected by HIV/AIDS.
Needs: Sponsors and hosts for holiday fundraising events.
Volunteer: 702-382-2326, afanlv.org

BABY'S BOUNTY

This active group provides new and gently used infant clothing and gear to babies born to victims of domestic abuse, teen mothers, and low-income families.
Needs: Monetary or item donations; hosts for Baby Bundles or Diaper Bank drives; volunteers for sorting, cleaning, and clerical work.
Volunteer: 702-485-2229, babysbounty.org

BEST BUDDIES NEVADA

Best Buddies International works to enhance the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through socialization programs, job coaching, and tools in leadership development.
Needs: Monetary and office supplies donations; special events assistance; mentoring and friendship "Buddies;" and jobs for persons with IDD.
Volunteer: 702-822-2268, bestbuddies.org/nevada

BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF SOUTHERN NEVADA

BBBS is a mentoring network that provides children facing adversity with professionally

supported, positive relationships.
Needs: Toy donations for ages 7+, including new bicycles or skateboards for the Holiday Bike and Board Bonanza; volunteer "Bigs" who are interested in playing sports, hiking, reading, and other fun events with their "Littles."
Volunteer: 702-731-2227, bbbsn.org

BLIND CENTER OF NEVADA

BCN assists the blind and visually impaired by focusing on personal development, social interaction, and meaningful employment.
Needs: Fundraising; general hygiene donations; volunteer shopping assistants; dedicated volunteers for ceramics on Tuesdays and Thursdays and BINGO on Wednesdays.
Volunteer: 702-998-4903, blindcenter.org

BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF SOUTHERN NEVADA

Club programs and services promote and enhance the development of boys and girls by instilling a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging, and influence.
Needs: Donations, sponsors, and volunteers for local clubs — each location has different needs.
Volunteer: 702-367-2582, bgcsnv.org

CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF SOUTHERN NEVADA

Regardless of faith, the charity provides counseling services, services to pregnant women, immigration legal assistance, transitional housing, aid to low-income families, and a food bank.
Needs: Selecting CCSN for AmazonSmile or Smith's Inspiring Donations; Facebook fundraisers; donations of non-perishable food, hygiene items, and winter clothes; volunteers to serve the Community Meal, prepare Meals on Wheels, help in the Hands of Hope Community Food Pantry, or tutor in the English Language Program.
Volunteer: 702-405-0597, catholiccharities.com

GOODIE TWO SHOES FOUNDATION

The organization provides disadvantaged children and children in crisis with new shoes and socks as well as other items deemed essential for good health and positive development.
Needs: Monetary donations, volunteers to help participating children in fitting and selecting brand new shoes and socks.
Volunteer: 702-617-4027, goodietwoshoes.org

HEAVEN CAN WAIT ANIMAL SOCIETY

Heaven Can Wait works to eliminate companion animal suffering and pet overpopulation through aggressive spay/neuter programs, adoptions, community outreach, and education.
Needs: Monetary, pet food, and pet item donations. Volunteers for events, adoption and fostering programs, administrative work, and clinical assistance. Writers for various publications.
Volunteer: 702-655-4800, hcws.org

HELPING HANDS OF VEGAS VALLEY

HHoVV provides free assistive services to senior citizens in Southern Nevada, allowing them to maintain their dignity and independence while improving health and daily living.
Needs: Monetary and food donations; volunteer drivers, food drive coordinators, food pantry workers, and admin help. Bilingual volunteers particularly needed.
Volunteer: 702-507-1850, hhovv.org

HELP OF SOUTHERN NEVADA

HELP assists those in need to overcome barriers and attain self-sufficiency.
Needs: Donation drive hosts, event and family sponsors; volunteers to assist in events planning and execution, mentoring, and administrative duties.
Volunteer: 702-369-4357, helpsonv.org

INDIGENOUSAF

IndigenousAF (IAF Inc.) is a nonprofit organization in Nevada that supports community work and projects which strengthen Indigenous cultures, knowledge, and identity through the arts and education.
Needs: Financial and resource support
Volunteer: 702-300-7120, iafinc.org

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE AGENCY

JFSA provides professional social services including counseling, senior services, adoptions, and emergency assistance.
Needs: Monetary donations; volunteers to help with daily administrative tasks, the food pantry, driving seniors, and events held throughout the year.
Volunteer: 702-732-0304, jfsalv.org

LAS VEGAS VALLEY HUMANE SOCIETY

The Humane Society is dedicated to improving the welfare of animals, particularly those that are stray or abandoned.
Needs: Monetary, pet food, and toy donations; fosters; transportation for rescues; cat socializers; volunteers to assist in fundraisers, media, and administrative work.
Volunteer: 702-434-2009, lvvhumane.org

LAS VEGAS RESCUE MISSION

The Las Vegas Rescue Mission provides people in need with shelter and services without regard to religion or origin. During the holidays, it provides children with Christmas gifts as well as food and other essentials.
Needs: In-kind and monetary donations; volunteers to help prepare meals, sort and price items for the thrift store, assist in toy and food drives, and mentor recovery clients.
Volunteer: 702-382-1766, vegasrescue.org

LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF NEVADA

LSSNV provides professional social services to people of all backgrounds, including counseling, senior services, adoptions, and emergency assistance.
Needs: Donations for the children's toy and clothing drive or through AmazonSmile; volunteers to assist with the drive-up food pantry, office tasks, maintenance at housing units, and assembly and distribution of holiday baskets.
Volunteer: 702-639-1730, lssnv.org

NEW ERA LAS VEGAS

The Las Vegas chapter of New Era Nation is devoted to empowering and encouraging Black people to love, serve, and build.
Needs: Food donations and financial support via Cash App $ServingThePeople
Volunteer: Inquire at neweralasvegas817@gmail.com

NEVADA PARTNERSHIP FOR HOMELESS YOUTH

NPHY provides youth services including street outreach, 24-hour crisis intervention, and an independent living program. The drop-in center is still available for youth, but no longer open to the public.
Needs: Financial donations; donations of hygiene, cleaning, and art supplies, water, books, and games. Virtual volunteers to help with classes, translating, entertainment, and advocacy.
Volunteer: 702-383-1332, nphy.org

SAFE NEST

Safe Nest provides emergency and legal services, safe housing, and long-term counseling to victims of domestic violence and abuse.
Needs: Financial and in-kind donations of new and gently used clothing, blankets, housewares, backpacks, and art supplies; volunteers must first graduate from the DV Academy.
Volunteer: 702-821-2736, safenest.org



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CENTENNIAL HILLS PARK

The beloved hangout of my childhood has changed. What else will?

BY **Rachel Wilson**

Two months ago, I plopped my son into his stroller and headed to a nearby public park, determined to find a nice place for us to relax outside while he learned to walk.

As we rolled up to the entrance, I paused. It didn't look like anything I remembered seeing before. Inside the park, the paint on structures was chipped and worn down, showing patches of dull concrete. The lines on the ground and some of the play tunnels looked like they had been painted over, but even the last layer was faded. The replaced slides were aging. Swings were missing or hanging by a single chain. The enormous ceramic frogs that guard the four corners of the splash pad were starting to resemble gargoyles. I was shocked. I almost didn't recognize this staple of my childhood.

When I was a kid, we called it the Fancy Park. (It's also colloquially known as the Butterfly Park, but my family didn't call it that when I was growing up because it was so, well, fancy.) Built in the mid-2000s, while I was still in elementary school, the brand-new Centennial Hills Park was the go-to hangout for my neighborhood friends and me. It was glorious: towering canopies shaped like flowers; tables and chairs resembling giant red mushrooms; climbable butterfly figures that were four times our size — all designed to make us kids feel like we were living our own version of *A Bug's Life*. Only the bravest of the brave dared to climb the seven flights of rainbow stairs to the top of the slides, then zoom down the nearly 90-degree nosedive of blue, green, and pink tubes. The cool kids would jump over the fencing around the slide entrances carrying old cardboard and race down the poured rubber incline as if they were sledding. It was so popular, the squishy floor where kids landed wore away.

Now, as I looked at the place with my son, it wasn't so fancy anymore. I wanted him to know how magnificent my favorite park had been, but I didn't want to ruin it for him either. It's only 15 years old — relatively new in the larger timeline of Las Vegas — so it may not be renovated for a while. There was some evidence of an attempt a handful of years ago, but it didn't appear to be anyone's priority.

Neglected public spaces such as Centennial Hills Park make Las Vegas look its age: 116. It's not a long time compared to Paris or Cairo, with their rich histories spanning centuries. But to a city as young as Vegas, and to someone still in her 20s, the 15 years that have passed since the park opened feel like an eternity.

I, like Vegas, am still relatively young, but in my early venture into motherhood, I'm starting to feel my age, too. Seeing my favorite childhood park lose its luster made me wonder what's in store for our town down the line. *Will these places be revived? Torn down and replaced with more housing? Or left alone to rot in our desert heat?*

Sadness swelled in my eyes and the back of my throat, escaping as a heavy sigh. Resolved to make the best of it, I rolled the stroller toward a tree, parking us in the shade. As my son played in the grass, I imagined him several years from now, racing to the top of fixed-up slides, running through well-groomed grass, playing tag with his friends. I could see him climbing freshly painted butterfly statues and swinging, higher than I ever could, on a shiny new swing set.

I hope that happens, that this park gets the care it deserves. The weekend before this story went to press, the district's councilwoman, Michele Fiore, held a Centennial Hills Park cleanup, an optimistic sign for the future. In our city's rush to build new communities, I hope it doesn't forget to take care of those it already has, so all our kids will have someplace fancy to feel small, free, and alive. ✦



PHOTOGRAPH **Christopher Smith**



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